



# Session Five

## *New Stories & Dreams*

**“THERE’S A PUZZLING DISCONNECT BETWEEN OUR GROWING AWARENESS OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS AND OUR ABILITY TO CHANGE OUR PRESENT DIRECTION. WE HAVE FAILED TO TRANSLATE FACTS ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS INTO EFFECTIVE ACTION IN THE UNITED STATES. WE ARE DISCOVERING THAT THE HUMAN HEART IS NOT CHANGED BY FACTS ALONE BUT BY ENGAGING VISIONS AND EMPOWERING VALUES.”**

--- Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, page 6

As we have become aware of environmental concerns within religious circles, there have been many fears and questions. Is this a distraction? Is it “earth worship?” And yet as we consider it more deeply, we realize there are even greater spiritual risks than these. It is not only our Earth that is in jeopardy, but it is our very selves.

While we sought to establish that God is greater than the earth, we have instead often relegated him to a place above it, forgetting that he is also in it. We do not just evict ourselves by our poor treatment of the earth, we evict God’s presence here with us. People of faith must always remember that all we do is unto God.

It is not just risk the physical extinction that we face, it is our own spiritual extinction as well. Our lack of care for the Earth ultimately reveals our selfishness, our greed, and our small vision. This is the ultimate environmental problem – a lack of respect for God who sees all and knows all.

We must find new perspectives. We must long for more than the American Dream – more than a house, a car, a dog and an attractive

spouse to come home to. We must love truth more than convenience. Our society encourages us to have it our own way. Our God has always encouraged us to have it God’s way. If we want to repair our Earth, if we want to restore our greedy and self-centered attitudes, we need not simply recycle more, we must find new eyes to see the Earth with. We must tell a new story about what makes life meaningful and what we are working toward.

**SESSION OBJECTIVE:** To identify goals and dreams not based on acquiring and consuming material goods. To continue uncovering the rich resources we have in each other and our land, daring to believe in a future that is different than the one our society tells us is valuable.

**Watching a Documentary About Polar Bears Trying to Survive on the Melting Ice Floes** *A Poem by Mary Oliver*

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

1. Identify reasons why it is important that we take responsibility for what we have done to the Earth. How does being a person of faith affect this? How does it shape our idea of God?

## Daring to Dream: Religion and the Future of the Earth

*-Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim*

1. List ecological problems that are considered common knowledge. Now list reasons why you think people have not and do not respond to these crises.
2. Imagine you are in charge of the organization that you work for. What is important to you? Do your goals conflict with making good choices for the earth? Identify how and why your choices are important to:
  - a. your own well being
  - b. a group of indigenous people in Africa
  - c. your grandchildren (present or future)
3. Read **HEBREWS 11:1-4**. Identify reasons why “quick fixes” conflict with living in faith of what we cannot see. Name ways living in faith can offer a different perspective than the one our society offers.
4. “HUMANS, EARTH, AND THE REST OF LIFE ARE BOUND IN A SINGLE STORY AND DESTINY.” Identify ways in which we can tell stories that are not just about human beings. Consider the popularity of films with animals in them (animated and otherwise). Is this helpful or harmful? Why?
5. Bring to mind long-term challenges you’ve face in your life (getting a degree, losing weight, marriage, etc.) When it seemed impossible, what was your motivation? Compare this to the idea of the large changes that need to be made for our earth to survive. Identify

reasons why having specific goals and dreams is important in overcoming difficulties.

### 6. Read **JOSHUA 24:25-24**.

Compare reliance on technology and money to Old Testament idolatry. Identify why it is important to throw out false ideas/false worship in order to create a way forward.

**FOOD FOR THOUGHT:** Print out the UN Earth Charter. Keep it on-hand and consult when making community choices. ([www.earthcharter.org](http://www.earthcharter.org))

## Vulnerability and Vision in El Salvador

*-Lisbeth Barhona*

1. Identify reasons why America has been slower to respond to environmental crisis than other nations. List attitudes and beliefs that need to change. Circle things you see in your own community.
2. Discuss the “misuse of power” in relationship to caring for the Earth. How is lording power over the earth a global concern? A spiritual concern?



## Power, Light, and Hope: Fighting a Crisis, One State at a Time

*-Sally G. Bingham*

1. You may have heard people complain that their actions are too small to really make a difference. Identify strengths and weaknesses of this argument. Why does what you do matter? Why does it not matter?
2. How could involvement with an organization like Interfaith Power and Light effect your community? Name reasons why practical action is important. Suggest other organizations you do or could partner with.

## After Katrina: Searching the Ruins for Resurrection

*-Ray Waddle*

1. Identify how different churches in the article have responded to the needs around them. How has environmental action become important to them? Now identify the local needs around you. What are the biggest problems in your city or community?
2. "I didn't see myself until I lost myself. I didn't see my culture until I saw it broken down." -- Malik Muhammed. Share about a disaster you have been in. What did you lose? How did that give you a chance to create new dreams?

## Our Story

You may have notice that there is no title for this session. It is because this session is about your community, your concerns, and your way forward. Take time to consider the following questions.

1. Identify what is important about the land in your community. What is beautiful? What is functional? What does your land cultivate in you that you can't feel, sense, think or believe anywhere else?
2. What animals are native to your area? Why are they important?
3. Creating a title for this session. What is important to you? What should your new dreams and visions be called?

### CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Read **JEREMIAH 7:1-7**. Now identify ways that your community can:

1. Rebel against the consumer mindset of our society.
2. Offer an alternative solution.
3. Be a part of inviting God to dwell on Earth.

**O God, we need you more than ever as we try to find a new way forward. We are weary of a world where money and progress are our priorities. Give us wisdom and love to see other possibilities. We ask you to dwell with us as we learn to care for the poor and the oppressed, as we learn to think less of ourselves. Help us to create a future of healing, help us restore our Earth as you restore us.**