



## SACRIFICE IN A WORLD THAT LOVES COMFORT

**“CONCERN FOR THE ENVIRONMENT IS NOT MERELY AN EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION OF SUPERFICIAL OR SENTIMENTAL LOVE. IT IS A WAY OF HONORING AND DIGNIFYING OUR CREATION AND THE HAND AND WORD OF GOD. IT IS A WAY OF LISTENING TO ‘THE GROANING OF CREATION’ (ROM 8.22).”**

--- His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, page 53

In a world that screams for progress, that is always looking to get better or be better right now, the voice of environmental justice often seems odd. *Slow down. Do less. Pay attention.* Like any voice we are not used to hearing, it can be abrasive. It seems to interrupt what we are doing. But as people of faith, we are continually working to hear a voice that is not our own, but God’s voice.

**SESSION OBJECTIVES:** To identify some of the personal and societal framework that prevents us from understanding the importance of environmental concerns. To consider the role and idea of sacrifice, which is not valued in our culture, but is central in Jesus’ teaching.

**New Moral Awakening; or How I Changed My Mind.**  
- Richard Cizik

1. What situations have you encountered where people did not think making a good environmental choice was important? List the reasons given. What are the strengths and limitations of those reasons?

2. Have a few people read **GENESIS 2:15** aloud in different translations.

Cizik and others translate the Hebrew words “abad” and “shamar” as “serve and protect.” “Abad” appears in Joshua 24:15: “As for me and my house we will ‘abad’ the Lord.” “Shamar” is used for keep or protect, such as in Numbers 6:24: “May the Lord bless you and ‘shamar’ you.” How does this translation change your ideas of our relationship with earth?

List actions that would “serve and protect” creation.

3. List common personal goals that people in our society have. Does caring for the earth usually fall on that list? Name reasons why a society where everyone has “personal goals” can conflict with the environment. *What kinds of goals ought we to have?*
4. Identify the risks of choosing self-denial. What are the risks of not making those sacrifices? What did Joseph risk in his acts of self-denial? What did he gain? (Consult **GENESIS 37-50** if needed)

## "Everything that Breathes Praises God"

*-His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew*

"THE SAD REALITY IS THAT MANY OF US, ESPECIALLY IN MORE AFFLUENT WESTERN SOCIETIES, HAVE BECOME ACCUSTOMED TO LIFESTYLES OF WASTE AND GREED. THUS, WE ARE NOT ALWAYS WILLING TO UNDERGO THE SACRIFICE REQUIRED OF US IN ORDER TO RESPOND TO THE ECOLOGICAL CRISIS, AND SO WE PREFER EITHER TO IGNORE IT DELIBERATELY OR ELSE DISMISS IT INDIFFERENTLY."

For the rest of the session, as an experiment, be prepared to share your materials with your neighbor. Use one pen or pencil, one session guide, one Bible, etc. Find your partner now and place the materials you won't be using under your chairs.

### 1. Read **MARK 8:31-35**.

Identify how the message of the cross relates to our attitude toward caring for the earth. Now name ways in which this is in conflict with the messages we hear in our world today.

### 2. Identify ways we can respond with awe toward creation. How does Patriarch Bartholomew see the loss of awe as dangerous? *How do you?*

### 3. Remember your own experiences of worship in outdoor settings (either individually or with a group). How does nature shape your understanding and appreciation for God? Should it do more than create feelings? Do we get more out of nature than we give to it?

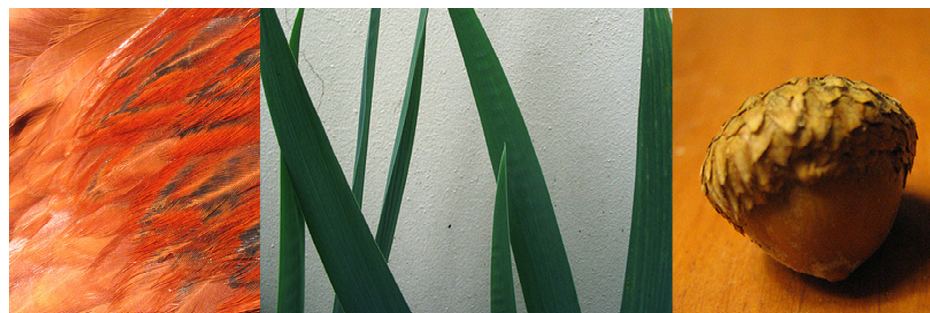
4. Bartholomew describes caring for the Earth and caring for the poor as being two sides of one coin (page 57). Compare and contrast the fragility of the earth with the fragility of people. How are caring for the two similar?

## BLACK BEAR

*A Poem by Mary Oliver*

Have someone in the group read the poem on page 72 aloud.

1. How does the person encountering the bear in this poem feel about modern ideas of progress?
2. With your partner script out a conversation between a human and a bear or another animal in the wild. What would the animal have to say to you? What should you ask or say to them?



## How Big Should People Be?

*A Sermon by Bill McKibben*

1. Compare what a community can accomplish compared to other forms of technology. Pull out all of the technological devices that you are carrying with you (phones, beepers, zip drives, etc.) How have these items helped your life? How have they hurt you? Identify other things and people that could fulfill their function. (Be creative!)

2. Pick two words that McKibben would use to describe Job. Now pick two words he would use to describe us today.
3. On page 27 McKibben shares that Europeans use half as much energy as Americans, saying this is because they “situate themselves a little differently on the spectrum between individuals and community.” Identify other differences between Europeans and Americans. With your partner, create a brief radio advertisement that communicates the benefits of a more “European attitude.”
4. Read **JOHN 3:27-30** with your neighbor.  
Why is “becoming less” important in John’s ministry? Why is it important in your own life?

### The Beginnings of a Beautiful Friendship: Religion and Environmentalism

*-Roger Gottlieb*

1. Read **JAMES 1:22-25** aloud.  
Gottlieb raises the issue of the disconnect between speaking of creation as God’s gift to humanity and not being responsible with it. Compare how this disconnect is related to the disconnect in James 1.

2. Remember what you do with gifts people give you, gifts you want very much, and others you may not. Discuss with your partner how receiving a gift changes your relationship with the person who gives it. Do you act differently about the gift after they are out of room? How does this relate to God’s continual gift of the earth to us?
3. Identify the unique gifts Gottlieb discusses that faith communities possess. Check the ones that your own faith community has. Which ones do you personally most strongly possess?

**CONCLUDING REFLECTION:** Resume using your own things. Take a moment now to discuss how sharing has affected this session. Has it been uncomfortable? Consider the discomfort of taking the bus or bicycling. What are ways you can counter our society’s focus on comfort by your own sacrifices?

**End by identifying five things in your own life that you can share with others so that less is consumed and more needs are met.**

Share this list with your partner or the group.

Gracious God, help us to hear your voice. Help us to know the love that you have for our neighbors and all of your Creation. Remind us of your Son’s uncomfortable life and move us away from living according to our society’s ideas of progress and comfort. Give us strength and faith to make sacrifices and support one another. Teach us to go with wonder into the world, loving what you have made and being attentive to it.