



INTERFAITH SOCIAL PLASTIC[®] MANUAL

Fighting Ocean Plastic Using
Principles of Christian Spirituality





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INTRODUCTION

OUR FAITH AND PLASTIC POLLUTION

WHY JOIN THE SOCIAL PLASTIC REBELLION?



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

WHAT DOES PLASTIC WASTE HAVE TO DO WITH OUR FAITH?

IS THERE A CONNECTION WITH OUR SPIRITUALITY AND HOW WE DISPOSE OF OUR WASTE?

Christians are becoming more environmentally aware and are rediscovering the call from the Scriptures to be stewards of creation and to live in harmony with the creation, of which we are a part.

Many people are looking for a more holistic spirituality that leads us to live in harmony with creation, we see contemporary initiatives in all denominations being spearheaded by many faith groups to rediscover the ancient teachings of our faith in order to connect us again with creation. These provide meaningful ways for people to be coherent in their belief in God and their religious convictions by leading lives more considerate of the needs of our planet with a view towards care for its future as is the basis of Christian stewardship.

Although many of these initiatives are focusing on climate change—which is very urgent and important—the crisis that involves plastic waste has the same urgency, and our goal with this campaign is to advocate for believers to become more involved.

The amount of plastic we use has increased horrendously over the last few decades, and the volume is projected to continue increasing multiple times over in the years to come. The reasons for this are that plastic is cheap, easy to produce, light in weight, and difficult to break, making it a very useful material. So far, we have produced 8.3 billion tons of it, and by 2050 that will increase to 40 billion tons manufactured in total. The disadvantage of plastic is that it is difficult to dispose of and takes a very long time to degrade. Basically, all the plastic we have produced is still here. A big portion of that plastic is creating environmental problems as 8 million tons enter the oceans every annually and create plastic islands as big as whole countries. Furthermore, the elements break it into smaller particles called microplastics, which led to the deaths of 1 million seabirds and 100,000 sea mammals annually. Through the food chain, microplastic enters our bodies and causes harm to our health.

As this trend continues the volume of plastic waste in our seas will match the volume of fish with catastrophic consequences for seas, marine life and humans.

The Plastic Bank was founded by two Canadians, David Katz and Shaun Frankson, to prevent the flow of plastic waste into the ocean while improving lives. The company does this by revealing the value of the plastic through recycling, putting the value into the hands of the poor and by providing companies a closed-loop supply chain solution of environmentally and socially sound material, Social Plastic®. The award-winning Social Plastic is generated through a growing global movement—the Social Plastic rebellion—now present in Haiti, Brazil, Canada, Germany, the Philippines and Indonesia.

We are inviting believers from all faiths and denominations to join hands with us to transform plastic from waste into a valuable currency, creating the biggest convenience store for the poor, where everything is available through the collection and exchange of plastic.

Together, we are launching an Interfaith Social Plastic rebellion, since plastic is present in every parish, church, mosque and temple, and in the lives of all believers.

Furthermore, faith communities can powerfully complement government and private sector initiatives, as faith gives people meaning and connects to deeper issues of worldview and culture. These are powerful drivers to engage people in changing behavior, which makes a significant impact in reducing plastic waste.

THE INTERFAITH SOCIAL PLASTIC REBELLION HAS TWO PRIMARY PROGRAMS.



LOCAL IMPACT

Faith groups can empower the community and encourage believers to bring their plastic to receive cash, incentives or donate it to the church which therefore acts as a collection point. The deposited plastic is processed through local recycling partners into the Social Plastic supply chain.



GLOBAL IMPACT

Building on the above program, faith communities can incentivize members to collect more plastic and mobilize believers to donate their value received from the plastic deposit program to operations in other countries to launch the Social Plastic rebellion in communities without proper waste management systems.



In the connectedness of these two programs, information is authentic and transparent through a blockchain technology, encouraging believers by allowing them to monitor the plastic their communities have collected. It also is a way to strengthen the unity among believers spanning different continents and denominations by caring together for God's creation and worshipping the creator together in this meaningful way.

INTERFAITH SOCIAL PLASTIC® TOOLKIT



INTERFAITH SOCIAL PLASTIC® TOOLKIT

AS A PURPOSE DRIVEN PROGRAM TO MOBILIZE BELIEVERS IN THIS POWERFUL MISSION, PLASTIC BANK HAS CREATED A TOOLKIT TO ENGAGE FAITH COMMUNITIES WITH MEMBERS CREATING CHANGE IN VILLAGES, TOWNS AND CITIES. THIS TOOLKIT INCLUDES THE FOLLOWING PARTS:

'Interfaith Social Plastic Training Manual, Fighting Ocean Plastic Using Principles of Christian Spirituality', laying out the theological foundation and direction (this document).

This first part is a series of sermons and Bible studies. The series' topics progress from Genesis to Revelation, starting with emphasizing the goodness of creation. The following topics are the command to tend creation in Genesis 1:28. After that, the fall of humanity and the consequences for creation are discussed, including the agonizing of creation and its underlying reasons. By applying these theological concepts to daily life, we are enlivened by integrating social principles of the church, such as the worth and dignity of every human person, family and community; God's love for the poor; the dignity of work; and solidarity through neighborly love with special emphasis on the care for creation.

Every topic includes emphasis on relevant Bible texts and important concepts. However, as this material is used in a variety of contexts and audiences, we encourage the clergy or preacher to contextualize the material with locally relevant stories and illustrations that will excite and engage the receivers meaningfully.

'Social Plastic Rebels Youth Manual'

The 'Social Plastic Youth Rebels Manual' communicates the same themes for youth audiences. In many faith communities, young people are very active, and utilizing this energy can create momentum from within. Young people create powerful impact as they learn new behaviors while adopting an environmentally sound

lifestyle. Teaching and training the next generation is of great importance in sustaining the program and creating long-term transformational impact in communities.

The 'Action Manual – Global North'*

The 'Action Manual-Global North'* is designed to help congregations to join the program by mobilizing members to raise funds through their plastic deposits or plastic neutralization in order to empower communities globally. It includes tools to help in the organizing process.

The 'Action Manual – Global South'*

The 'Action Manual-Global South'* is designed to help your congregation in planning to set up a collection point to empower your community. It includes some tools on how to start a collection center and train collectors.

The two action manuals, '**Action Manual – Global North**' and '**Action Manual – Global South**', outline the essential tools for launching a local Interfaith Social Plastic rebellion. Each applies the learning from the sermons and studies to practice the new spirituality of integrating care for creation into our daily lives. The intention is to mobilize and organize believers to create a momentum for action.



THEOLOGY FOR CREATION

The next section lays out the heart of our Theology for Creation and teaches us to act full of **love**, **hope** and **faith** to stop ocean plastic and to empower the poor by revealing the value of Social Plastic. These six powerful sermons with corresponding Bible Study Material will enliven congregations to connect our faith and spirituality to confront the current plastic waste crisis and discover how God is empowering them to be part of the solution and not the pollution.

*Note: Generally, definitions of the Global North include the United States, Canada, Europe, Israel, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan as well as Australia and New Zealand. The Global South is made up of Africa, Latin America, and developing Asia including the Middle East. The use of the terminology is more complex and goes beyond the scope of this paper. For more information, please read: Marea Clarke: Global South: What does it mean and why use the term? University of Victoria, Political Science, accessed at <https://onlineacademiccommunity.uvic.ca/globalsouthpolitics/2018/08/08/global-south-what-does-it-mean-and-why-use-the-term/>

SERMON SERIES AND BIBLE STUDIES

CARING FOR CREATION AND
REVEALING THE VALUE OF PLASTIC
AS PART OF OUR FAITH JOURNEY



SERMONS

- 7** PART ONE: WEEK ONE
- 9** PART ONE: WEEK TWO
- 12** PART ONE: WEEK THREE
- 15** PART ONE: WEEK FOUR
- 17** PART ONE: WEEK FIVE
- 21** PART ONE: WEEK SIX
- 24** PART TWO: WEEK ONE
- 25** PART TWO: WEEK TWO
- 27** PART TWO: WEEK THREE
- 29** PART TWO: WEEK FOUR
- 32** PART TWO: WEEK FIVE
- 34** PART TWO: WEEK SIX

PART 1: SERMONS

WEEK 1: “AND IT WAS GOOD”— OUR WONDERFUL WORLD

Main Message

- Creation is good and wonderful.
- It displays the greatness of God.
- It is God’s gift to us.

Scriptures

- Genesis 1
- Psalm 24:1-2
- Parable of the Talents
- Parable of Good Wicked Administrator
- Parable of the good earth
- Romans 1:19-20
- Colossians 1:16
- Revelation 11:18
- Proverbs 13:22

Sermon Notes

Overview:

This sermon is the first one of a series of six sermons which unpack the message of our faith in relationship to creation. We believe as Christians it is our calling to be good stewards of creation and to care for it with our full commitment as our service to God and humanity. As a church, we have entered into a partnership with the Plastic Bank. The Plastic Bank is a movement to prevent plastic waste from entering the ocean and to inform people of the value of the material.

In this partnership, we will go through this series of sermons to teach us how our spirituality is a great source of strengthening our stewardship. But we will also deepen this knowledge through Bible studies for adults and for young people. At the same time, we are mobilizing our church to engage in collecting plastic and teaching the value of it by setting up a Plastic Bank collection center. We are planning to make this a long-term activity to reduce the waste in our community, and to help people to earn additional income or to use this income to support the ministry of our church. We are excited about this opportunity, and we will engage with all of you over the next few weeks to set this up and begin running our own Plastic Bank collection center.

Introduction:

We all like photos of scenic landscapes and sunsets. We enjoy a glass of cold water on a hot day and some fresh fruits. We take it for granted that our hearts are beating and that seeds grow when we sow them in the soil.

Nevertheless, it is a miracle that life exists. It is a miracle that our planet provides all we need and much more. Through the cycles of exchange of air, water and composting, life has become sustainable as the different ecosystems work together to provide life giving resources and maintaining balance. At the same time, the different organs in our bodies work together to sustain us and ensure we function.

But beyond the physical beauty of creation, God gave us His Spirit. We are conscious beings, aware of ourselves, our surroundings and the time in which we live. In addition, we can attach meaning to our lives and our world. This spirit allows us to co-create with God, or being creative in the arts, science and communities.

In Genesis 1, we read an account of God creating the world. After each task, God evaluates what was created, and every time, the result of the assessment is that “God saw it was good.” After six days, the task is completed and the final assessment in verse 31 is “very good.”

The creation account drives one important point—that creation has value. This value is intrinsic as it was assigned by the creator. As his creation and part of the whole ecosystem, we have a place that is very good too. We are valuable and loved as is the whole creation. This indicates that our role must preserve the state of creation as “very good.” Michael L. Blaine explains that God wants to make it clear by saying, “*Make no doubt about it: all that I have made is good! Every rock, every beating heart, every molecule*”. Blaine explains further: “*If we are looking for a foundation upon which to build a deeper Theology or to affirm the intrinsic value of the world, we need look no further.*”¹ We cannot engage in activities that will render creation into a state that is not “very good” anymore.

Why is that so? Romans 1: 19-20 gives the answer: *For the invisible things of him, his eternal power and divinity, are clearly understood by the creation of the world and by the things that are made so that there is no excuse;* (Rom 1:20 JUB).

- Creation visibly displays the attributes of the invisible God. The miracles of creation should amaze us and create in us a sense of awe and majesty. By doing so, we see the creator behind it, the wisdom, the creativity, and the power that brought everything into being and sustains it all.
- We do not own creation. In Colossians, we read: *For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him* (Col 1:16 ESV). Even though, we clearly need creation to live and are dependent on it, creation was not for us, as we are just a part of the same. Creation was for Christ and through Christ. As believers, this dogma strengthens our faith. As Christ is Our Savior, Our Brother and the one who died for us because of his love, we can trust creation is good as it is through him and for him. This further means we are deeply connected to creation. Living on this planet is a precious gift to us, which we cherish. All other creatures and elements share the same connection, and therefore, we want to cherish them as well.
- This means the world does not belong to us, but to God. Psalm 24: 1-2 makes it clear that this world belongs to God. Or as Bishop George D. McKinney Jr. puts it: “*The creation does not belong to the rich who possess it, not to the poor who need and want the resources. Neither the greedy nor the needy can claim ownership.*”² The question of ownership indicates what rights we have and where we are accountable on how we treat this world. “*The earth is the LORD’s and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein, for he has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers*” (Psalm 24:1-2 ESV).

Our lives are not our own but belong to him. If everything belongs to God, we are accountable to him for how we treat His creation and live our lives on this earth. We often hear in environmental circles that we have borrowed this world from our children, indicating that we are accountable for the condition of the world we are leaving behind for the next generation. Will it still display the beauty and majesty of the Creator? Or will it be ravaged and destroyed? Will it become uninhabitable, displaying our greed and lack of responsibility? If this is already a heavy thought, we have borrowed this world from God. If your friend borrowed something valuable from you and returns it broken, you will demand rightfully that the person will replace the item or pay for it. But what if the item is irreplaceable? The relationship and trust in your friend will be strained, especially when you discover your friend did not really take care of your items but was being knowingly irresponsible. As already mentioned before, creation is very good and valuable to God. Therefore, our conduct toward creation is important and has consequences. We believe that God is also righteous, and our deeds will be rewarded or punished. God is not taking it lightly how we treat his creation. The book of Revelation speaks of the last judgement. In Revelation 11:18, the Apostle John points out that God’s wrath will be coming on those destroying the earth and that destruction is coming on them as well. As we currently observe the harmful consequences of human activity on the planet, we experience suffering and harm ourselves because of that. If we harm the earth, we harm ourselves.

On the other hand, we also take part in the fullness and creativity; we have been endowed with abundance. We have developed significantly as a species and in many ways our progress has made our lives better.

Closing thoughts

Nevertheless, we are living with the challenge not to destroy the earth, but to love the earth and to adore the Divine for the beauty and majesty displayed in creation.

We have the capacity to do good. Human progress has brought much good, such as reducing poverty and reducing hunger and diseases. We live in much more freedom and participation and inclusivity. We are living in a society that is much better than that of our ancestors

But as a congregation and individuals, we are all contributing to polluting this planet, including with plastic waste. We must treat creation with the value God has given it to us for being good stewards. I am encouraging all of you to consider this seriously and to evaluate every action this week, whether it is aligned to the value of creation or reducing value. Whether you eat, commute, work, dispose of your waste, shop or whatever you do, ask yourselves, “Am I displaying the value of God’s creation, and if not, how could I change my behavior to display the value of creation?”

Paul Brand reminds us to serve God by helping to preserve the good creation for our children, quoting Proverbs 13:22, where it says, “*A good man leaves an inheritance for his children’s children.*”³

This means we also need to manage our waste properly not only here in our community, but globally. Plastic waste has become a problem and we are all accountable to resolve this problem because we all use plastic. That’s one of the reasons we are partnering with The Plastic Bank. Plastic is made of crude oil, a valuable resource also created by God for us to use responsibly. Therefore, plastic is not trash, it has value and is useful. By collecting this plastic through our congregation, we are revealing the value of plastic and honoring God.



WEEK 2: THE GOOD COMMANDMENT— CARING FOR WHAT WE WERE GIVEN

Main Message

- Having dominion over creation does not mean abusing creation
- It means caring for creation
- Caring for Creation is a divine commandment

Scriptures

- Matthew 25:14-30
- Genesis 1:26-28
- Psalm 72:8, 12-14
- Leviticus 25:1-5
- Mark 10:42-45

Sermon Notes

Overview:

Today is our second week of the Creation Care series in partnership with the Plastic Bank. Last week we learned that (1) Creation is very good, (2) it was created for Christ and through Christ, as the liturgy mentions “Through him, with him and in him and (3) creation belongs to God and is administered by us. We concluded that we are therefore accountable in how we treat creation, and this includes what we do with our plastic waste. Through joining the Plastic Bank program, we can become better stewards of creation. Today we want to unpack the concept of being good stewards.

Introduction:

There was a woman who married a widower with two children. The woman was barren and could not have children herself, so she cared for these two kids as if they were her own and raised them like she was their real mother. The two children responded very well to her care and loved her like a mother. When she was getting older, her husband died first, so the two children, now grown up, lovingly cared for her. This story powerfully illustrates the principle of stewardship, taking care of somebody or something entrusted to you that is valuable and how this stewardship benefits you later. It could have gone so differently. The women could have chosen to not take good care of these children, but rather to neglect them. The children’s lives could have fallen apart, so that when she became old and her husband died, they could have chosen not to care for her, ending her life lonely and in misery. We are all stewards; we are all entrusted with our lives and all that comes with it. Our lives have value, and what we do with them matters. We are either good or bad stewards, and the consequences come back to us. We can also tie this with the parable of the talents in Matthew 25.

“Similarly, it is like a man going on a trip who called his servants and turned his money over to them. To one man he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, based on their ability. Then he went on his trip. “The one who received five talents went out at once and invested them and earned five more. In the same way, the one who had two talents earned two more. But the one who received one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground, and buried his master’s money. “After a

long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The one who had received five talents came up and brought five more talents, saying, ‘Master, you gave me five talents. See, I’ve earned five more talents.’ His master told him, ‘Well done, good and trustworthy servant! Since you have been trustworthy with a small amount, I will put you in charge of a large amount. Come and share your master’s joy!’ “The one with two talents also came forward and said, ‘Master, you gave me two talents. See, I’ve earned two more talents.’ His master told him, ‘Well done, good and trustworthy servant! Since you have been trustworthy with a small amount, I will put you in charge of a large amount. Come and share your master’s joy!’ “Then the one who had received one talent came forward and said, ‘Master, I knew that you were a hard man, harvesting where you haven’t planted and gathering where you haven’t scattered any seed. Being afraid, I went off and hid your talent in the ground. Here, take what is yours!’ “His master answered him, ‘You evil and lazy servant! So you knew that I harvested where I haven’t planted and gathered where I haven’t scattered any seed? Then you should have invested my money with the bankers. When I returned, I would have received my money back with interest.’ Then the master said, ‘Take the talent from him and give it to the man who has the ten talents, because to everyone who has something, more will be given, and he will have more than enough. But from the person who has nothing, even what he has will be taken away from him. Throw this useless servant into the darkness outside! In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth!’” (Matt 25:14-30 ISV).

The parable clearly demonstrates the cause and effect principle behind stewardship, where good stewardship is rewarded, while poor stewardship leads to negative consequences.

God commanded us to be stewards over creation.

Genesis 1:26-28 talks about the creation of the first humans: *Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” So, God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (Gen 1:26-28 ESV).*

This text has often been used by environmentalists against Christianity. The emphasis was on “subdue” and “have dominion,” which seems to give humans permission to act toward creation as they want, and to enslave creation without minding the consequences to ecosystems and other life forms as long as we think it benefits us.

So, let us look at these two phrases to unpack their meaning. The Hebrew word for “subdue” is *kabash*, which means to subjugate something that is hostile. To understand this, we need to be aware that at the onset of human civilization, the earth was a wilderness, and human activity was aimed toward survival and cultivating the earth. It required transforming the hostile wilderness into a place where human settlements were safe and life could prosper. *Kabash* meant cultivating fields and gardens, and building towns and roads. It does not mean to harm or destroy, but to create and cultivate by

transforming a hostile environment that brings death into a friendly place that yields life.

Dominion means Stewardship and Caring

“Having Dominion” is the word *radah* that describes royal rulership. It is also used in Psalm 72:8 to describe the rule of God: *May he rule from sea to sea, from the river to the ends of the earth* (Psalm 72:8 NABRE)

This indicates that God has entrusted us to have dominion, sharing with us being partakers of his dominion. This dominion is not for our sake but is given to us by God to administer it for him and in his place. Therefore, we can only administer this dominion as he would have done it, based on his values and principles. But how is this rulership then to be implemented? Verses 12-14 describe it as follows: *“For he delivers the needy when he calls, the poor and him who has no helper. He has pity on the weak and the needy and saves the lives of the needy. From oppression and violence, he redeems their life, and precious is their blood in his sight”* (Psalm 72:12-14 ESV).

This shows that the underlying values of God’s dominion are love, care, mercy and empowerment, without any oppression, exploitation and abuse.

It is clear, that human activity does have an impact on creation, the eco-systems and other living beings. But our role must be to build up a reconciled world.

An Example from the Mosaic Law

The Mosaic law contains regulations that demonstrates practical application of these principles. The Sabbath Year in Leviticus 25:1-5 teaches us to give rest to the land for one year of every seven years:

The LORD spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai, saying, “Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When you come into the land that I give you, the land shall keep a Sabbath to the LORD. For six years you shall sow your field, and for six years you shall prune your vineyard and gather in its fruits, but in the seventh year there shall be a Sabbath of solemn rest for the land, a Sabbath to the LORD. You shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard. You shall not reap what grows of itself in your harvest or gather the grapes of your undressed vine. It shall be a year of solemn rest for the land (Lev 25:1-5 ESV).

Giving nature rest from human activity so it may recover, and to curtail human consumption, forcing us to be content with what we have, is a powerful example of respecting the needs of the land and of other creatures. It shows dominion has a framework of respect and service, where limitations are set to avoid harm, abuse and exploitation. This is good stewardship. It makes sense that the soil could recover lost nutrients from over utilization, resulting in higher yields thereafter.

The Example of Jesus

The final and supreme example of servant leadership is the Lord Jesus Christ himself. He taught his disciples that having dominion means the way in which we serve humbly, we become more human and more in harmony with creation, ourselves, God and others.



And Jesus called them to him and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mar 10:42-45 ESV).

This is a very strong statement about how leaders are to be servants foremost and committed to humility, which is acknowledgment of the truth about oneself, about one’s place in the world, and about one’s duties and responsibilities. Following the way of Christ, dominion and subduing means service, giving ourselves and having an attitude that is loving others as oneself; equal in dignity; no elevation or demotion of oneself over another. It means to constrain oneself so others can thrive, which includes tempering oneself and restraining from excesses, and other harmful activities.

In relation to our treatment of creation, the application of these principles means that pollution, exploitation and destruction are not right, but rather preservation, care and conservation are to be pursued. We are to love creation the way Christ loves us.

Closing Thoughts:

We have come to the point in human history that applying these principles to creation has an urgency that will have significant impact on the next generations. Pollution and the destruction of creation through human activity have reached levels that stretch earth beyond its capacity. Currently, the amount of resources we use is at a level that we will need three planets like Earth to sustain our consumption. Therefore, we need to act immediately and radically. And we need to act together.

Here in our church, we are taking an important step by partnering with the Plastic Bank. We see the negative impact of plastic pollution and we are committed to stop it. The poor, needy and broken crying out are not only people living in poverty, it is also all of creation being ravaged and exploited. In many places it is being impoverished from its former beauty and splendor with plastic waste everywhere. This is unacceptable. If subduing means making our place a lifegiving place, we need to deal with plastic waste radically, because uncontrolled plastic waste transforms our communities into communities of death—the death of animals and of humans.

If we are serious about being Christians, then we are serious about being good stewards. This means we must be serious about handling plastic properly in our community. We can even use it to do good through the partnership we have with the Plastic Bank.

Instead of throwing plastic away, we return it into the supply chain and recycle it, so it can be made into new products. This makes us into good stewards of creation, as well as of the plastic we consume. Our partnership with Plastic Bank is our application of being good stewards, serving our community and nature.

And if all of us will do their part, we can have a great impact together, as Sharon Gallagher encourages us, “We are told that a little leaven can leaven the lump. Like it or not, we are all part of the lump: we live in human bodies of flesh, we live on the earth, we live in society. Perhaps, if enough Christians lived and worked in ways that sustains the earth, we could preserve what remains of the good things God created.”⁴



WEEK 3: CREATION IS AGONIZING—PLASTIC IS EVERYWHERE

Sermon Notes

Main Message

- The earth is in agony because of a lack of stewardship.
- Our behavior toward the planet can be called sinful and is threatening the sustainability of life on earth.
- We urgently need to change our behavior, or the consequences will be catastrophic.
- Recycling Plastic with the Plastic Bank is a solution with which we can make a significant impact.

Scriptures

- Romans 8:22
- Isaiah 5:13
- Proverbs 26:13
- 1 Timothy 6:10

Introduction:

Last week, we talked about stewardship and that God calls us to be good stewards of the earth in which He has entrusted to us. We also discussed that stewardship includes being responsible with how we dispose of our waste. We emphasized that our partnership with Plastic Bank is one important solution for our church to deal responsibly with our plastic waste. Instead of being considered waste, we are demonstrating the value of the material, transforming it from waste into a solution to empower poor people in our community.

Today, we are exploring the consequences of poor stewardship and the situation we are currently encountering. We will discuss, why we as people of faith are called to be part of the solution.

Let me start us off with a question. How do you feel when you are sick? What is it like to have a fever, pain, and feeling fatigue? What about when the symptoms get worse? What is it like when the pain is getting more intense? How do you feel when you are bedridden and you cannot perform your basic routine anymore; when pain medications no longer dull the pain? What about when there is no more hope and you must think about your final hour?

Nobody wants this kind of life, right? If we have a chance to avoid such a destiny, we would do everything we can to do so. But how about our mother Earth?

Earth is groaning

In Romans 8:22, where the Greek word *sustenazo* means experiencing a common calamity, the Apostle Paul writes that earth is groaning. *For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now* (Rom 8:22 ESV).

The famous writer Philip Yancey points out: “Like humanity, the rest of the created world presents a strange mixture of beauty and horror, of splendid cooperation and savage competition.”⁵

We can see this tension in the good provisions the earth gives us to sustain life and the beauty of nature. But we also witness the horror of natural disasters and the destruction they bring. It is like when we suffer and die through sicknesses caused by microorganisms. However, the groaning has increased with our failure to properly use of our resources and steward them well. When humans were only few and used simple technology, harmful human activities had limited impact on creation. But with the increase of numbers and technological progress, harmful human activity has had a bigger impact on creation. Does that mean we should still live like people in the stone age and leave behind any progress? No, we should not. But it is our responsibility to ensure our progress is not harming planet Earth. This makes common sense as we live on the earth, and we do not have another planet where we can move to should earth become uninhabitable.

How is the earth groaning?

There are several issues today that are creating challenges for sustainable life on our planet. Many of them are caused by our activities. We want to focus especially on the problem of plastic today in our landfills and oceans. We all produce waste. 100 years ago, most of the waste was biodegradable or reusable. Today, with all the synthetic materials, like plastic, waste will not rot, even after a hundred years. Here are some ideas about what is happening with plastic waste today.⁶

- By 2050, we will have 40 billion tons of plastic on Earth, up from **4.5 billion tons** now.
- Manufacturers produce **300 million tons of new plastic each year**.
- Nearly all the plastic ever produced still exists.
- The value of plastic packaging lost to the economy each year is worth **\$80-120 billion USD**.
- The oceans may contain more plastic than fish by 2050.
- **7 billion kg.** of plastic enters the ocean each year.
- Marine plastic kills over **1,000,000 seabirds and 100,000 marine mammals annually**, while micro plastic enters the food chain through fish into humans.

David Katz puts the origins of ocean plastics in context:

“

Of the plastic that is entering the ocean, it is not surprising that it comes from those countries with extreme levels of poverty. If you don’t have power or food for your children, recycling is not even in the realm of possibility. In many of these impoverished communities there is no garbage truck that comes by and picks up your waste. What you have is a stream, a river, a canal and the streets. Most countries have two seasons—the dry season, where everything goes into the riverbed, and the rainy season, when it’s all washed out to sea.

”

Once in the ocean, much of the plastic gets broken down by wave action, salt, and ultraviolet radiation into pieces so small they are hard to see. These small pieces, collectively named “microplastics,” were hardly on experts’ radar until recently, but now they are what many researchers are most concerned about. Whereas salt and sunlight can cause plastics to physically break into microplastics, chemically they don’t spontaneously decompose into other compounds.

Instead, they just accumulate. Once dispersed by currents, microplastics become virtually irretrievable. The following excerpt from Parker’s *National Geographic* article clearly illustrates how microplastics have now spread across our oceans:

“

Microplastics have been found everywhere in the ocean that people have looked, from sediments on the deepest seafloor to ice floating in the Arctic—which, as it melts over the next decade, could release more than a trillion bits of plastic into the water, according to one estimate. On some beaches on the Big Island of Hawaii, as much as 15 percent of the sand is actually grains of microplastic. Kamilo Point Beach, the one I walked on, catches plastic from the North Pacific gyre, the trashiest of five swirling current systems that transport garbage around the ocean basins and concentrate it in great patches. At Kamilo Point the beach is piled with laundry baskets, bottles, and containers with labels in Chinese, Japanese, Korean, English, and occasionally, Russian. On Henderson Island, an uninhabited coral island in the South Pacific, researchers have found an astonishing volume of plastic from South America, Asia, New Zealand, Russia, and as far away as Scotland.⁷

”

To give you a visual of just how much plastic is now in our oceans, University of Georgia engineering professor, Jenna Jambeck, says it is equivalent to having five plastic grocery bags filled with plastic trash sitting on every foot of coastline around the world. What makes things more challenging is that scientists are unclear as to how long it will take for all of this plastic to completely biodegrade into its constituent molecules. The most optimistic estimates predict it will take at least 450 years. More cynical forecasters believe the plastic waste will never fully breakdown.

This is alarming. But what are the underlying reasons for this happening?

- What are the underlying reasons for our harming of the earth and being such poor stewards?
- The main reasons are threefold:

– **Ignorance:** The people of Israel went into exile and suffered the consequences of their sins because they lacked the knowledge to do what is right, as the prophet Isaiah told us. *Therefore, my people go into exile for lack of knowledge; their honored men go hungry, and their multitude is parched with thirst* (Isa 5:13 ESV).

Ignorance can have deadly consequences and is not excusable by God. Many people just do not know how to take care of creation, and they naively damage creation. That’s why we have these educational programs, so people learn of the responsibility to steward creation.

– **Poverty:** Often the poor have no choice but to harm nature as it is their only option to survive. If choices are limited to survival or harming creation, survival instincts eliminate the ability to freely choose, but creation suffers the consequences. Additionally, the poor often do not give priority to environmental concerns, as much of their energy and effort is focused on one thing: survival. If all your effort is consumed by trying to feed your family and you can just barely make it, how can you have extra energy to consider the importance of caring for the environment? Therefore, through our partnership with Plastic Bank, we empower the poor and impoverished communities by giving them a choice to both improve their standard of living to a dignified life and to transform environmental degradation as well.

– **Comfort:** Some people know what their responsibilities are, but they are unwilling or too lazy to respond correctly because of the discomfort it causes. For example, separating waste and bringing plastic to the collection center requires extra effort. The Book of Proverbs warns us about using excuses as an easy way out. The lazy one says, *“There is a lion in the way! A fierce lion is in the streets!”* (Pro 26:13 TS2009).

But in the end, we are just making things worse for ourselves and our children. Often people want others to start first, or they think their small contribution doesn’t count. People also feel powerless against the massive consumer machine, but in the end, these are also excuses for doing nothing. We need to encourage each other and hold ourselves accountable to do what is right. A way to respond to this challenge could be forming groups to segregate plastic and bring it to the plastic center.

– **Greed:** Many people earn a good living from pollution. Even though technologies are available that are less harmful, they refuse to change their approach. Making money off of something that is harming others and the planet is egoistic and greedy. Paul warns in his letter to Timothy not to love money. *For the love of money is the root of all evil, which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.* (1Ti 6:10 JUB).

As followers of Jesus, we should not consent to pride and greed which destroys our world, but rather, allow our business dealings to be guided by love, creating an abundance for all and protecting our world. Our partnership with The Plastic Bank is one way where we give people the opportunity to improve their living standards through recycling plastic.

Closing Thoughts

Today we have learned powerfully that our earth is groaning, that the condition of our mother Earth is critical in so many ways, and that we are all a part of the cause by the way we live. We also investigated our attitudes and other factors as to why we treat our planet so badly.

If we will not act now to change things, the problems will only get worse to the point of harming all life on earth. Let us be reminded by the words of Fred van Dyke:

“

We must begin to live as stewards. Humans are responsible to God to maintain creation’s fruitfulness. It is not primarily for humanity that Adam tends the garden, but for God, the creator. He is the One who commissioned us as stewards. We have the privilege of using creation’s fruitfulness for our needs, but we dare not forget our responsibility. If our stewardship becomes self-serving, creation’s fruitfulness will be diminished and our lives will be impoverished.⁸

”

A new, important aspect of our life as a community will be our partnership with The Plastic Bank to transform waste into something valuable. And in that way, we will start to be healers of our planet, as this is what we as believers are called to.



WEEK 4: REDEMPTION OF CREATION— THE GOOD NEWS FOR US ALL

Sermon Notes

Main Message

- All broken relationships are redeemed through Christ, including our relationship to creation.
- Redemption also means that waste like plastic can become valuable.
- As God's children, we are called to live out this redemption in all aspects of our lives.
- We are called to be ambassadors of redemption, transforming our communities.

Scriptures

- Jeremiah 29:11
- Colossians 1:19-20
- 2 Corinthians 5:20
- Romans 8:28

Introduction:

Last week we explored how the earth is groaning under our treatment and how our poor stewardship, driven by ignorance, comfort and greed, has brought earth to the brink of collapse. Today we discuss how God is empowering us to become healers of the earth and reverse the damage by reversing our behavior.

This is not the time to give up and lose hope. There are solutions to the problems we have created. Our partnership with The Plastic Bank is a hope-giving undertaking, where we can make an impact practically.

If we look at nature, there is no waste. Everything is transformed and reused. If a big tree dies and falls to the ground, it will compost and become fertile soil. This soil provides the nutrients for new trees to grow. Our economy should work in just the same way. Why? God in His infinite wisdom gave us nature as an example, or a blueprint, on how to run our economy based on His principles. How can we return to that model?

Redemption through Christ.

For this, we must look at the crucial relationships we have. The four crucial relationships, each one of us has, are (1) with God, (2) with oneself, (3) with others, and (4) with all of creation. We are created for relationships, and all beings are somehow connected as they originate from one higher being and are sustained by this higher being—God. For these relationships to work, we need love and mutuality. However, selfishness and greed have harmed these relationships. Nevertheless, God wants us to live in love and abundance, as the prophet Jeremiah wrote: *For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope (Jer 29:11 ESV).* *We are invited to live in fullness through forgiveness and reconciliation—to be restored into harmony, healing and wholeness in all our relationships.* Paul wrote in Colossians 1:20,

For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross (Col 1:19-20 ESV).

Paul wrote that all things were reconciled, and that Jesus made peace with things in heaven and on earth. It means our relationships and connections are being guided by this peace. We now can have peace with ourselves and stop rejecting ourselves. We further have the possibility to strive for peace within our community by ending hate, oppression and exploitation. And finally, we can live in peace with nature. St. Francis of Assisi has been one of the best examples in history of having peace with nature, calling the elements his brothers and sisters, and caring not only for the poor, but also for plants and animals.

As with St. Francis, the Spirit wants us to open our hearts and, through our faith, to receive this peace and let it guide our lives and our actions. Only with this peace inside of our hearts can we become healers of the earth. True transformation is happening from the inside out, when we change our convictions, our goals and our ambitions. It is when those things that were important before—like status, riches and power—become meaningless that service, simplicity and love can fill us with unspeakable joy. It is a change from darkness into light, from damage into harmony.

Can plastic waste be redeemed as well?

Plastic is everywhere now with many of our appliances being made from plastic, it is in cars and our children's toys. Most of the goods we buy are packaged in plastic, either bottles, cups, wrappers made of foil. Even our clothes and shoes are made from it. Plastic is light, cheap and sturdy, but plastic has become a disaster as most of it ends in landfills, the sea, or is burned. While plastic largely is recyclable, only 9% ends up being recycled in practice.

Much of the plastic is recyclable, but some of it is not because of being mixed with other substances in the manufacturing process. Some goods are also over packaged, using more plastic than is necessary. Also, many of the snacks and drinks packaged in plastic are very unhealthy due to their high sugar content. This means that we as consumers are responsible to purchase goods that are healthy, while the industry is responsible to limit packaging and to use only recyclable packaging. According to the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, many companies are working on this. Further, the government needs to guide us through laws to ensure recyclable plastic is used—and reused responsibly.

There is still something even better we can do to redeem plastic, we can use it as a business opportunity to improve the lives of the poor. The Plastic Bank has built relationships with companies buying recycled plastic from the Plastic Bank for premium prices. They have transformed plastic into a currency. This is called Social Plastic, which is the brand of the Plastic Bank, and through it, Plastic Bank provides extra income for poor people. According to the World Bank, in 2015, about 735 million people lived in extreme poverty.⁹

Through the Plastic Bank, we can help some of them to get out of poverty in a dignified way. This is an exciting program for us as a church; here we can be healers of earth and society.

Based on the work, Plastic Bank is doing in Haiti, collecting plastic can have a significant impact on people living in extreme poverty:¹⁰

The value that people can achieve on a daily basis in Haiti can triple or quadruple their income. They are typically earning less than a dollar a day in what are mostly environmentally degrading industries, whereas with recycling they can go from a dollar to four. Some recyclers are making up to six dollars a day. And it sells by mass, so the more you

collect, the more you make. It's an unlimited income opportunity. That is hope, that is change, that is prosperity, that is social security as a parent, that is everything to put a child in school. That's a paradigm shift.

Social Plastic: A Ladder of Opportunity

Once plastic is exchanged, it's cleaned, bundled, and crushed into pellets. These pellets are then sold, at a premium (above market price), to multinational corporations such as Shell, IBM, SC Johnson, and Marks & Spencer, who need plastics to manufacture their goods. The brands who buy this recycled plastic, which is known as Social Plastic, choose to pay more for it because they see it as a way to stand out and gain an advantage over the competition by showing consumers that they are dedicated to making a positive social and environmental impact with their products. By charging an additional fee to companies that want to use Social Plastic, the Plastic Bank can pay collectors more money for the materials they collect.

For many companies, such as Germany based Henkel, the maker of home, laundry, and personal care products like Persil detergent, the opportunity to manufacture their goods with Social Plastic is a win-win-win situation. Less plastic makes it into the ocean, more people get out of poverty, and Henkel gets to enhance its brand by showcasing their commitment to environmental sustainability and social progress. Henkel describes the decision to use Social Plastic as "turning environmental challenges into life chances."

With interest in its recycled products growing, the Plastic Bank is now extending the scale of its operations. Three years ago, the social enterprise started working in Haiti. To date, they have established 35 Social Plastic collection centers around the country with 2,000 collectors.

Collectively, these individuals have retrieved 8 million pounds of plastic waste and turned it into Social Plastic for reuse by corporations. After learning valuable lessons in the Caribbean, the Plastic Bank is now developing a presence in South-East Asia and South America, in some of the countries that contribute the greatest volume of plastic waste into the ocean, including China, Vietnam, Indonesia, and the Philippines.

Showing neighborly love to our communities and sharing God's message.

God loves all people and all of creation. He wants to demonstrate His redemption and peace everywhere. One calling for us as a church is to reach out to others in love and neighborliness. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:20, *Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God (2Co 5:20 ESV).* Our Plastic Bank Project is one way that we can show love to others and to creation. It is a way through which we can promote the message that God is love.

Closing Thoughts

In the message of Redemption, we have concentrated on the power of the Christian faith. We have been set free to be transformed in all relationships and to be at peace with God, ourselves, our community, and all of creation. This power enables us to live differently and to bring change into our communities, so they can become places of peace. This is the work of Christ in us.

The Theologian Van Dyke moves this further, as we are called to join in this work of redemption. He says, *"We must demonstrate the*



reality of Christ's work in our treatment of creation, and we should expect substantial healing to occur if we treat creation in obedience to the covenant God established with it. If we do so, we will begin to understand the Amish proverb that we did not inherit the land from our parents, but rather are borrowing it from our children."¹¹

In that way, we can transform plastic from an environmental hazard into an instrument of transformation, to serve the poor and to be reused in the economy, just as God intended.

However, this will only work if we join this movement and become disciplined recyclers. Not by force, but because our hearts and minds have been renewed, and we are enlivened by the deep meaningfulness this provides for us as individuals, as a community of faith, and as humanity. It is what we were destined to do; that's why it resonates so deeply with our hearts.

WEEK 5: THE NEW EARTH— WILL THERE BE PLASTIC IN HEAVEN?

Main Message

- God's vision of the new heaven and earth is based on harmony, which is also called "Shalom," the Hebrew word for peace and wellbeing.
- Shalom is the outcome of the redemption given to us through Christ.
- Shalom encapsulates all aspects of life.
- Our waste can be used for advancing Shalom through the Plastic Bank.

Scriptures

- Isaiah 65:17-25
- 2 Chronicles 36:20-21
- Matthew 5:9
- Romans 12:2
- John 13:12-17

Sermon Notes

Introduction

We all know the story of the caterpillar and the butterfly. Everybody likes the beautiful butterfly, but nobody enjoys the view of the ugly caterpillar. However, we all know that without the caterpillar, there would be no butterfly. Nevertheless, we are all amazed by the significant change the caterpillar undergoes to become the butterfly. But to get there, the caterpillar must basically die and digest itself to transform into the butterfly.

This is a great picture for the transformation of Jesus Christ after the resurrection, but also for the destination of creation, including us.

The Vision of Shalom

Last week, we talked about the redemption through Christ and the peace it brings into all our relationships. The Hebrew word for peace is Shalom. However, Shalom means more than peace as we understand it today. It means a holistic wellbeing, where everything is in harmony. The Theologian Walter Brueggemann defines Shalom as "the central vision of world history in the Bible where all of creation is one, every creature in community with each other, living in harmony and security toward the joy and well-being of every other creature."¹² The prophet Isaiah describes this beautifully:

“

For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But ye shall be glad and rejoice from age to age in the things which I shall create; for, behold, I create joy unto Jerusalem and unto her people joy. And I will be glad with Jerusalem and rejoice with my people: and the voice of weeping shall no longer be heard in her, nor the voice of crying. There shall no longer be there an infant of days, nor an old man that has not filled his days, for the child shall die one hundred years old; and he who sins at one hundred years of age shall be accursed. And they shall build houses and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as the days of the trees shall be the days of my people, and my elect shall perpetuate the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain, nor give birth with fear; for their births are the seed of the blessed of the LORD, and their offspring shall be with them. And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall be fed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the ox; and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not afflict nor do evil in all my holy mountain, said the LORD (Isa 65:17-25 JUB).

”

Let's summarize the main points of the text:

- God is creating a new heaven and earth.
- God's people will live in joy and forget any painful past.
- People will live in health and prosperity.
- People will work in safety and be productive.
- God's people will live in close community with God and each other.
- All of creation will live in harmony in community.

This is a powerful vision of what Shalom should look like and what God's plan is for His creation. More so, caring for creation is a very powerful way of showing people that we love them, and that we really care about their future and the future of their children. However, if we are not acting decisively to change our lifestyles, the coming environmental crisis could unfold in an apocalyptic scenario.

Shalom is very important in the Old Testament. As mentioned, the Sabbath year, occurring every seven years, gave rest to the land in ancient Israel. They were not allowed to till the land or to harvest. However, the Jews failed to follow these instructions and the consequences were severe. The prophet Jeremiah, in 2 Chronicles 36:20-21, is quoted as saying that the people of Israel were being taken captive into exile because of their failure to observe the Sabbath year, and so the land would be given a rest for 70 years to make up for it. If we fail to live in shalom, it will backfire on us. We were created to live in shalom, and when we are outside of it, we will experience harm—whether in our personal lives, in society, or in nature. Therefore, the invitation to live in Shalom is for our own good, as well as for the common good. In this way, Shalom works only if we see the interconnectedness of all of life and all processes on the planet. Every action has consequences and often many more of which we are not aware.

Therefore, promoting Shalom in all aspects of life and society is our call as a church. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus calls those making peace the children of God.

Blessed are those who make peace. They will be called God's children. (Mat 5:9 GW)

Now, if we think of Shalom in all aspects, can there be Shalom while our oceans are polluted with plastic? Can Shalom coexist with whales, turtles and seabirds dying from being filled with plastic waste? Is Shalom present when those in poverty live lacking basic commodities and services, while their shantytowns sink into a sea of plastic waste created by megacities?

Of course, we know this is not Shalom. The vision of Shalom is clean seas with thriving life within and everybody living in a clean and safe environment. This means our waste has consequences. It is not gone when waste pickers pick it up and bring it to the garbage dump. It is either creating harm or doing good, depending on how we consume, and on what and how we throw away. Shalom for waste management is urgent, as with the rising population and increase of consumption, waste is becoming an uncontrollable problem. It will not happen by itself, but if we embrace the divine vision and make it a primary driver of our lives, it is possible.





How?

First, this is a matter of the heart and mind. Albert Einstein said that *the world we have created is a product of our thinking. We cannot change it without changing our thinking.*

This also resonates with the Apostle Paul writing:

Don't become like the people of this world. Instead, change the way you think. Then you will always be able to determine what God really wants—what is good, pleasing, and perfect (Rom 12:2 GW).

We need to remind ourselves that in God's economy there is no waste. Everything is transformed into something new. Photosynthesis transforms carbon into oxygen, composting transforms dead organic matter into fertilizer, evaporation transforms salty sea water into life giving rain.

The current discussion about a circular economy attempts to recreate this process as an economy where there will be no more waste. This is the way forward and we as a church must begin to see that is part of our calling which will lead us to better embrace the principles as of Shalom.

In our linear economy, things are produced and then disposed. In a circular economy, everything can be used again and again. As there is no waste in nature, we are also not producing waste in our economy as it is based on Shalom. Here is one example how it can be done:¹³

Think of your typical office chair. Across the world, there are millions of office chairs in schools, government buildings, and boardrooms. You may be sitting in one right now. These chairs are built with a combination of metals and synthetic plastics. Unfortunately, virtually none of them were designed with their end use in mind, and there is no way they can be easily disassembled so that their valuable technical and biological nutrients can become "food" for something else. As a result, once the expected lifetimes of these chairs are up, which is a around ten years on average, all of their materials will end up as waste.

Herman Miller, which is one of the top suppliers of office furniture in US, decided they could do better. In 2001, the company's engineers set about designing a mid-price range office chair, the Mirra, to be truly recyclable. The goal was to create a closed loop design where all materials would one day become "food" for either the technical or biological cycle.

"A business is rightly judged by its products and services, but must also face scrutiny as to its Humanity," (D. J. De Pree, Founder Herman Miller, Inc). The design team started by analyzing all the chemical ingredients that went into building the chair to make sure they were safe for human health and the environment. Next, they made sure that the chair could be disassembled quickly using common hand tools so that the materials could be separated and diverted into the appropriate pathways. Lastly, the team agreed that the chairs needed to be manufactured using 100% renewable energy, while also dramatically reducing their carbon and water footprint.

In 2003, the Mirra chair was unveiled and 96% of the chair could be recycled as a technical nutrient. It was also easy to take apart in 15 minutes and was made with materials that fit easily into existing recycling systems such as aluminum and PET plastic. The end result was a product that consumers loved and that had an exponentially better environmental impact compared to other comparable office chairs.

We all use plastic in different ways, and one option is to use less plastic and to be more responsible in what products we consume and purchase. It is our responsibility as a consumer to choose products that come from companies using principles of a circular economy.

Secondly, we have the chance to transform our plastic waste into something powerful. The model given to us by the Plastic Bank is opening new avenues for us to use plastic as an instrument to advance Shalom.

We will benefit from it personally because much of the plastic we use will not be wasted, but rather will be recycled to use again. Also, impoverished communities benefit, as waste collectors are not only earning more, but are moving from an informal way of earning a living to becoming part of mainstream society by accessing services like bank accounts, health care, education, and even mobile and digital communication. Finally, we help turn off the flow of plastic into the ocean at its source. All the cleanups will not come to much if the flow of plastic into the seas does not stop.

There are many ways we can be peacemakers and bring Shalom into the world. This starts with our hearts. It is the heart of service that Jesus demonstrated to his disciples in the washing of the feet of the disciples, which we can read in John 13: 12-17.

When Jesus had washed their feet and put on his outer robe, he sat down again and told them, "Do you realize what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right because that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you must also wash one another's feet. I have set an example for you, so that you may do as I have done to you. Truly, I say to you with certainty, a servant is not greater than his master, and a messenger is not greater than the one who sent him. If you understand these things, how blessed you are if you put them into practice! (Joh 13:12-17 ISV)

Brueggemann powerfully explains this text: "*In that strange series of events, the towel and the basin (for washing the feet) are symbols of shalom. The towel and basin are not only symbols, though they are that and powerful ones; they are the means by which something is done. In this dramatic act, Jesus was offering tools to his church.*"¹⁴

In this way, our partnership with Plastic Bank is a very relevant and powerful tool, through which we can serve, like washing feet. We can use plastic and we at the same time take responsibility for the plastic we consume. This transforms our use of plastic into a more personal experience for each one of us as it empowers us to practice Shalom daily. It also connects us to a global movement of like-minded groups and individuals who do the same, where together we can make a bigger impact.



Closing Thoughts

Today, we discussed God's vision of Shalom for His creation, which means peace and harmony. We have emphasized that the circular economic model, where there is no waste, is based on the principles of God's economy. This new economic model is the way we change our thinking about how we use things as God calls us to renew our way of life. This is needed if we want to become peacemakers, which is our calling as children of God. One powerful aspect of being peacemakers is to transform plastic into a currency instead of it becoming waste. Through this our Church can become better stewards, protect the oceans, and help the poor, both here in our community and on a global scale.

I am excited about this, and I thank all of you who join us in making this a success in our Church as we can leave this behind as a legacy for our children who will inherit this planet from us.



WEEK 6: SPIRITUALITY FOR THE TRASH CAN —WHAT WOULD JESUS DO WITH PLASTIC?

Main Message

- Jesus came to change the world.
- He was Shalom in human form.
- We are invited to follow his footsteps.
- This brings radical changes, including to the way we deal with waste.

Scriptures

- Luke 4:16-21
- Acts 4:34
- John 14:27
- Ephesians 5:1-2
- Matthew 21:12-17

Sermon Notes

Introduction

More than 2000 years after his death, people still discuss not only who Jesus Christ was, but also what it was that he wanted to do. Churches, theologians, philosophers, and historians have discussed this question and have all come to different conclusions.

For our faith, the Lord Jesus is the central figure on whom it is based, and his life, death and resurrection have extreme significance for what we believe, on our ethics, and on how we practice our faith. His teachings give us guidance for answering life's deepest questions. Our goal is to embrace the values and principles that Jesus demonstrated in his life, and which we follow as his disciples. Today, at the end of our Plastic Bank Sermon series, we will examine the first teaching of Jesus, which he preached in his hometown of Nazareth. It is called *Nazareth Manifesto*, and it is what can be considered the mission statement of Jesus, laying out what he wanted to achieve on earth. That teaching is the blueprint of the ministry of the church and needs to be connected to all we do. We will unpack this today and relate how it supports our partnership with the Plastic Bank program.

The Nazareth Manifesto

Here is what happened in Nazareth:

And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luk 4:16-21 ESV).

In this text, Jesus refers to the Jubilee Year found in Leviticus 25, where every 50 years all slaves were set free, all debts were forgiven, all sold lands were returned and everybody got a brand-new start. Unfortunately, it was never implemented, but it would have ensured social justice and access to production assets to everybody. It was a law that promoted Shalom within the community.

This is what Jesus was referring to in this text in bringing good news to the poor, declaring liberty to the oppressed, and proclaiming the year of the Lord's favor. This is also called the Kingdom of God where God rules where the poor hear good news, the broken are healed, and the oppressed relieved. The kingdom of God is a demonstration of love. Jesus embodied this love and the manifestation of the presence of God.

That's why his claim was that in him these statements have found fulfillment. His mission was to proclaim this Jubilee to all of us as a new age of Shalom, where reconciliation will take place everywhere. The first Christians took these words very seriously, even literally. In Acts 4:34, we read that the members of the first church sold belongings and real estate to help the poor, and because of that there were no more poor people. For example, Eusebius of Caesarea reported in the Third Century that during the plague, Christians helped the dying and showed extraordinary compassion.

Even until today, there is a great need for the Church to stand up and show this kind of compassion. The poor and oppressed are still there today, including the 790 million people living in extreme poverty. Environmental theologians also call our planet Earth the "New Poor." We see poverty is more of a social problem than a material one, as there are enough goods for everybody. The problem is embedded in cultural, economic, social, and sometimes religious factors keeping people captive in poverty, where they are often oppressed and exploited. The Earth, just as humans, has been ravaged, oppressed, and exploited through our pollution and abuse of natural resources. The condition of the earth is a problem caused by human activity. The pollution of the oceans with plastic waste is a classic example as plastic is solely a human-produced material. Ocean plastic is there because we put it there! It has devastating consequences and is leaving the oceans impoverished, ripped of their beauty and their richness, and even endangering its capacity to sustain life.

But the Nazareth Manifesto is a message of healing and of peace given to us as a gift. In John 14:27, Jesus talks about this peace. "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid" (John 14:27 ESV). This peace in us shows the presence of God, as it offers us the courage to further advance peace. Who will do this work of peace today? Who will advance the presence of God and proclaim his love?

Show the light in you

All of us are called to serve and to love. The peace Jesus left lives within us empowers us to transform our world, and to conform ourselves to Jesus.

The Apostle Paul wrote, "So be imitators of God, as his dear children. Live lovingly, just as the Messiah also loved us and gave himself for us as an offering and sacrifice, a fragrant aroma to God (Eph 5:1-2 ISV).

We are all called to imitate Jesus, which means to reflect on every situation and think, "If Jesus would be in this situation, what would he do? How would he react?" Paul gives us a hint: do the loving and selfless thing. If it is selfish and without love, then it is contrary to what Jesus would have done. He also tells us to be proactive. If there is a need and a problem, Jesus would act upon it at once.

So, what would Jesus do about ocean plastic? What heals broken people and sets the oppressed free? What is the loving and selfless thing to do?

Jesus would not just stand by and watch the oceans being destroyed. In Matthew 21:12-17, we read that Jesus threw the merchants out of the temple who desecrated the holy place by doing business. In some ways, the whole of creation is God's temple. It is sacred because God created it, and it displays His holiness. Humans are desecrating the planet by polluting it with plastic everywhere. Wouldn't Jesus act decisively to change that?

Since Jesus ascended to heaven, he's sent the Holy Spirit upon us to be his hands, feet and mouth. The Spirit inspires people to find solutions and giving divine callings to make a difference. We believe Plastic Bank is one such inspiration. It is a calling for those working there, and it was a divine inspiration to the founder David Katz to start it.

Now God has brought us in touch with them, and we are now joining this movement to be the hands, feet and mouth of Christ to transform plastic waste into a currency that empowers the poor. We are now healers of the earth, we are setting the earth and poor free from oppression by collecting plastic and transforming it into Social Plastic.

Let me share this powerful story with you from a book about the Plastic Bank, by Graham Mitchell.¹⁵ It is the story of Lise, a poor waste picker from Haiti. It shows how empowerment together with technological innovation can change people's lives. This is the outworking of the gospel.

Lise Nasis was, for most of her life, unbankable. In 2010, the Haitian earthquake left Lise widowed, homeless, and with no way to provide for her two daughters. Shortly thereafter Lise began collecting discarded plastic waste. For the past five years, Lise has finished each workday by bringing the material she has gathered to be weighed and checked for quality at a local Plastic Bank depot. From there, the value of what she has collected is transferred into a mobile phone application that works like a bank account to track how much plastic individuals have collected and to park their earnings in a digital wallet. This application serves a number of important purposes.

First is security. Many of the collectors of discarded plastic are women and children, and the Plastic Bank soon realized that some were being mugged for their proceeds. Having her funds secured in an online account gives Lise, and thousands like her, peace of mind that she won't have her hard-earned income stolen.

Second, through the collection of material, Lise has the opportunity to earn a credit rating. This is very significant as the more frequently she returns material, and the higher the quality, the more she is able to prove her worth. This in turn gives Lise the opportunity to obtain low-interest loans, something that is very hard to come by for most people living in poverty. As a result of collecting plastic waste, Lise affords a life, a home, and she can afford her two daughters' school tuition and uniforms. The more she works, the more she makes, and the more she makes the more she reveals to potential lenders that she is worthy of credit.

About 140 million people make a living from picking waste. We can make a significant difference in the lives of these brothers and sisters of ours. This is our calling and it needs all of us to act. This is not something optional or peripheral. This is at the center of God's heart. The theologian Charles Ringma points out, *"Looking at a biblical overview to God's heart and our mission to the poor, we need to recognize that ministry to the poor is not peripheral to the biblical story. It is central and at the very heart of God's love for the vulnerable and God's passion for justice and shalom."*¹⁶

Closing Thoughts

Today, in our final sermon, we have examined the mission of Jesus to heal the broken and deliver the oppressed. This ministry of love was what Christ came to do. In our day, together with the poor, the planet earth has become oppressed to the point of collapse, choking in part on the extensive plastic pollution.

We, the church, are now the extension of Christ's hands, feet and mouth to bring healing and freedom from oppression. This means we bring liberty to the earth from plastic pollution. Therefore, all of us are called to join in promoting the Plastic Bank program and to help support this initiative and make it successful in our community. This means:

- Learning about the different types of plastics from our handout material.
- Segregating all your plastic at home.
- Bringing your plastic to the collection points.
- Teaching others to do the same.

Even if nobody would join us, we should do this because it is the right thing to do. However, we believe our actions will spread like wildfire and that many will join us. Think about our faith. Jesus started with 12 men and after 300 years, most of the people in the Roman Empire had become Christians. They had no internet, cell phones or even planes, cars, or trains. The Apostles and their followers just walked. We do not have 300 years to transform the way we use plastic. We only have a small window of a few years before it is too late, but we have digital tools to spread the news faster. Make this part of your legacy, that you have been part of a movement that turned the tides on plastic pollution and made an impact to heal the world.

PART 2: CORRESPONDING WEEKLY BIBLE STUDIES FOR SMALL GROUPS

WEEK 1: "SMALL GROUP STUDY: "AND IT WAS GOOD"— OUR WONDERFUL WORLD

Learning Objectives

By the end of this study participants will have:

- Greater appreciation for the wonder of creation.
- Deepened meaning of God's ownership of all that is created.
- Better understanding that we are stewards and responsible for how we treat creation.
- Evaluation their own lives as stewards and reflected on action to improve their own stewardship.

Grasp

- Opening exercise: Think of an experience where you experienced the awe of creation, or you felt deeply grateful for something or somebody God created. Close your eyes and see this experience in your inner eye.
- Share your experience briefly with the group.

Receive

- Read Genesis Chapter 1. God created everything out of nothing and authored life, which he sustains until today. The final assessment in Verse 31 is that all of creation is "very good."
- How do you experience this in your life? Do you struggle believing and living it? Read Romans 1:19-20 where Paul writes that we can see God through creation. What do you think he means by this?
- For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God himself has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible attributes—his eternal power and divine nature—have been understood and observed by what he made, so that people are without excuse (Rom 1:19-20 ISV).
- Share any experience you've had relating to this.
- Read Psalm 24:1-2, where God is proclaimed as the true owner of all of creation.
- *A Davidic Psalm. "The earth and everything in it exists for the LORD—the world and those who live in it. Indeed, he founded it upon the seas, he established it upon deep waters" (Psa 24:1-2 ISV).*
- What are your thoughts about this?
- What does this mean regarding our relationship with nature and other creatures?
- How does that make us accountable on how we live today?

Apply

In your surrounding community or home:

- In what ways will you be using what we were reflecting upon about creation back home with you?
- How can you be more aware of God's goodness in the things he has created?
- What can you do to be a better steward of the things God has entrusted to you?

Walk

Let us close giving praise and thanks to God for the greatness of his creation with singing or praying the hymn: How great Thou art (You can also listen to the hymn together at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cc0QVWzCv9k>)

[Verse 1]

O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder
Consider all the worlds Thy hands have made
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder
Thy power throughout the universe displayed

[Refrain]

Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to Thee
How great Thou art, how great Thou art
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to Thee
How great Thou art, how great Thou art!

[Verse 2]

When through the woods, and forest glades I wander
And hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees
When I look down, from lofty mountain grandeur
And see the brook, and feel the gentle breeze

[Refrain]

[Verse 3]

And when I think, that God, His Son not sparing
Sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in
That on the Cross, my burden gladly bearing
He bled and died to take away my sin

[Refrain]

[Verse 4]

When Christ shall come, with shout of acclamation
And take me home, what joy shall fill my heart
Then I shall bow, in humble adoration
And then proclaim: "My God, how great Thou art!"

[Refrain]

Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to Thee
How great Thou art, how great Thou art
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to Thee
How great Thou art, how great Thou art!



WEEK 2: SMALL GROUP STUDY: THE GOOD COMMANDMENT— CARING FOR WHAT WE WERE GIVEN

Learning Objectives

After this study, participants will have:

- Deepened understanding on stewardship as serving and caring
- Identified examples from the Old and New Testament on stewardship and service
- Embraced the urgency of applying good stewardship in the area of creation care.
- Explored the partnership with Plastic Bank as an avenue to be good stewards

Grasp

Share an experience when you were entrusted to care about something that was not yours or the other way around, when you entrusted somebody with something that was precious to you. What was the situation? Were there any extra cautions on the side of the caretaker that no harm will happen? Was there any unintended harm, or what would have happened if the precious object would have been harmed?

Receive

- Read Genesis 1:26-28.
 - Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, to be like us. Let them be masters over the fish in the ocean, the birds that fly, the livestock, everything that crawls on the earth, and over the earth itself!” So God created mankind in his own image; in his own image God created them; he created them male and female. God blessed these humans by saying to them, “Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it! Be masters over the fish in the ocean, the birds that fly, and every living thing that crawls on the earth!” (Gen 1:26-28 ISV)

How do you feel about the words “subduing” and “dominion?” Are there any limitations in applying these concepts? What would be a proper application of these words in the way we deal with creation? What should be our attitude to ensure creation is not harmed?

- Read Psalm 72:8 and verses 12-14.
 - *May he rule from sea to sea, from the Euphrates River to the ends of the earth* (Psa 72:8 ISV).

- *For he will deliver the needy when they cry out for help, and the poor when there is no deliverer. He will have compassion on the poor and the needy, and he will save the lives of the needy. He will redeem them from oppression and violence, since their lives are precious in his sight* (Psa 72:12-14 ISV).

Verse 8 states that God has dominion over the whole world. How did he apply this dominion in verses 12-14? What does that imply on how we should apply our dominion over creation?

- Read Leviticus 25:1-5.
 - *The LORD spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai. “Tell the Israelites that when you enter the land that I’m about to give you, you are to let the land observe a Sabbath to the LORD. For six years you may plant your fields, and for six years you may prune your vineyard and gather its produce. “But the seventh year is to be a Sabbath of rest for the land—a Sabbath for the LORD. You are not to plant your field or prune your vineyard. You are not to gather what grows from the spilled kernels of your crops. You are not to pick the grapes of your untrimmed vines. Let it be a year of Sabbath for the land*

Why was it good stewardship to give the land one year of rest every seven years? What is the underlying principle of this law? How could it be applied today?

- Read Mark 10:42-45.
 - *Jesus called his disciples and told them, “You know that those who are recognized as rulers among the gentiles lord it over them, and their superiors act like tyrants over them. That’s not the way it should be among you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must be a slave to everyone, because even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many people.”* (Mar 10:42-45 ISV)

What is the main approach to rulership in society? How was the style of leadership by Jesus very different? What does that mean for us as believers? How do we have to treat creation to apply this principle?

- Read Sephora’s story. How do you see these stewardship principles applied in her

Apply

What aspect of how we should treat nature became important to you?

SEPHORA’S STORY

I call myself a survivor after the 2010 earthquake killed close to half a million of Haitians. I was in Haiti while all the buildings around me collapsed, but the one I was in did not. Tragically, a girl at school sat in the chair where I usually sat in class because I was late, and she died. I realized that I was spared for a reason. It was not because I was better than the ones who died, but because I still have to fulfill God’s mission for my life. It was a wakeup call from the semblance of life I was living. I looked around to discover that living a fulfilling life is not about going to school, having a job, taking care of our family, but it is fulfilling our mission on earth, the mission that each one of us is created to fulfill. From that time, I decided that my everyday activities need to benefit not only my family, but also my country and my people. I need to have greater impact as the Lord put humanity in charge of the garden of Eden to work it and keep it (Genesis 2:15). Through my research to find ways to serve God, I discovered the Plastic Bank and their incredible work. I fell in love with their mission to stop ocean plastic. The approach caught my attention as we are living with plastic through our consumption, but mostly it was discarded everywhere. I was attracted to have a sustainable business model while caring for creation. Discovering the value in plastic and transforming it into a currency that helps micro-entrepreneurs make a living, reveals the opportunity to make a sustainable impact. When the Plastic Bank launched their program in Haiti, I decided to apply and join the group to become the Haiti Development Manager.

I am following Christ, and as God’s daughter, I refrain from polluting the land in which I live, for God lives in community with us (Numbers 35:33-34). My work with Plastic Bank does not only meet my needs but fulfills the mission for which God created me—to advance his kingdom by teaching people to take care of the creation he entrusted to us.

As a Christian, I see my religion as service to the poor and to refrain from wrong (James 1:27). For this reason, I am encouraging the collection of plastic, cleaning up the environment and teaching people to do the same. For me, this is the best way to make a living through being a good example and showing God’s love through my life (Matthew 5:16).

- How does it relate to your walk with nature?
- What small step will you do to be more mindful of creation?

Walk

During the week reflect on the following questions:

- How can we be better stewards in disposing plastic waste? Plastic is not waste. It is a material made from crude oil. If it is recycled, it can be used again for new products. It is a valuable material. Read the Plastic Bank Flyer and identify in your waste; where are you using PET, HDPE and PP. How can we separate this material at home, and where can it be sold?
- Watch either David Katz Ted Talk <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mT4Qbp89nIQ> or an overview of the Plastic Bank <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SdLQLaZ010U&t=2s>

Let us close with the Stewardship Prayer:

STEWARDSHIP PRAYER: *Oh God, giver of life and source of our freedom, we are reminded that Yours is “the earth in its fullness; the world and those who dwell in it.” We know that it is from your hand that we have received all we have and are and will be. Gracious and loving God, we understand that you call us to be the stewards of Your abundance, the caretakers of all you have entrusted to us. Help us always to use your gifts wisely and teach us to share them generously. May our faithful stewardship bear witness to the love of Christ in our lives. We pray this with grateful hearts in Jesus’ name. Amen.*¹⁷



WEEK 3: SMALL GROUP STUDY: CREATION IS AGONIZING— PLASTIC IS EVERYWHERE

Learning Objectives

After this session, learners will have:

- Understood that pollution is drastic and threatening the continuity of life.
- Internalized that we are all contributing to the crisis and that radical reversal is urgent.
- Investigated the different attitudes and factors causing people to pollute.
- Committed to use plastic for good and not for bad.

Grasp

Waste and ocean plastic: We all produce waste. One-hundred years ago, all the waste was biodegradable or reusable, but today, with all the synthetic materials, like plastic, waste will not rot even in a hundred years. Here some facts about what is happening with plastic waste today. Please read the following bullet points:

- By 2050, we will have **40 billion tons** of plastic on Earth, up from **4.5 billion tons** today.

- Manufacturers produce **300 million tons of new plastic each year**
- Nearly all the plastic ever produced still exists.
- The value of plastic packaging lost to the economy each year is worth **\$80-120 billion**
- By 2050, the ocean may contain more plastic than fish.
- **7 billion kg** of plastic enters the ocean each year.
- Marine plastic kills over **1,000,000 seabirds and 100,000 marine mammals annually**, while micro plastic enters the food chain through fish into humans

What do think when you read about this crisis? Has it affected your life too? How?

Receive

Read Romans 8:22. *“The earth and the creatures on it are agonizing and in pain.”*

What do you make of that? How has our sin caused this to happen?

Apply

What realization about plastic waste hit you most?

Read Dyan’s reflection. How do you feel in relation to your faith about it?

FAITH AND OCEAN’S FATE

By Dyan Mabunga Rodriguez

Single-use, a term associated with plastics which are used only once and then thrown away, has been recognized as the word of the year for 2018.

Rightly so, the issue of ocean plastics has never been so pervasive as it has become today. Social media is constantly peppered with real images—painful images—of marine life succumbing to death due to ingestion of loads of plastics. Ocean plastics are a universal concern, literally and figuratively encompassing borders and generations, and disrupting priorities in development work.

Fish are a powerful metaphor in the Bible. The ichthys or ichthus, a symbol resembling the profile of a fish, was adopted by early Christians. As a Christian, I can imagine Jesus Christ bearing strong emotions about ocean plastics. Many of the famous accounts of Christ were situated amidst bodies of water. Jesus, organizer of fisherfolk to become “fishers of men”, found strength, solace and comfort in the seas.

It must break the Creator’s heart that something which man created to be as functional as, plastics, create needless deaths of sea creatures and oceans. The second encyclical of Pope Francis, *Laudato si*, critiques consumerism and irresponsible development. Consumerism and commercialism pervade every facet of society even the small spaces of the marginalized and vulnerable.

In struggling economies where there is a gnawing gap between the rich and the poor, I believe in my heart that if Christ was physically present, he would choose to live with the marginalized. Christ would witness the sachet check usage economy in developing countries which hides behind the cloak of improved access to products. The millions poured in garbage hauling services with wanton disregard for the implementation of policies. The recklessness and mindlessness of citizens, powerful and ordinary, in managing wastes.

I believe in my heart that Christ sees the humility of hearts, those whose hearts earn an honest wage from segregating waste to find recyclables. Christ sees the sincerity from those who toil with their hearts and minds for the preservation of oceans.

As a practicing Christian, I believe that working with a company and social enterprise such as the Plastic Bank is a form of service to the God of the universe who values stewardship. The Plastic Bank thrives in areas where ocean plastics are a deep concern, recognizing the vital role of plastic collectors—those who are at the bottom of the recycling pyramid, and empowering them as important actors in the plastic recycling chain.

As Christians, we can contribute to changing the fate of oceans by using our faith to advocate for plastic recycling and supporting initiatives, such as the Plastic Bank, in providing long-term solutions to reduce ocean plastics and poverty.

What has hindered you so far to grasp the value of plastic? What opportunity to change do you see in your life?

Walk

Let us close with a prayer for our planet earth::

Most gracious God, we come before you to pray for the wellbeing of the planet. You alone know the full extent of the destruction we have wrought to your beautiful handiwork, and what needs to be done to remedy it. We pray for the people around the globe who suffer because of environmental damage. We pray for the defenseless creatures harmed or made extinct by our selfishness and ignorance. We pray for the oceans, air, mountains, plants, and soil, that life and health may again pulse in them. We pray that we humans have a change of heart and stop harming the planet. Pour out your Holy Spirit on us that we may have the passion and wisdom to work effectively to restore your creation. Guide us in our personal, church and community efforts. Give us strength to continue with this work when it is difficult and requires sacrifice. Bless the Earth and all its life in every way. We make this prayer through Christ, our Lord. Amen.¹⁸



WEEK 4: SMALL GROUP STUDY: REDEMPTION OF CREATION— THE GOOD NEWS FOR US ALL

Learning Objectives

After this study, participants will have:

- Understood that Christ's redemption also includes reconciling our relationship with nature.
- Explored how the redeemed use of plastic as a currency brings redemption and transformation.
- Drew inspiration and hope by joining into the Social Plastic Movement as part of their faith.
- Embraced the call to be agents of redemption in their communities, and to show love by redeeming plastic from waste into currency.

Extra material needed

- Personal copy of Waste Segregation Guidelines

Grasp

Have you ever been in a conflict and somehow you were able to talk it through and become reconciled? How was this for you? What was the impact to the new reconciled relationship?

If you look in our world and our society, where do you see relationships that are broken? How can these be reconciled?

Receive

- Read Colossians 1:19-20. *For God was pleased to have all of his divine essence inhabit him. Through the Son, God also reconciled all things to himself, whether things on earth or things in heaven, thereby making peace through the blood of his cross.* (Col 1:19-20 ISV)
- When we read that Christ made peace with everything, what does that mean to our four core relationships? How does this impact our relationship to God, to ourselves, to others and to nature? How does this turn many things upside down in our lives?
- Read Jeremiah 29:11. *For I know the plans that I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for well-being, and not for calamity, in order to give you a future and a hope.* (Jer 29:11 ISV)
- What connection do you see between God's good plan for your life and the redemption of all our relationships?
- What does this imply for our relationship with creation?
- What if we could redeem our plastic waste from just being waste to something that can transform our lives? What would that look like?

Read the Interview with David Katz. What features of redemption can you see?

- How would it change your life if you could use plastic waste like a currency to avail of services or help others?
- What could be the impact to our society?

Read 2 Corinthians 5:20. *Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.* (2Co 5:20 ESV)

The Apostle Paul is telling us to be ambassadors for reconciliation.

- How can we show in our communities that we have been reconciled with creation?
- How will waste segregation be a way to be an ambassador of reconciliation?

Apply

Share the copy of the Waste Segregation Guidelines to all participants and read it together.

- Please share if you have any further questions about it.
- What could be some difficulties in segregating waste in a disciplined manner? How can we overcome these?
- What will motivate me and my family to do this?

Let us all share these guidelines at home and practice waste segregation at home for one week and let us share our experience next week.

Walk

Let us close with a Prayer for Recycling¹⁹

Creator God, this whole earth is yours, and the fullness thereof. Yet Lord, we live in such a disposable society. Everything is always hurry hurry, busy busy. Convenience is king, and plastic queen. We don't have time to think, to care, we only have time to buy, use and throw away.

Yet in Your creation, there is no such thing as away. Out of sight and out of mind doesn't mean something is not creating harm. When we litter, or our waste flies out of landfill, it kills or strangles your creatures.

So, we find dead whales, dolphins, turtles and birds on our beaches with their stomachs full of our plastic. Plastic accumulates in our oceans, creating a Pacific Garbage patch the size of Texas and coating the pristine beaches of many remote islands with waste.

And now micro-plastics are even finding its way into our drinking water and thus into our bodies. This fast use, fast waste system treats us all like we are disposable. We are just buying machines, cogs in a wheel of never-ending consumption. In this attitude, everything is disposable - us, our bodies, the poor, your world.

Help us instead to value all that you have given us. To value your world and each other over speed and convenience. Help us to reduce, reuse, rethink, refuse, repair, recover, regift and recycle.

*We can send children to school by collecting plastic bottles and empower communities to get access to bank accounts and health insurances. That every plastic bottle we collect is protecting whales, turtles and birds.*²⁰

And when none of this is enough Lord, remind us that recycling is a way of serving You, our God who loves the whole earth and its creatures. It is an act of worship and love for you to make sure we are putting the right items in the right bins. So, strengthen us always to do the right thing. We ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.

DAVID KATZ INTERVIEW WITH GAME CHANGER

What is the defining principle that governs your life?

David: I have devoted my entire life to being in the pursuit to take people's pain away.

When was the most powerful moment where you felt this injustice?

David: My earliest childhood memory was my father beating my mother. And I remember being at his knee, trying to pull him away that was the moment.

Pretty intense

David: That's why I devoted my life to it. That's the Plastic Bank. We endeavor to do whatever we can to take people's pain away. And we do that for the environment and for humanity.

What is the problem you are trying to solve?

David: Within the Plastic Bank we are eliminating the flow of plastic entering the ocean. Now we do that by alleviating poverty. We do that by revealing the inherent value inside of humanity.

How can everyone be part of it?

David: If you are passionate about what is occurring and unfolding in the environment. Every time you buy something, you vote for it. You must be very aware of that. If you buy excessive packaging they will make excessive packaging, even if it is ridiculous. If you want to be larger than that go to plasticbank.com and join the movement.

Express to the companies to use social material. A material whose value is transferred through the people who encounter it, rich and poor. Social Plastic is the material we collect, we use that as currency. Anyone collects the material they can pay for school tuition or other things they cannot afford. They can use it to take away the pain from the environment and use it to take their own pain away. And if it is used for manufacturing, they can help the industry to take their pain away.

How do you make it happen?

David: So much power lies in authenticity. Within the blockchain banking application, we provide an application for the poor to be bankable through plastic as well. When the plastic is deposited it goes into their account. If every bottle was worth 5 Euro, how many would be on the streets?

None!

David: So, it is not the plastic! It is us! It is us!



Waste Segregation Guidelines: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle

Rationale: 80% of our waste can be reduced, reused and recycled instead of going to the landfill.

Goals:

- Minimizing garbage by, for example, buying items with less packaging and storing items properly so that they do not rot.
- Reuse items or repurpose them instead of buying new ones, for example, using paint pails as flower pots.
- Recycle or compost waste

About 50% of our household waste is kitchen waste that can be composted to become organic fertilizer. About 30% of our waste consists of recyclable waste, which is paper, glass, metal and plastic. This leaves only 20% as waste, which is also referred as Residual Waste.

CATEGORIES FOR WASTE SEGREGATION:

BIODEGRADABLE WASTE

- COFFEE POWDER WASTE
- EGG SHELLS
- FOOD LEFTOVERS
- FRUITS & FRUIT PEELS
- FLOWERS
- FISH
- GREENS
- CORN HUSK, SILK AND STEM
- ROTTEN FRUITS
- VEGETABLE PEELS
- VEGETABLE WASTES
- TEA POWDER WASTE
- TENDER COCONUT
- TISSUE PAPER

RECYCLABLE WASTE

- ALUMINUM FOILS
- BROCHURES
- CARTOON BOX
- GIFT WRAPPING PAPER
- GLASS AND BOTTLES
- METALS AND METAL OBJECTS
- PAPER, BOOKS, MAGAZINES
- PAMPHLETS
- PLASTIC BOTTLES, CONTAINERS AND PACKAGING
- PRINTOUTS
- RUBBER
- CARDBOARD
- TICKETS
- TIN

RESIDUAL WASTE

- CDS
- SPONGE
- TETRA PACKS
- TOYS AND DOLLS
- SNACKS PACKETS
- SWEEPING DUST
- DRAIN SLIT
- ASHES
- BROKEN GLASS
- DISPOSABLE DIAPERS
- BATHROOM CLEANING BRUSH
- SANITARY NAPKINS
- HUMAN HAIR / NAILS
- WAXING STRIPS
- SOILED COTTON
- USED COSMETICS
- COTTON EAR BUDS

WEEK 5: SMALL GROUP BIBLE STUDY: THE NEW EARTH—WILL THERE BE PLASTIC IN HEAVEN?

Shell Social Plastic Bottle Program

In 2017, Shell Oil partnered with Plastic Bank to collect and recycle on million kilograms of plastic waste in Haiti.

To accomplish this feat, Shell designed a reusable water bottle, committing to fund the recovery of 2 kilograms of plastic for every bottle sold. 500 000 Social Plastic bottles were produced and sold at retail locations in the Netherlands and United Kingdom.

Collectors in Haiti were paid with Shell's Social Plastic premium price, above market value in addition to the market value for plastic, providing a stable livable income for hundreds of collectors and their families.

Learning Objectives

After this study, participants will have:

- Realized the overarching vision of Shalom for society and life.
- Embraced the concept of peacemakers.
- Examined that there is no waste in God's economy.
- Committed to transform plastic from waste into an instrument of Shalom.

Grasp

Humanity has always dreamed of creating a perfect world. As we are not perfect, the world we have created is not perfect either. The world we create reflects who we are. What does the current state of the world tell you about us? If you could create a perfect society, what would it look like? What will be the key features of that world? What would make people happy? What things would you remove?

Receive

- Read Isaiah 65:17-25. *"For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy, and her people to be a gladness. I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people; no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress. No more shall there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not fill out his days, for the young man shall die a hundred years old, and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed. They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain or bear children for calamity, for they shall be the offspring of the blessed of the LORD, and their descendants with them. Before they call I will answer; while they are yet speaking I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall graze together; the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain," says the LORD. (Isa 65:17-25 ESV)*



1,400
NUMBER OF
COLLECTORS ENGAGED



30%
AVERAGE INCREASES IN
INCOME FOR COLLECTORS
PER MONTH



36
MILLION
NUMBER OF EQUIVALENT
PLASTIC BOTTLES*



88%
INCREASE IN INCOME
ABOVE THE POVERTY LINE**

What aspects of a perfect world can you identify? Which ones attract you the most and why?

- All these aspects are summarized under the Hebrew word Shalom, or peace. If we think about Shalom in living with nature, what would that mean for us as individuals and as a society?
- Read Romans 12:2. *Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect* (Rom 12:2 ESV). If we want to see Shalom being realized, how would we need to change our thinking?
- If we consider God's economy, there are the three major life cycles ((1) Photosynthesis: plants change carbon into oxygen, (2) evaporation transforms sea water into life giving rain and (3) composting is transforming dead organic matter into nutrients for fertilizer) which are sustaining life on earth. Why is there no waste? What does that imply for human economic activities?
- What does that mean for our waste? Why should there be no waste or much less waste?
- Read the Shell case study, how has good come out of plastic waste through this intervention?
- How will a life in Shalom transform even our waste?

Apply

- Read Matthew 5:9. *"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God."*
- (Mat 5:9 ESV) Based on what you learned today, what does it mean to be a peacemaker? How can we promote the reduction and transformation of waste?
- If plastic waste can be used as a currency as we are doing in our partnership with Plastic Bank, what benefits could you see? How can you support this?

Walk

- Which aspect of Shalom became important to you?
- What difference will it make in your life?
- Let us close with a prayer from *Laudato Si*:²¹

God, we praise you with all your creatures. They came forth from your all-powerful hand; they are yours, filled with your presence and your tender love. Praise be to you! Son of God, Jesus, through you all things were made. You were formed in the womb of Mary, you became part of this earth, and you gazed upon this world with human eyes. Today you are alive in every creature in your risen glory. Praise be to you! Holy Spirit, by your light you guide this world towards the Father's love and accompany creation as it groans in travail. You also dwell in our hearts and you inspire us to do what is good. Praise be to you! Triune Lord, wondrous community of infinite love, teach us to contemplate you in the beauty of the universe, for all things speak of you. Awaken our praise and thankfulness for every being that you have made. Give us the grace to feel profoundly joined to everything that is. God of love show us our place in this world as channels of your love for all the creatures of this earth, for not one of them is forgotten in your sight. Enlighten those who possess power and money that they may avoid the sin of indifference, that they may love the common good, advance the weak, and care for this world in which we live. The poor and the earth are crying out. O God, seize us with your power and light, help us to protect all life, to prepare for a better future, for the coming of your Kingdom of justice, peace, love and beauty. Praise be to you! Amen

WEEK 6: SMALL GROUP BIBLE STUDY: SPIRITUALITY FOR THE TRASH CAN—WHAT WOULD JESUS DO-WITH PLASTIC?

Learning Objectives

After this study, participants will have:

- Examined the mission of the Lord Jesus to heal the broken and release the oppressed.
- Identified the poor and planet earth as the broken and oppressed.
- Committed to be the hands, feet and mouth of Christ on his behalf.
- Enrolled to actively participate in the Social Plastic Movement as part of their commitment to follow Christ.

Material needed

Please provide a copy of the Social Plastic Pledge form for each participant and pens.

Grasp

One of the main attributes of us being human is to give purpose to our lives. When you think about the purpose of your life, how would you describe it? Why do you live? What makes your life meaningful? What do you want to achieve?

Receive

- Read Luke 4:18-19. *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor"* (Luk 4:18-19 ESV). How did Jesus define his purpose? What are the main features of his purpose statement? Do you remember any Bible stories, where he acted out his mission?
- Jesus said he came to bring good news to the poor, heal the broken, and set the oppressed free. In our world, who are the poor, broken and oppressed, Jesus is talking about? Which of them are part of your community?
- Look at the story of PhoPho, a waste collector in Haiti whose life has been transformed because of the Plastic Bank, being able to rent a home and send his children to school. How has he become a healer of humanity and of earth?
- Read John 14:27. *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid* (John 14:27 ESV). God's medicine to heal us and creation is his peace, his Shalom. To whom did he give this peace? What should be the impact of this peace on our lives? Why do you think, he gave this peace to us? What are we to do with it?
- Read Ephesians 5:1-2. *Therefore, be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God* (Eph 5:1-2 ESV).
- How can Jesus be your example?
- What are some examples where we as a church have been shown love and peace in our community?

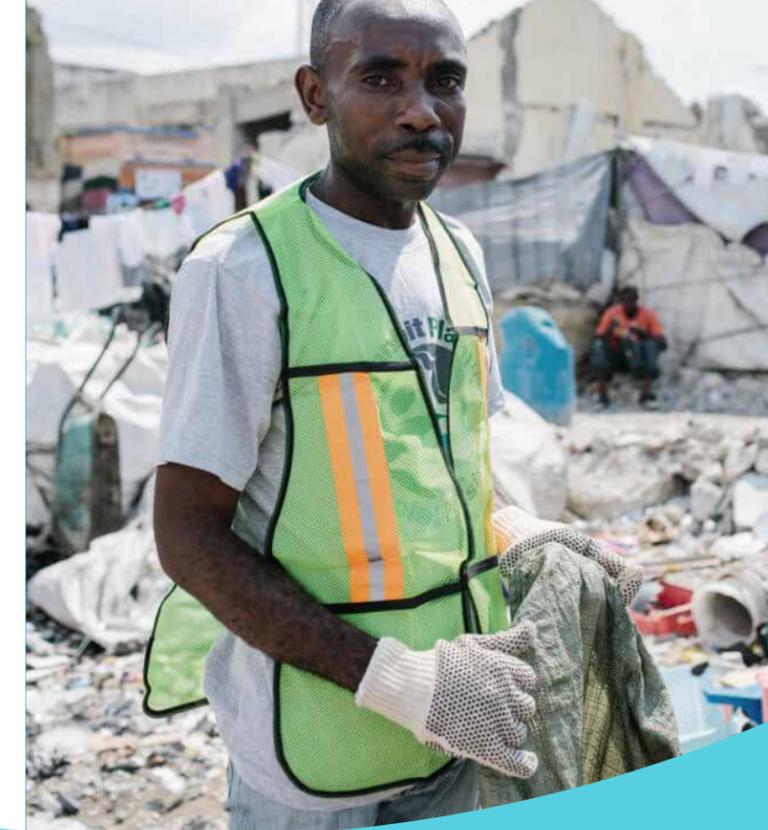
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'Collecting plastic puts food on the table, sends my children to school and helps me rent a home'

'I live in downtown Port-au-Prince and collect mainly in the Rue Pavée area. Collecting plastic is my life, it's what I know how to do. Even when I travel, when I get back I will continue collecting. Picking up plastic means work for me, an income and cleaner environment. The support Plastic Bank gives means a lot to me.'

Darismond 'PhoPho' Faukes

”



Apply

How can we take Jesus as an example when it comes to plastic waste?

The Plastic Bank Revolution program our church is hosting is a powerful way for us to be more like Jesus bringing good news to the poor and to the planet. Let us become healers of the earth and of humanity. Let us transform plastic into currency and show the value of it. this is what Jesus would do!

Have you tried any of the following so far?

- Learn the different forms of plastics from our info material.
- Use only or mostly plastic that can be recycled instead of sachets and multilayer packaging.
- Segregate all your plastic at home.
- Bring your plastic to collection points.
- Teach others to do the same.

As our church has launched the Plastic Bank program, we all want to participate to show our commitment to God and each other by transforming plastic waste into a currency.

Let us all sign the pledge to live life differently and make an impact through transforming plastic.

[Give each participant a pledge form]

Let us read aloud the pledge together.

Please sign it now. You can also sign it later at home. As a reminder to us, it might be helpful to display the pledge somewhere where you see it often, like your mirror or desk. You can also go online to join the movement globally.

Congratulations, we have finished the series about Creation Care and the Plastic Bank.

Walk

Let us close with the prayer of St. Francis²² to lift our commitment to heal the broken and set the oppressed free:

*God, make me an instrument of your peace.
 Where there is hatred, let me bring love.
 Where there is offense, let me bring pardon.
 Where there is discord, let me bring union.
 Where there is error, let me bring truth.
 Where there is doubt, let me bring faith.
 Where there is despair, let me bring hope.
 Where there is darkness, let me bring your light.
 Where there is sadness, let me bring joy.
 O Master, let me not seek as much
 to be consoled as to console,
 to be understood as to understand,
 to be loved as to love,
 for it is in giving that one receives,
 it is in self-forgetting that one finds,
 it is in pardoning that one is pardoned,
 it is in dying that one is raised to eternal life.*



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PLASTIC BANK PLEDGE FOR COMMITTING TO JOIN THE SOCIAL PLASTIC REBELLION

I, _____ am joining the worldwide movement of the Social Plastic Movement to eliminate ocean plastic and empower poor communities.

As a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, I am expressing my love to God by protecting and caring for his wonderful creation.

I commit to use plastic as a currency and not as waste anymore.

I am a responsible and active consumer in purchasing goods with recyclable plastic and will ensure all plastic I consume is being recycled.

I am advocating to my family, my neighborhood, my community and to the companies I purchase goods from to join the Social Plastic Movement.

I am supporting my local congregation in implementing the Social Plastic program and will comply with the guidelines.

Place and Date: _____

Signature: _____

—
You can also sign up online at <https://www.plasticbank.com/get-involved/>

After this series: What is next?

To date, this opportunity is the only one of its kind for mobilizing and training faith communities to launch a rebellion that will change the world around them by revealing the value of plastic and preventing plastic from entering the ocean.

Together, we foster a spirituality of living in harmony and service of creation, unpacking a new perspective on biblical texts and traditions. It engages believers to become agents of change in their own households first, and in their communities. This empowers not only individuals, but also the whole faith community to move in unity, demonstrating God's love for people and creation in a powerful way.

After teaching your congregation, the next step is to move to action. It is action that transforms the world and demonstrates the love of our God. Please, study the "Action Manual" depending on your location and context, if you operate in the Global South or Global North and organize

your congregation for action. As a practical advice, you don't need to finish all three sermons before you can start to action. We suggest, you work parallel and start organizing your church using the action tools, while you are also teaching these homilies. For having your whole congregation aligned, we suggest also to work with your youth leaders to teach our "Social Plastic Rebels" youth manual to enliven your young people together with the whole church. In that way, you create a momentum in your church that is unleashing all believers to act together and in unity powerfully for transformation.

We pray that God will bless you in moving this crucial action forward and are with you anytime you need help and advice. We are also thrilled to hear your story and join in your victory as well as linking you to the victories of other faith groups. Please write us at interfaith@plasticbank.com.

Shalom and God bless you!



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CHURCH CALL TO ACTION

Name of Church: _____

Address: _____

We, the _____ (name of church), have committed to partner with Plastic Bank, _____ (local address of Plastic Bank), to implement the Plastic Bank Stewardship Program through our church.

We commit to put our faith in action fighting ocean plastic and empowering poor communities through the following activities:

- Mobilize our members and the wider community to act on fighting ocean plastic.
- Use the training manual, the tool kit and the youth manual to educate our members.
- Set up a committee in our church to implement the program.
- Implement the program with full of passion and excitement.

Place and Date: _____

Church Representative: _____

Plastic Bank Representative: _____



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We want to hear from you! Please contact us at interfaith@plasticbank.com
For more information, you can check us out at <https://www.plasticbank.com/>