

Green
Passion and Resurrection
Preparation

*40 Days of Green Preparation for the
Passion and Resurrection of Jesus Christ*

40 Bible-Meditations and Passion-Actions

by Paul de Vries, PhD

President, New York Divinity School

and President of



















The Green Bible Society®



Most of the scripture passages are quoted from the New International Version.
Others scripture quotations are marked.
All will be properly marked prior to publication of *Green Passion and Resurrection Preparation*

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Soli Deo Gloria = Glory only to God.











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Introduction

Green Passion and Resurrection Preparation ... with the Four Themes

In the complex streams of history, what really matters? What is truly worth our commitment, time, energy and resources? Poised as we still very near the beginning of the 21st century, with tragic wars raging and reasonable alarms for saving shrinking natural resources, how do we answer these timely questions?

One splendid time to explore the Biblical answers is during what some people call “Lent,” an annual preparation for actively celebrating the passion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. While times of reflection are valuable every day, this Green Preparation is a series of forty (40) especially serious days for preparation and reflection—knowing the matchless power of Jesus’ passion and resurrection. Frequently in the Bible, the number “40” is associated with preparation:

- 40 years Moses spent tending sheep in the wilderness before the Lord called him to lead Israel’s liberation. (Exodus 7:7)
- 40 days Moses spent with the Lord on Mt. Sinai before leading the people of Israel through the wilderness. (Exodus 24:18)
- 40 years the people of Israel wandered in the wilderness, being prepared for the acquisition of the Holy Land.
- 40 days’ warning to repent, announced by Jonah to the people of Nineveh. (Jonah 3:4)
- 40 days Jesus was challenged and tempted in the wilderness before beginning his earthly ministry. (Matthew 4:1-2; Mark 1”12-13; Luke 4:1-2)
- 40 days Jesus was with the Apostles and Disciples between his resurrection victory and ascension into heaven, preparing them for their extraordinary ministry. (Acts 1:3)

The remembrance of the passion and resurrection of the Lord Jesus is so important that we need at least 40 days each year to begin to do it justice.

The strongest Christian tradition is to exempt Sundays from special Preparation, since each Sunday is already a weekly celebration of Jesus’ resurrection. The Preparation for the Passion can take a rest on Sundays as we weekly acknowledge the joy and power of Jesus’ Resurrection for our lives now. Individuals using this guide can focus on their own church’s theme each Sunday. Pastors and church leaders can select from these 40 Bible-meditations for some teaching content for those seven special Sundays. The basic pattern might look like this:

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			<i>Ash Wed: Med. #1</i>	<i>Meditation #2</i>	<i>Meditation #3</i>	<i>Meditation #4</i>
1 st Sunday	<i>Meditation #5</i>	<i>Meditation #6</i>	<i>Meditation #7</i>	<i>Meditation #8</i>	<i>Meditation #9</i>	<i>Meditation #10</i>
2 nd Sunday	<i>Meditation #11</i>	<i>Meditation #12</i>	<i>Meditation #13</i>	<i>Meditation #14</i>	<i>Meditation #15</i>	<i>Meditation #16</i>
3 rd Sunday	<i>Meditation #17</i>	<i>Meditation #18</i>	<i>Meditation #19</i>	<i>Meditation #20</i>	<i>Meditation #21</i>	<i>Meditation #22</i>
4 th Sunday	<i>Meditation #23</i>	<i>Meditation #24</i>	<i>Meditation #25</i>	<i>Meditation #26</i>	<i>Meditation #27</i>	<i>Meditation #28</i>
5 th Sunday	<i>Meditation #29</i>	<i>Meditation #30</i>	<i>Meditation #31</i>	<i>Meditation #32</i>	<i>Meditation #33</i>	<i>Meditation #34</i>
<i>Palm Sunday</i> 6 th Sunday	<i>Meditation #35</i>	<i>Meditation #36</i>	<i>Meditation #37</i>	<i>Maundy Thursday</i> <i>Meditation #38</i>	<i>Good Friday</i> <i>Meditation #39</i>	Holy Saturday <i>Meditation #40</i>
<i>Resurrection</i> <i>Sunday</i>						

Traditionally there are four Biblical disciplines recommended for Lent: self-denial, almsgiving, penitence and prayer. Each of these is especially tied to one of the four special Holy Days of Holy Week, and also to one of the four principles of Creation-care that are taught throughout the Bible. These are also the four principles of Micah 6:8, *in reverse order*: What does the Lord require? (Pay attention to his Presence); Do Justice: (Justice); Love mercy: (Love); Walk humbly with your God: (Honor his authority with good stewardship and accountability.)

<i>Four Biblical Disciplines</i>	<i>Four Holy Week Holidays</i>	<i>Four Principles of Creation-Care</i>
Self-denial {accountability}	Palm Sunday: submitting to Jesus' authority above our own	AUTHORITY of the Lord Jesus Christ This is the basis of our human stewardship and accountability to him.
Alms-giving {love}	Maundy Thursday: learning Jesus' new command: Love one another as I have loved you.	" LOVE one another as I have loved you." Jesus' new command teaches us to love all people, near and far, present and future.
Penitence {justice}	Good Friday: affirming Jesus' gift of his own suffering to pay our penalty for sin.	JUSTICE and Mercy: Jesus died on the cross to redeem and restore people and creation, so that we humans now have the opportunity to do no harm and to do what is right and just.
Prayer {awareness}	Resurrection Sunday: demonstrating the power even to bring new life to a corpse—and revealing the power of the Holy Spirit dwelling within.	Resurrected PRESENCE of Jesus: The Resurrection of the Lord Jesus establishes his authority over life and death, and reveals his presence in all of his world—so that it matters to him how we relate to what he is creating and sustaining.

Each of the 40 Bible-meditations for *Green Passion and Resurrection Preparation* are primarily focused on the significance of one or another of these four special days and related four principles. However, they are all deeply interdependent and interrelated. The meaning of each of these four holy days is intensely deepened by the others. Also, the four Biblical disciplines of this Preparation are mutually supportive.

As a result, the categorization of the 40 Bible-meditations may not be precise or exclusive. Each one stands on the authority of the Scripture it studies. In reality, they could be studied in any order—and appreciated individually or as a group.

Readers Note: This book includes forty (40) Bible-meditations and "*Passion Actions*"—enough for forty the forty days of Preparation. Feel free to pick and choose, according to our Savior's leading, and your interests and time commitments.

In whatever way you use this book, may this be *your most meaningful preparation for the Lord Jesus Christ's Passion and Resurrection ever.*

Unpacking the Creation-Care Box

God has given many gifts to his world. Creation Care Box conveys one of the most important divine gifts. First, take a look at this page, and imagine what would happen if we unfold the Creation-Care Box. Second, look at the first page in the Appendix (page 50) for the answer.

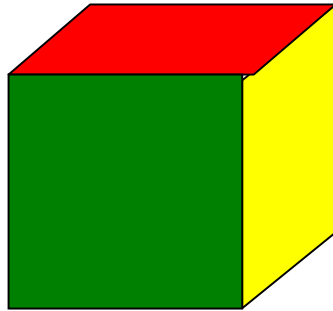
The Top:

We should always pray like Jesus, in our works and words, “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

Side 1:

ACCOUNTABILITY to the Lord Jesus

Christ: This is the focus of our human stewardship and accountability to him, especially celebrated on Palm Sunday. Our role: self-denial



Top-Front View

Bottom-Back View

Side 2:

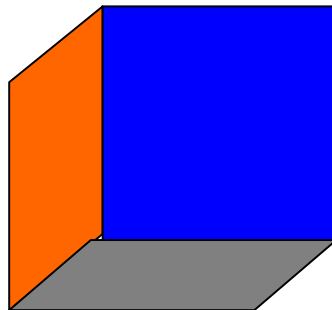
“LOVE one another as I have loved you.”

Jesus’ new command given on Maundy Thursday teaches us to love all people, near and far, present and future. Our role: almsgiving

Side 4:

AWARENESS of Jesus: The Resurrection

of the Lord Jesus reveals his authority over life and death, and his powerful presence in all of his world. It matters to him how we treat his splendid creation. Our role: prayerful living



Side 3:

JUSTICE, Goodness:

On Good Friday, Jesus died on the cross to redeem and restore us, so that we humans now have the opportunity to do no harm and to do what is right and just. Our role: penitence

The Base:

Civic responsibility has one Lord, never only one issue.
There is one Lord, and he has many issues for our behavior and belief—as engaged individuals and communities.

The Creation-Care Box

The Top: God's Will. The top of the Creation Care Box consists of key words from the Lord's Prayer: "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." In other words, when we pray those words, we are saying that we want God's will, which is done in heaven, to be done on earth—right where are, right now, not sometime in the distant future or the "sweet bye-and-bye." Doing God's will includes how we behave, how we believe, what we say and what we think. Quite comprehensive, to be sure. To pray without behavioral practice is hypocritical; to practice without praying is unspiritual.

The Base: One Lord Jesus Christ. The base of the Creation Care Box has the words "One Lord—never only one issue." What does this mean? Simply that God reigns supreme. No one is above the Lord and nothing escapes the Lord, who cares about every aspect of human life, including all the issues in society that are in constant debate. He wants us to treat all these issues with special attention. (Please see the Appendix for a roster of seven key contemporary Biblical issues and their vibrant relationships with creation-care.)

Not everyone can spend his or her whole life dealing with every issue with the same intensity, but no one should say that Creator-God himself is interested in only one issue versus another—or that we ourselves should be committed to only one issue. For example, some groups emphasize protecting the rights of the unborn, while others emphasize protecting the environment. Both of these groups are doing something worthwhile. They are protecting human life before and after birth. *To commit to one without the other is to ignore the Lord himself who is the one who unites these two pro-creation principles.*

If you feel that God has called someone to work on solving one particular social problem or issue, is it fair to criticize other people who feel that God has called them to focus on another of God's issues? While we are saved by God's grace, our good works are the main evidence that his grace has actually done something within us. Issues in all the areas that affect our daily lives such as government, education, health, technology, ecology, arts, entertainment and such like are everyone of them important to God—for he is the Sovereign Lord of all and of every aspect in particular. Therefore, should not all of them matter to us as well?

Side One: AUTHORITY of the Lord Jesus Christ: This is the focus of our human stewardship and accountability to him, especially celebrated at Palm Sunday.

Side Two: "LOVE one another as I have loved you": Jesus Christ's new command on Maundy Thursday teaches us to love all people, near and far, present and future. On the same day Jesus introduced the Lord's Supper and holy foot-washing—two overt expressions of his love.

Side Three: JUSTICE and Goodness: On Good Friday, Jesus died on the cross to redeem and restore every human willing to repent and to receive his grace, so that we humans now have the opportunity to do no harm and to do what is right and just.

Side Four: The Vibrant PRESENCE of Jesus: The Resurrection of the Lord Jesus establishes his authority over life and death, and reveals his presence in all his creation, so that it matters to him how we relate to his splendid creation.

40 Green Bible-Meditations and Actions
for Passion and Resurrection
PREPARATION

**Scriptural teachings on the four themes, the
related four holy days of Passion Week,
and affirming the four dimensions of Creation-Care**

Bible-Meditation #1: **Spiritual Sacrificial Service**

What does it say?—

STUDY: Romans 11:33-12:3

*GOLDEN TEXT: Romans 11:36-12:2 = *From him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen. Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your reasonable act of worship. Be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind—that you will be the proof that God's will is good, acceptable and perfect.*

What does it mean?

The old favorite spiritual “*He’s Got the Whole World in His Hands*” reminds us that the Lord has intimate care and compassion for his creation, and it shows. God is the macro-manager, of course, and a micro-manager as well, according to Scripture. He is the Lord of his creation, and he has designated us humans to be his stewards, accountable to him. However, unlike finite bosses, he continues to be intimately involved—so that all life is “*from him, through him and to him.*” He is the *Original Green*. Moreover, because this living God is ever-present as our compassionate Creator, we can confidently offer him our lives and bodies as living sacrifices—knowing he can even bring life out of death. *He, the ultimate Green Boss; ours, the ultimate service.*

1. When we feel the Creator’s immediate presence (as in Romans 11:36), does it change how we think and act toward his Creation? How do we think about his mercies? Should we act more green to show our gratitude for his mercies? What difference do his mercies make?
2. What is it like being a living sacrifice? Could it mean giving up something for the benefit of the Creator, or the benefit of other people, or the benefit of his good creation?
3. What makes our lives truly “pleasing to God”—trashing and depleting his creation or protecting and improving it? Should all our service to him be green? How is being a “living sacrifice” a reasonable act of worship? How is Jesus’ life and ministry our model?
4. How are our behaviors and actions becoming the living proof that the Creator’s will is “good”? “Acceptable”? “Perfect”? Does it help if our behavior is green?

What are we going to do about it?

5. Romans 11:36 says that everything comes from the Creator, is sustained by him and returns to him. Can you describe living sacrifices that would be meaningful to you and to your Creator? What especially “pleases” him in your life, relationships and work?
6. Can you give three examples of how our behavior can be seen as “good” in relation to our Creator’s will? “Acceptable” in his presence? “Perfect” for his purposes?
7. What would make the service to our Creator truly “reasonable”? How does active creation-care help achieve reasonableness? How does worship in such daily sacrificial behavior compare with other acts of worship—such as in a worship service in a church?

Learned Lesson: Becoming “living sacrifices” is a most worthy method of self-denial, and also of truly affirming Jesus’ authority over our lives.

Passion Action: Unless your physician would object, why not fast for lunch two or three times a week during this Preparation, spend those lunch times in Bible-meditation and prayer, and donate the lunch-cost savings to the church or to an effective environmental group.

What does it say? –

STUDY: Mark 16:1 through 16

GOLDEN TEXT: Mark 16:15 and 16 = *And he said to them, “Going into all the world, proclaim the good news to the whole creation. The one who believes and is baptized will be saved; but the one who does not believe will be condemned.*

What does it mean?

“Proclaim the good news to the whole creation” was Jesus’ final instruction that Mark records. Whether it came before or after the final commands as recorded by Matthew (Matthew 28:20) or Luke (Acts 1:8), it is consistent with their records. Mark’s point remains a sweeping instruction. The whole creation needs to hear the “Good News” of what the Lord Jesus Christ accomplished by dying for us and rising from the dead. The “Good News” expresses his love for creation, and when we communicate it by words and works, we show our love for his creation as well.

1. The first word of this command is “going.” Does this assume an outward orientation for service to Christ? Must we go into his world? Must we venture outside our space?
2. Can we disciple and teach only humans? Is the “Good News” also for the benefit of eagles, deer, tomato plants, granite rocks and all the rest of “*the whole creation*”?
3. Should “*proclaim the good news*” include our works as well as our words? What defines this proclamation? Since the “Good News” includes God’s love, must it be communicated lovingly? Is the loving care of the creation a good start?
4. How do we express our belief in the “Good News”? Does it take works as well as words to show that we really believe? What clues do you look for to know that others believe?

What are we going to do about it?

5. Is this “Good News” creation-care responsibility related to creation’s longing for the full revelation of who God’s true children are, as in Romans 8:19-22? Does proclaiming his “Good News” help show that we are his children? Help show our love for his creation?
6. Francis of Assisi preached to squirrels and birds as well as to people. Is this what Jesus had in mind? How should we bring “Good News” to animals and plants?
7. How clearly do we proclaim the “Good News”? Does our behavior toward creation show that we believe the “Good News”? How could our proclamation be more compelling and consistent?

Learned Lesson: We show our love for creation by affirming and acting the “Good News,” the very Gospel we will especially celebrate in this upcoming holy week.

Passion Action: Can you walk to work, church or the store? Walk this week and softly (or silently) pray for the people, homes and businesses you pass, while you save fuel, reduce CO2 use, get needed exercise and help protect the environment for all. And enjoy the walk.

What does it say? –

STUDY: Psalm 22

GOLDEN TEXT: Psalm 22:1 and 16 = *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning?... Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet.*

What does it mean?

Psalm 22 is a timely preparation for Good Friday, now merely six weeks away. In the first 22 verses of this Psalm, there are perhaps nine (9) prophetic references to Jesus Christ on the cross (verses 1, 6, 7, 8, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18), and it is one of the most vivid descriptions of his Passion. This text is also exceptional for its numerous references to animals. His enemies are compared with a herd of strong bulls (verses 12), roaring lions (verses 13 and 21), a pack of vicious dogs (verses 16 and 20) and wild oxen (verse 21). Meanwhile the psalmist refers to himself as a mere worm (verse 6)! If you have the opportunity, read verses 1-22 more than once, and from different translations.

1. How did the psalmist have such a vivid picture of the Lord Jesus Christ? Was this also an honest description of the psalmist's own lonely suffering?
2. Why in verses 8 and 9 does the psalmist appeal to his own birth in God's world and God's authority over his life from the beginning? In what ways could our birth in his world be part of a covenant between the Creator and us?
3. What happens between verses 21 and 22? Why did the psalmist "change his tune"? What happened to Jesus? Can we always be confident that victory is coming?
4. Why does Psalm 22 end with ten verses of extraordinary praise to God? When they heard Jesus speak the first verse in his agony from the cross, did anyone understand that Jesus' own lips would speak God's praise soon? Did it occur to them on Resurrection Sunday?

What are we going to do about it?

5. Have you ever been attacked or misunderstood because you stood up for justice? Did you doubt God's affirmation? If you work for creation-care, will some make it hard on you? Why or why not?
6. Why did the Creator make a world with such strong dangers, including hungry lions' jaws—both literal and metaphorical? Can dangers make us better? Do shared risks strengthen collaboration? Can hazards help us to hone higher priorities?
7. Can even the wickedness of some people be exploited by the Creator (and us) for greater good and divine glory? How could the present depletion and pollution of creation be redeemed and utilized for justice?

Learned Lesson: Godly people can feel utterly forsaken by God, especially when human enemies are vicious. After being honest to God, they can find in him the strength to overcome the danger.

Passion Action: Car-pool for church, work, school and shopping—especially for this Preparation time. Get to know your friends and neighbors better and involve them *Green Preparation*—all while you are saving fuel and reducing CO2 and other bad exhaust, for everyone's benefit.

What does it say? –

STUDY: Deuteronomy 29 and 30, especially 30:11-20

*GOLDEN TEXT: Deuteronomy 30:19-20: = *This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live, loving the LORD your God, obeying him, and hold fast to him. For he is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.*

What does it mean?

These are Moses' last words in his very last sermon. After this he sings a song, gives some advice, pronounces a blessing, and climbs up Mt. Nebo to die. What would you say if you knew it was your last opportunity to teach the people? For Moses this moment is even more crucial, because the Lord has also made this sermon equal to the Ten Commandments given on Mt. Horeb—another name for Mt. Sinai. (See Deuteronomy 29:1.) Moses defines for all the people a whole worldview and lifestyle based upon *choosing life*.

1. Moses characterizes the life-choice lifestyle as “*loving the LORD your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him.*” What are some of the ways we love the Creator? How do we obey his commands? Do we really cling to him? How does this three-part life-choice relate to our care and treatment of the Lord's Creation?
2. In what ways do some people choose death? Has our treatment of God's Creation been toward death or toward life? How do you know?
3. What are the curses Moses mentions in verse 19? What happens to the creation when we choose death? What happens when we choose death by recklessly increasing the pollution and depletion of creation? Do some of the curses follow automatically, according to the laws of the creation?
4. What are the blessings Moses mentions in verse 19? What happens in God's creation when we choose life? What happens when we choose life for the people in poor environments? What happens when we choose life for our own great grandchildren through cleaning and restoring God's creation?

What are we going to do about it?

5. The choice of life has to show; it cannot exist as a private attitude hidden in our hearts or imaginations. How does this life-choice show in your life?
6. Moses characterizes the life-choice lifestyle in terms of loving him, obeying him and clinging to him. Does having a positive relationship to God's creation aid this process? Is there any other way that the life-choice is shown more dramatically than in our treatment of God's creation?
7. Does the future of life on Planet Earth depend on our choices now? How do we choose life today in a way that matters?

Learned Lesson: We can choose life in prayer and in the practice of the Creator's presence—especially because Jesus conquered death itself.

Passion Action: Read up on the environmental conditions that enflame asthma and cause cancer. What are the main hazards in your community? What can you and others in your church and networks do?

What does it say? –

STUDY: Luke 19:37 through 40

*GOLDEN TEXT: Luke 19:39 and 40 = *Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!" "I tell you," Jesus replied, "if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out."*

What does it mean?

Jesus had already demonstrated his authority over natural phenomena—healing various diseases, raising the dead, walking on water and commanding violent storms to stop raging. Now on the first Palm Sunday, at the beginning of the most momentous week in all history, many people were singing Jesus' praises as he entered Jerusalem, riding on a donkey in an impromptu parade. However, the religious leaders were not happy that such a large and expressive crowd of people were so vocal in their praise of Jesus.

1. Is praising the Lord Jesus so utterly natural that even the good stones in the creation are prepared to "cry out" in worship and adoration? How do natural objects praise the Creator? Does their created goodness help?
2. What would the stones sound like in their praise to the Creator? Do the regular beauty and stability of stones already count as praise to the Creator? What else could we imagine from stones and soil in their appreciation of the Creator?
3. Why were the people especially strong and spontaneous in their praise as Jesus entered Jerusalem this time—for his last few days before dying for our sins? What did they see in Jesus? Why were the religious leaders so upset and judgmental?
4. Could some of those parade participants be the same people who urged Pilot to crucify Jesus the following Thursday? Why or why not? Are mobs easily swayed? What is the role of truth within such mass demonstrations? Do stones change as easily as people?

What are we going to do about it?

5. Have you ever felt an urge to worship the Creator in a public setting? In a park? Walking down the street? At a restaurant? At work? How did that urge to worship feel? How did you express it? Was anyone ever offended at your sincere worship?
6. When we use leaded pencils to write prayers or compose worship songs—or use silicone chips to design divine praise on a computer—are the lead and silicone rocks expressing praise? Did Jesus have even more in mind? Do archeological findings that help reaffirm the truths of the Bible count as the rocks crying out praise to the Lord of creation?
7. Is there anything in all the creation that could *never* express praise to the Lord? Any people? Any animals? Any trees or plants? Any dirt or rocks? Are there any limits to the creation's proper appreciation of the Creator? Any limits to our praise? In what creative ways can you praise our Creator this week?

Learned Lesson: Praise and rejoicing in the Creator is appropriate for humans as well as the rest of God's creation.

Passion Action: Start your *Green Journal*, using a notebook with recycled paper. Include frequent (or daily) reflections on responding to God's grace, perhaps with photos, starting with this Preparation pilgrimage. It is up to you whether to share your *Green Journal* with church, family or friends.

What does it say? –

STUDY: Deuteronomy 15:1 through 11

GOLDEN TEXT: Deuteronomy 15:4 and 5 = *There will, however, be no one in need among you, because the LORD is sure to bless you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you as a possession to occupy, if only you will obey the LORD your God by diligently observing this entire commandment that I command you today.*

What does it mean?

When in John 12:8, when he asserted, “*You will always have the poor with you,*” Jesus doubtless upset some of his listeners—especially any of the religious leaders who knew about Deuteronomy 15. Jesus’ real point is that the poor will always be with us *because* we are regularly disobedient and do not follow the Lord’s commands. He includes the commands in this passage to provide financial assistance for the benefit of those in need—assistance in the form of loans and resources, without predatory interest. Later, on Maundy Thursday he said, “*Love one another as I have loved you.*” If we acted on such love, would there be poverty?

1. Compassion for the poor has always been a priority with God. How can we be the best instruments of God’s blessings for those in need? Is it better to give gifts or to help design financing and economic policies that will help poor people meet their needs?
2. Why does God make our care for the poor such a priority? What happens to the rest of a society when the poor are destitute? If they are not able to buy basic goods and services, or feeding their children properly, how are others in that civilization affected?
3. In this passage, the key element in our compassion for the poor is not the “charity” of giving, but compassionate lending. Is compassionate credit better than an out-right gift? What is the place for gifts? Did the Good Samaritan (Luke 10) give or lend? Why?
4. There is a reminder here of the need to “forgive” some loans—and not to be stingy with those whose loans will likely be forgiven. Under what circumstances should some lenders today express such care for the borrower in their lending?

What are we going to do about it?

5. Have you experienced the Lord’s blessing in your life? Do you have a responsibility to share that blessing with others? Does helping to improve the environment you share with others count as sharing his goodness? Are there better ways?
6. High-risk loans to needy people might take more time than giving a gift. Could you help a church or mission agency to set up lending programs? Could those loans carry conditions of creation-care for the borrowers—for the good of all? Do lenders have responsibilities to guide borrowers? Has it ever been otherwise?
7. In a way of speaking, the Lord has lent the earth to us for a period of time. How can we repay the loan “with interest”? How can we show our gratitude? Does he have the right to guide our use of “the principle”? Are we good tenants?

Learned Lesson: Many people are hurt when a society ignores the Lord’s commands, and their hurt should be a wake-up call for the society to return to the Lord’s guidance.

Passion Action: Instead of planning to give gifts to family or friends at Passion Week, convince them to join you in donating to church or charity at least as much as the value of the gifts. That way you help people while you save the resources otherwise spent for manufacture and transportation.

What does it say? –

STUDY: John 11:17-26 – the miracle of Lazarus' resurrection

*GOLDEN TEXT: John 11:25 = *Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live... ."*

What does it mean?

So much of world religion is world denying. There is a universal awareness that something is wrong, and most religions seek solutions to the problem by reducing desires, detaching self from the physical world, disciplining the self more, being more submissive to the religious authorities, and such like. Not only is Jesus Christ the only one who conquered death, but Biblical teaching is unique in valuing resurrection and life so very much.

1. The name of God, YHWH means "I AM" or "I BREATHE." When Jesus says he is "the life," is he helping to clarify that he is all God and all human? Since he is "the life," do we have responsibility to protect life?
2. Jesus had a ministry of "life." There is no record of anything dying in his presence, and the dead came back to life—spiritually and physically. How can we try to sustain that reputation?
3. Jesus claims to be "resurrection," and he draws our attention to his conquering death itself that great Sunday morning right after he was crucified. Did resurrection characterize the rest of his ministry, too? Is this a model for us?
4. Jesus speaks these words right after a burial, and just before raising that man from death. Do death and disaster kill the resurrection and the life? Or does "the resurrection and the life" give death and disaster a very hard time? How is the Creator's presence shown?

What are we going to do about it?

5. Do we see Jesus' presence in good life around us, in the creation? Why or why not? What would it take? Why does life sometimes seem like a tug-of-war?
6. In what ways are your life and work pro-Jesus? Do you defend life? Are you also pro-hope? How? What is the effect? Do you feel the goodness of those choices?
7. Jesus says that even if we die, we will live if we believe in him. Do we believe? Do we believe enough? How do we express our good gratitude?

Learned Lesson: Because Jesus himself personifies life itself as well as resurrection victory over death, we sincerely serve him when we work to protect life and restore creation.

Passion Action: Set up two boxes in a convenient place at home—one for scrap paper, for paper used on one side only; the other for double-used paper to be recycled.

What does it say?

STUDY: Revelation 1:12-20

GOLDEN TEXT: Revelation 1:17 and 18 = *When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he placed his right hand on me, saying, “Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever; and I have the keys of Death and of Hades.*

What does it mean?

The most common portraits of Jesus are painted in less than accurate ways. Jesus is often represented as white-skinned, even though Bethlehem is a long way from Europe. Those paintings represent him with thin fingers and spindly arms—even though Jesus was cutting and hammering boards six days a week for about twenty years, without any power tools.

1. Have we ever seen a drawing or painting true to this verbal portrait of Jesus included in Revelation 1? Could that painting capture the whole power of Jesus as master of creation and Lord of life and death?
2. What is more powerful—these words or a painting that seeks to depict these words or a movie seeking to enact this description? How should our behavior represent him?
3. In the general objectives of the book of *Revelation*, what purpose does this vivid picture of Jesus provide? Does this portrait motivate us to more vibrant service to him?
4. Does this description of Jesus only partially depict his greatness? Or is this text an exaggeration of his strength and power?

What are we going to do about it?

5. Does this greatness of God and vastness of his creation tend to motivate you to attempt excellent work to honor Jesus and care for his creation? Does his greatness ever justify our failures, so that he can cover for our mistakes?
6. John says that Jesus’ face is “like the sun shining in all its brilliance.” (1:16) Do you lack energy in your desire to protect the earth’s environment and energy resources? Does meditating on this passage recharge your spiritual batteries, renew your emotional and physical energy resources?
7. Jesus reminds us that he was dead and is alive forever. Without being trite, is he the best model of renewable energy—both physically and spiritually? If this pattern is set in Jesus, should we not respect and reproduce redemptive patterns of renewable energy wherever possible? Is this work an important way to honor the Lord Jesus?

Learned Lesson: Jesus is supremely great and good, the living and loving dynamo, the encourager and example for creation-care.

Passion Action: Along with others at church, or among friends, adopt a river or stream. Take pictures before you put your gloves on to collect trash in bags to carry off, and perhaps plant trees or bushes—then take pictures again. Check on the stream at least every three months.

What does it say? –

STUDY: 2 Peter 1:1-7

*GOLDEN TEXT: 2 Peter 1:3 and 4 = *His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by and to his own glory and excellence. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by lust.*

What does it mean?

The Creator has truly “given to us all that we need for life and godliness.” We can have a fulfilling life in a growing relationship with God. He relates to us as very special stewards, for he invites us even to “participate in the divine nature.” As his very images, we represent him to all of creation. As the Gospel is about the kingdom of God, it is also about restoring our human place as the Creator’s representatives for creation-care.

1. How do we use the resources he has created and given? Can we use them further to empower physical and spiritual vitality in ourselves and others?
2. What purposes does the Creator have for us, since he has shared with us all these physical and spiritual resources? Can we help fulfill those purposes?
3. How has distorted human desire (lust) damaged and depleted the natural world and its resources? What would the godly desire do? How do we get started?
4. Are some of “physical” resources also “spiritual”—such as the splendor of mountains, valleys and oceans? Are some “spiritual” resources also “physical”—such as energy to care for creation because we “participate in the divine nature”?

What are we going to do about it?

5. How does the Creator invite us to participate in his divine nature? How do we say “yes”? Does being a good steward help? What should we do to represent him?
6. Do you see his divine nature within yourself? Within your family and friends? How can we recognize this divine nature it more? How can we demonstrate his divine nature to others and to Creation?
7. How can God’s “very great and precious promises” displace lust? Can the *Passion Actions* of *Green Preparation* help create a sustainable new life-style—good for you, others and the creation? How else do we “participate in the divine nature”?

Learned Lesson: The Creator empowers us to participate in his divine nature, undistracted by lusts, harmful human desires that can lead us to misuse ourselves and the environments around us..

Passion Action: Replace most burned-out light bulbs with compact florescent bulbs. They create just as much light with only 25% of the electricity—and the bulbs last much longer.

What does it say? –

STUDY: Luke 10:25-37

*GOLDEN TEXT: Luke 10:36 and 37 = ³⁶ Then Jesus asked, "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" The lawyer replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

What does it mean?

The lawyer asked, "Who is my neighbor?" to justify himself. He expected Jesus to fix some limits on responsibility, limits he could live with. Jesus "answered" by asking his own question "Who is the neighbor to the ones in need?" That is still the case today—when we know we need to be "neighbor" to people, even on other continents, even those yet to be born.

1. Why is this story one of the two or three most well-known of Jesus' parables, even among unbelievers?
2. When aiding the victim who had been robbed, pummeled, and left for dead—did the Samaritan risk anything? Did it cost him safety, time, money, whatever?
3. We are humored by the lawyer trying to "justify himself" to Jesus, by setting limits to the Greatest Command. Do we ever do that? Does it ever work?
4. Why did Jesus use questions so much? Were they effective? Do his questions help uncover the truth that is right in front of us? How do his questions work so well?

What are we going to do about it?

5. What if the victim was "robbed and left for dead" by people behaving badly than 1,000 miles away, *because they were careless with creation*, causing cancer or asthma, expanding the desert, and such like? Also, would people who helped those victims still be Good Samaritans, even if they cared for those people and creation at a distance?
6. The first trait that distinguished the Good Samaritan from the priest and Levite is that the Good Samaritan saw with compassion. Can we just choose to start seeing with compassion the victims of ecological injustice? What does it take?
7. What effect do you suppose this successful rescue had on the Good Samaritan himself? What will be the effect upon you when your creation-care helps save people's lives and health from some ecological crisis? Will you feel the Creator's approval? How will you know?

Learned Lesson: Jesus teaches us to apply the greatest command by having compassion and helping people in need, near and far, however well they know us—as he himself does.

Passion Action: Visit at least three nearby food stores and ask where they buy their fresh vegetables and fruits. All other things being equal, consider giving your business especially to the ones who buy closest. This encourages local farmers, saves transportation stresses on the environment, reduces pollution, saves fuel, *and may very well provide you with fresher food.*

What does it say?

STUDY: Genesis 5:1-3 and 28-31

GOLDEN TEXT: Genesis 5:1, 2, 28 and 29 = *This is the list of the descendents of Adam. When God created humans, he made them in the likeness of God. Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them “humans” when they were created... When Lamech had lived one hundred eighty-two years, he became the father of a son; he named him Noah, saying, “Out of the ground that the LORD has cursed this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the toil of our hands.”*

What does it mean?

Genesis begins with the magnificent creation story. God builds goodness in at every stage, with humans designated as the Creator’s stewards of the earth.. Then we read the story of their disobedience and the tragic murder of one of their sons by another. In this passage we read a summary of part of Adam and Eve’s family tree, their son Seth and his descendants. Cain and his family are ignored. At the beginning of this chapter we are reminded that God made man and woman as his images. Then most of the text of Genesis 5 records the multiplication of God’s images—for better or for worse.

1. Is one of the greatest miracles of all time and eternity the creation of men and women as God’s images? What are aspects of the Creator’s image in women? In men?
2. As God’s images made from the dust of the ground, are we humans living alloys of heaven and earth. Can it feel as if we are 100% angel and 100% animal at the same time? Are we truly part of the earth? Do we also have God’s authority in stewardship?
3. In Genesis 5:2, we are reminded that God blessed (affirmed) the first humans. Have you felt the Creator’s blessing, his affirmation? Have you blessed others in his name? Does he like us to affirm the created goodness in other humans?
4. Down the family tree, in Genesis 5:29, Lamech affirmed something special in his son Noah and claimed he would help make life easier for everyone. What was Lamech thinking? What was the basis for his prediction? How wrong can naïve optimism be?

What are we going to do about it?

5. Does blessing other people, affirming the goodness God has created in them, help them to focus on those good aspects? Does it strengthen them to overcome any curses? To overcome temptations? To in turn bless others? Have people blessed you? If so, how?
6. What is the danger of false positive predictions—when environmental catastrophes may be, in fact, the safer prediction? In what ways would predicting disaster and preparing for it have been more positive for Lamech?
7. Lamech died before the great flood, but for the last 115 years of his life, he saw his son Noah prepare the rescue Ark, apparently never lifting a hand to help prepare people for the predicted ecological disaster. What kind of person is quick with rosy predictions but will not help people prepare for known looming disaster? Is that a problem today?

Learned Lesson: Wishful predictions must be replaced by accurate guidance in the face of danger.

Passion Action: Sign up to cancel all your junk mail (www.dmachoice.org) and save about 1½ trees per year, on average. Those trees you protect will continue to reduce CO2 for everyone.

What does it say? –

STUDY: Job 42:1-9

*GOLDEN TEXT: Job 42:5 = “I had heard about you by the hearing of my ears, but now my eyes see you; therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.”

What does it mean?

It seems that God is about to give his third speech in response to Job’s questions and complaints. However, Job interrupts saying that he is now fulfilled because he has seen the Lord. This personal experience of the Creator was far more fulfilling than just hearing great things about God, as he had in before this moment. Why does he “*despise himself*” now? What he is saying is that he retracts his complaints and anger, and he repents—*content with the encounter*. Nothing compares with personally experiencing the Creator’s living presence. For background: the Biblical concept of God is the highest, because God is the sovereign Creator of all. The Biblical concept of God is nearest, for God is in Jesus Christ, in us and in his creation.

1. Hearing can be indirect, around corners, and at a long distance. In what ways do you think that Job “*heard about God*”? Did this hearing relate to God’s presence in creation? Did it help him to do the right?
2. Now Job’s “*eyes see God.*” Seeing always involves a direct line of vision, and what we see is generally relatively close—unless it is huge. How did Job see God? Do you think that the Lord showed himself to Job within his creation?
3. Is the Lord comfortable communicating through his creation? Does seeing or hearing from God require ecstasy or an escape from reality? Does it help that we are his images?
4. Job repents, even though the broader text says that he was righteous, even here in verse 8. Why does he repent? What was the result of his repentance? Was he able now regularly to see God’s sovereign presence in his creation?

What are we going to do about it?

5. Have you God? What was the encounter like—or what would it have been like? In simple terms, what does it take to see God’s presence in the daily life?
6. Why did it no longer matter to Job to have all his questions answered once he had met the Creator? What was the real desire of his heart?
7. While science and technology seek understanding of creation, how important is it for any of us to encounter the Creator? What is especially fulfilling for us—more technological toys or the living experience of the Divine presence?

Learned Lesson: What the Creator wants is personal relationships of mutual trust—far better than having around him people who profess merely second-hand ideas and beliefs.

Passion Action: Now, two weeks after “Fat Tuesday,” host a *Green Preparation* party. Serve healthy fruits and vegetables, encourage others to join still you in your *Green Preparation* pilgrimage, design some plans and posters for joint Passion Actions, and pray together for understanding and courage.

What does it say?—

STUDY: Genesis 2:7-15

GOLDEN TEXT: Genesis 2:15 = *The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to till it and keep it.**What does it mean?*

Since resource depletion and pollution of the earth are increasingly important issues, the incomparable wisdom of the Creator is increasingly more evident. Whether in that splendid original garden with our first ancestors or anywhere else on earth, these two simple standards of earthly behavior—“*till the Garden and keep it*,” literally “improve and protect it”—remain the absolute bedrock of our responsibilities to the Creator as his personal care-takers of his creation. This responsibility was given to the first man even before the first woman was brought in as his essential partner!

1. What was involved in improving and protecting the Garden? Why was not original bliss defined with no responsibility? How deep is our responsibility?
2. Why did they have to till or improve the Garden? What multiple benefits came from tilling it—physical exertion, working together, multiplying its beauty, increasing its fruit? Were there any bad effects or responsibility?
3. From what did they need to protect the Garden? Were they alert to “keeping” it safe against threatening physical and spiritual pollutants?
4. Why is improving and protecting the Garden the main command when there was no evident threat until Genesis 3? Is it essential to our being the Creator’s image (Genesis 1:26 and 27)? And also his stewards (Genesis 1:26 and 28)?

What are we going to do about it?

5. Why do gardens continue to play a central role in our lives? Do we eat anything that does not come from God’s great Garden? Does “improve and protect it” still apply to our relationship with the earth?
6. Was there work before sin entered the picture? Is responsible work natural? What should we do about those who pollute and deplete the earth?
7. Does his work for us on the original Passion Week help restore the meaning of human work? Could we come to love Mondays? Tuesdays?

Learned Lesson: Even from the very beginning, the DNA of human responsibilities to the Creator included protecting and improving the environment—an emphatic point repeated three times in the first two chapters of the Bible.

Passion Action: Depending on where you live, plan ahead or actually start planting a garden in your yard, or in planters, or in pots. Could you plant some trees in your yard, or near the road, or in a nearby park? Is permission needed? Trees are great partners for our reducing CO2 in the atmosphere, at the rate of more than 80 pounds a year for a mature pine tree, *pinus radiata*. (www.botany.org) .

What does it say?

STUDY: Isaiah 58:1-14

GOLDEN TEXT: Isaiah 58:10 and 11 = *If you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday. The LORD will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail.*

What does it mean?

God's biting sarcasm at the beginning of this chapter may be hard to take, but what follows is a powerful description of the true 24/7 worship and divine service that will transform a society. The key elements of such transformations are loosing the bonds of injustice, sharing food with the hungry and satisfying the needs of the afflicted and oppressed. It seems that God's approval can return us partly to the basic natural beauty and elegance of his original creation.

1. Why is the initial vibrant creation such a continuing standard? Is having urban societies "like a watered gardens" what we really desire? Can we use this image as a goal? What does it take to achieve it? Is Isaiah relevant today?
2. How much of our own "worship" activity falls under God's critical sarcasm of Isaiah 58:1-5? Does this *insincere worship* contribute to carelessness for his creation, too? If we truly love the Creator, would we love fellow creatures more that we do?
3. What is it about social injustice and insensitivity to the needs of the poor that gets in the way of vibrant worship? Why is sincere love for others in need essential to sustain our love of the Creator? And our care for his creation?
4. Why are protections for the poor and social justice so important? To whom do they really matter? Should these concerns guide our long-term planning? And guide our immediate decisions? Guide individuals? Organizations? Communities? All three?

What are we going to do about it?

5. What defines good worship for you? Is it what feels good when you meet in church? What happens when the music and preaching are over and you are on your own?
6. Does your worship of God translate into honoring him 24/7? Does it show in your care for his creation? Does it show in your love for all people, his images, regardless of their social status? In your life, what is the point of worship anyway?
7. In the future, when environmental resources become even more scarce and precious, will the issues of social justice and care for the poor become even more important or less important? Why do you think so? What are you prepared to do?

Learned Lesson: The most godly expressions of worship include "*spending yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfying the needs of the oppressed.*"

Passion Action: Are there dangerous and/or smelly chemical plants being built in poorer neighborhoods in your region? Are smoke-stacks generally up-wind from people already disadvantaged? Do not the poor have the same needs for pure air and water as others? Speak up and help shape people's consciousness.

What does it say?

STUDY: Revelation 4:6-11

GOLDEN TEXT: Revelation 4:11 = “*You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.*”*What does it mean?*

In the first glimpse of the throne room of heaven, John records this song of worship sung by all the 24 elders in heaven, as they fall before the One seated on the throne. All the while the elders are also dramatically laying their crowns before the throne, expressing their total homage. Only two qualifications for such complete devotion are cited: (1) the One on the throne created all things, and (2) by his will they existed. The Creation matters for eternity. Even in heaven, there is no attitude of trashing the temporal world. Instead, the Creator deserves eternal glory, honor and power.

1. An eternally defining trait of the Lord is that he is the Creator. Should we live even one day without being conscious that he created everything? Does it always matter how we care for his world, the Creation?
2. The intense goodness of the Creation is the significant obvious assumption held by all the 24 elders of heaven. Does our behavior assume such goodness of the Creation, too? How do we respect and protect that Divine goodness of the world around us?
3. Why are “*glory and honor and power*” mentioned here? Why is this triple tribute so strongly expressed? What does each tribute have to do with the Creator’s role? Should we sing and behave in such praise of the Creator?
4. If “*our Lord and God*” created all things, then what does the devil do? Does he only distort, dilute and destroy what the Creator makes? When you consider the people who primarily pollute and deplete the Creation, whose side are they on?

What are we going to do about it?

5. Do you think that the Creator is already worthy to receive “*glory and honor and power*”? How should that truth be expressed in your behavior and belief? Do other people know your high praise of the Creator? Why or why not?
6. Because he created everything, does that make him worthy of such eternal “*glory and honor and power*”? Should the Lord’s own elevation also elevate the work of his Creation itself—at least within our perception and behavior? How does this happen?
7. The wisdom of the heavenly elders is evident. How can we on earth become wiser to the Creator and his work? What are some of the sources of true wisdom for those of us on earth? How well are you using those sources?

Learned Lesson: The goodness and greatness of the Lord is shown especially in his creation and redemption of us and the rest of the world.

Passion Action: Share the goodness and greatness of the Creator by inviting a neighbor or friend to share a meal together with you at your home—saving on cooking costs and talking together about making your neighborhood cleaner and friendlier for all God’s creation—especially for people!

What does it say?

STUDY: Exodus 20:1-21

GOLDEN TEXT: Exodus 20:18 and 19 = *When all the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking, they were afraid and trembled and stood at a distance, and said to Moses, “You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, or we will die.”*

What does it mean?

Most of the people miss one of the most monumental moments of all history. The Lord speaks the Ten Commandments from the same mountain where he earlier spoke to Moses from the unconsumed “burning” bush—only now the “special effects” in nature are much greater so that perhaps a million people can see and hear. Tragically, it seems that the people completely missed the Lord speaking the Commandments, and now only saw and heard “*the thunder and lightning, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking*”—the creation capturing some of the awe of the Lord’s speaking to the people. They even ask Moses to “*not let God speak to us.*” For most of the people, this moment of great revelation is reduced to mere fascination with the stunning phenomena of physical creation itself responding to the Creator’s special presence.

1. Why does the text not mention at all that the people hear God’s voice? Could this be a simple mistake on the part of Moses, the author of Exodus? Why does he list everything else but fail to mention the voice of the Lord God? *Have the people so denatured nature that they were unable to experience supernatural revelation?*
2. Why do the people ask Moses to tell God basically to shut up (verse 19)? Do they perhaps hear a voice but choose not to listen to what the Lord is saying? Do they really think that they have nothing to learn from the Lord who has liberated them from slavery in Egypt? Have you ever experienced such intentional deafness in yourself? In others?
3. Could the people be so overwhelmed by the “special effects” that they choose not to hear the Lord’s voice? Do they ever even regret missing the Lord’s personal guidance? Can we, too, be so focused the environment that we miss the guidance the Creator gives us?
4. Moses’ response is paradoxical: *Do not be afraid, but have the fear of God.* (Exodus 20:20) How would they have been better off dealing with nature’s living God, not just with his powerful natural phenomena? How would we be better off?

What are we going to do about it?

5. Are we like the people at the base of Mount Sinai? Would we prefer salvation without the living Savior, without the One who has wise directions for our lives?
6. What are your experiences in “natural disasters”? Were you drawn closer to God? Ask at least two other people about the spiritual effects of ecological crises on them.
7. In observing the threatening ecological phenomena of our time, are these only fearful displays of natural power? Is there also a message from the Creator? Are there also messages from the Bible that become more urgent in the looming environmental crises?

Learned Lesson: The Lord’s saving presence is personal, and he has precious words for us to hear.

Passion Action: Are you listening for the Lord’s directions and encouragement? Review your reflections in your *Green Journal* (see Meditation #5) and catch up over the weekend, if necessary.

What does it say? –

STUDY: John 20:10-18

GOLDEN TEXT: John 20:15 = *Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.”*

What does it mean?

Jesus met Mary Magdalene in the garden just outside the now empty tomb, the tomb he had very recently occupied. Full of grief and devotedly looking for the body of Jesus so she could provide the proper honor for the dead, she mistakes Jesus for the gardener. All Jesus needs to do is say her name, and her eyes open to the reality of Jesus’ resurrection. Jesus then commissions her to spread the good news of his victory over death to the Apostles and to others.

1. Why do such great things happen in gardens? What is it about being surrounded by God’s creation that brings the best to life? What about Jesus made Mary think “gardener”? Could you imagine the same encounter in a home or a business?
2. Does Jesus have a sense of humor here? Does the Creator look like a gardener? Did he know why Mary was weeping and for whom she was intently looking? Do questions help start off the best conversations? Did Jesus use questions often?
3. How big and strong was Mary Magdalene? With her combination of passionate grief and anxious adrenalin, was she a force of nature? Why did Mary think she could just pick up Jesus’ body and carry him away? What kind of attitude did Mary have? Did she ever think of excuses for not doing what was right?
4. Why did the Lord pick Mary Magdalene for this extraordinary honor—the first to see him risen, the first to give the Gospel to the Apostles? What traits qualified her? Fearlessness? Total commitment? No excuses? Gutsiness? Complete belief? After all, even days later, after several encounters, some of the Apostles still doubted.

What are we going to do about it?

5. Back to the garden, what are we looking for—a corpse or the living Lord Jesus Christ? Are we ready to serve him and bring life back both to creation and to Church?
6. Is it possible to be so focused on death and destruction around us—including creation’s depletion and pollution—that we could miss the Lord’s showing us the way of resurrection? Could Mary have become so sad in her loss that she could have not heard the risen Lord calling her name?
7. Would you like to be in Mary’s shoes, meeting the Lord and bringing a message of hope and resurrection to others? What traits did Mary have that you could cultivate?

Learned Lesson: The resurrected Jesus is present to greet us personally, and he does not look at all like a corpse.

Passion Action: When shopping, take reusable cloth bags with you, celebrating the renewable life of the Creator and his universe. Buy—or help design—reusable bags with words or symbols that communicate a message of the greatest hope and renewal, made possible by Jesus’ resurrection.

What does it say?

STUDY: James 2:1-9

GOLDEN TEXT: James 2:8 and 9 = *You do well if you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.*

What does it mean?

James has a passion for right relationships between people, and he also insists that our behavior expresses the faith commitment that we have made. We are not only to love our neighbors; we are to be impartial about it. Perhaps he was aware that people's behavior in one place can impact other peoples' lives even at a long distance. He certainly knew that the highest principle for our behavior is love of other people.

1. Why does James call this the "royal law"? What would you call it? Is it the highest of all principles? Does it come from the King of kings?
2. How do we know that we have fulfilled this royal law? What is the measure? Why would decisions that prefer ourselves over others be obviously wrong?
3. Why is partiality so tempting? How often are our environmental decisions biased toward ourselves? Why is this partiality so wrong?
4. Is it partiality to care for the next-door neighbor and ignore the needs of the neighbor on another continent? How far does this Royal Law reach?

What are we going to do about it?

5. How can we prepare ourselves to be truly impartial? How can we know enough of people's needs?
6. Is one method of impartiality to improve the creation? Does everyone live in it and breathe its air? Does everyone benefit from an improved environment?
7. Who are your models of impartiality—in the Bible and elsewhere? Did they care for God's creation as a way of benefiting everyone else? And themselves?

Learned Lesson: A great repeated theme of the Bible is five simple words, the royal law of the family of the King of kings: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

Passion Action: Connect more strongly with neighbors and friends, helping each other in little ways to lend and borrow books, DVDs, toys, CDs. This will help reduce resource depletion and reduce harmful transportation impacts—while you also strengthen neighborhood networking, learn about others' needs where you can help, and grow in neighborly relationships of love and care.

What does it say?

STUDY: John 2:1-11

*GOLDEN TEXT: John 2:10 = *Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now.*"

What does it mean?

Generally the Creator's miracles are extreme variations of every-day processes—elevating their greatness. Here is a case in point: Every day the Creator transforms water into wine—in the millions of grapevines all over the world. He also created and conducts the natural fermenting processes. These every-day miracles continue in the splendid creation he designed and created. We have some scientific understanding, but we cannot replicate what he makes. Moreover, the Creator further demonstrates his authority over creation—and his care for the young wedding couple and guests, too—by speeding the *water-to-wine* process within six large stone jars, holding 30 gallons each. That is a lot of wine to process in a short time! Not for the Creator.

1. Which is the grander miracle, changing 180 gallons of water into wine at that wedding feast, or the every-day miracle of changing millions of gallons of water into wine? By which miracle should we be more in awe?
2. This miracle was the *first of Jesus' signs... and it revealed his glory*, verse 11 says. What did the "sign" say to the people? What does it say to you?
3. Do you experience grape juice and wine differently now because you know Jesus authority over water and wine? How do you thank God for the wonder of every-day miracles? Does that include protecting the plants, atmosphere, and such like?
4. What started this splendid story is Jesus' mother saying, "*Do whatever he tells you.*" (verse 5) Is that good advice now, too? How would we care for the every-day miracles of creation if we took Mary's wise advice now?

What are we going to do about it?

5. If we are careless with the creation, are we risking damaging the Creator's *miracle tools*, the "golden geese" by whatever name—the grapevines, aquifers full of naturally filtered water; forests full of trees that transform carbon dioxide into precious oxygen, oceans producing huge harvests of healthy food, or gardens flowers of exquisite beauty and vegetables and fruits of essential nourishment? Who protects these *instruments of miracle*? If not us, who? If not now, when?
6. Do the extraordinary miracles grab our attention? But do the equally marvelous, daily miracles sustain us? Are we showing care and appreciation for this day-by-day miracle support that literally keeps us alive?
7. How is the blood Jesus shed for us, for the remission of sins, on that first Good Friday, also the New Wine of the new covenant that restores us to the Creator (Matthew 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:17-20)? Does his extraordinary death for us produce the best miracle wine ever? How do we share it?

Learned Lesson: Jesus is the Master of the wine of marriage and the wine of the New Covenant

Passion Action: In most communities the tap water is good, and can be further improved with affordable in-home filtering. You can stop using plastic-bottles for (1) convenience, (2) reduced use of plastics, and reduced transportation impact of fuel use and road congestion.

Bible-Meditation #20: A Midget Bush with a Giant Voice [prayer: awareness]

What does it say?

STUDY: Exodus 3:1-12

*GOLDEN TEXT: Exodus 3:5 = *Then he [the Lord] said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground."*

What does it mean?

The poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning famously claimed: "Every bush is aflame with fire. Only those who see take off their shoes. The rest sit around and pick blackberries." The berries are great, and the Creator is present in all his creation, and in every one of his creations in particular. After forty years out in the wilderness, having escaped prosecution for killing someone, Moses experiences a vibrant *divine presence* in one of God's creation, a little bush. Because of this encounter, nature is no longer "*denatured*" to him, and Moses is also no longer alienated from the Lord, the Creator. It all comes together at one little bush.

1. Is it possible that the Lord tried to speak to Moses through bushes or other created things on earlier occasions? If so, why did Moses not notice before?
2. What might have helped especially prepare Moses to see God's power and presence—and to hear his voice—this time? What might have sensitized Moses? Is it noteworthy that two of the greatest leaders of all time—Moses and David—spent years of their lives tending a few sheep—surrounded only by the creation?
3. How hungry was Moses for the Lord? Are we more likely to meet the Creator in his creation if we cultivate the awareness of our God-shaped vacuum?
4. What makes the ground holy? Is there any ground that does not have God present? Can we do anything to prepare to feel, see or hear him better?

What are we going to do about it?

5. Have you heard God's voice? Have you seen evidence of his presence? What have you done to make those experiences more likely?
6. Where is holy ground now? Can the Creator reveal himself even through polluted and depleted nature? Should we protect his creaturely instruments of communication? Even little bushes?
7. How does the Creator presence impact how we should care for creation? Can we celebrate Palm Sunday without caring about palms? And other creatures that God can use to reveal his presence and power?

Learned Lesson: The Creator speaks to us people in many ways through his creation, including his life-changing voices—whether silent, soft or loud—from obscure places.

Passion Action: Take at least an hour to sit in a quiet part of a park or in your church sanctuary or at home. Whether from the grass, bushes or trees—or from the windows, chairs or tables—quietly recognize and affirm the Creator's presence and listen carefully for his guidance.

What does it say? –

STUDY: Revelation 11:14-19

GOLDEN TEXT: Revelation 11:18 = *The nations raged, but your wrath has come, and the time for judging the dead, for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints and all who fear your name, both small and great, and for destroying those who destroy the earth.*

What does it mean?

The Bible teaches that the Creator is patient and slow to get angry. Through his gift of salvation in Christ's work in Passion Week, he seeks to bring people to himself and to restore the original relationships of stewardship, knowledge and trust. The Bible never hides the fact that the Lord has a place for penalties—especially when people persist in serious damage to other people, or to his creation in which we all live. If people “destroy the earth,” the damage impacts all other people—causing unjust and untimely disease and death. This story is a prophetic vision of the end of flawed human rule of the earth and the beginning of the fullness of the Kingdom of God.

1. What are the standards of the Lord's judgment in this situation? What do people who destroy God's earth deserve? Does this judgment seem unreasonable? Why or why not?
2. Is there any suggestion in this text that people who call themselves “Christians” will be judged more lightly, even if they destroyed the earth? Is it possible for people who are truly transformed by the Holy Spirit to be careless with the world that the same Spirit nurtured from the beginning (Genesis 2:2)? Who are the true the Christians?
3. Should *faith* in the Creator include *faithfulness* to the Creator and to his principles for caring for his earth? Is it possible to trust the Savior and not trust his instructions to care for his creation?
4. In Revelation 11:19 the great ark of the covenant is revealed in the temple in heaven. What is the point? Does it still represent the powerful presence of the Lord? Why is there such an environmental response—with “flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail”? Does nature have a stake in God's rule?

What are we going to do about it?

5. We are more and more aware of the way wrong policies and actions in one country can undermine the health and safety of the environments of the whole earth. When people continue to behave in ways that endanger the environment for themselves or others, what do you call that? Should they be held accountable for the consequences? In what ways?
6. Scientific predictions are never 100% certain. How certain should ecological disaster become before people are held accountable for their dangerous behavior? Is 90% enough? Is 80% enough? Is 70% certainty of disaster enough for us to change our behavior? What is your minimum? How certain is the Creator's judgment?
7. Is it possible to teach both God's grace for forgiveness of sin—and at the same time full accountability to him for behavior that endangers his creation? Do these contradict each other? Why or why not?

Learned Lesson: *The Living God is fair, and he says he will destroy those who destroy his world.*

Passion Action: *Write a paragraph on the Creator's abundant love for us and our personal accountability to him, and then share your thoughts with someone else.*

What does it say?—

STUDY: 2 Corinthians 5:14-21

GOLDEN TEXT: 2 Corinthians 5:16 and 17: = *So from now on we see no one according to the flesh. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, whoever is in Christ—A new creation! The old has gone. Look! The new has come!* [literal translation]

What does it mean?

The love of Christ transforms everything (5:14), including how we see him and his creation—including how we see other people. For every person who is in Christ, all creation is new (5:17) because it looks new. Paul exudes a holy expletive: “A new creation!” Nothing looks the same, even Christ himself is seen in a totally new way. What is the reason? If we are now truly “in Christ” we see other people through his eyes. In fact, we see all his creation through his eyes as well.

1. Is the world of a Christian really different from the world of the unbeliever? Does it show in what people do or say?
2. Is the “new creation” we can perceive when we are in Christ closer to the objective reality? Is it closer to God’s own perception of reality? Why or why not?
3. Are there people who still regard Christ merely according to the flesh? What limits and constrains their vision?
4. What can hinder our vision or experience of God’s creation and our responsibilities for it? Is “What would Jesus do?” a great question? Is “What would Jesus see?” an even more basic starting point?

What are we going to do about it?

5. Do you see God’s creation different than non-believers? In way ways? How clearly does this show in your actions?
6. There are methodological constraints in the sciences to examine only natural phenomena, so that believers and non-believers can study natural phenomena the same way. However, before getting into the laboratory, and in our personal relationships there, and then the rest of the day after the lab work is done—can believing scientists see God’s hand and take divine responsibility for their work?
7. How can we be more intentional—and more successful—in actually seeing his world through the Lord Jesus Christ’s eyes? Would meditating on the Bible more help? Which passages of Scripture? Would prayer help? How?

Learned Lesson: Accountable spiritual sight-perception is available for those who are “in Christ.”

Passion Action: At home, write down the present numbers on your water, electrical and natural-gas meters. Record the numbers at about the same day and time each week, at least for the remainder of Preparation, and mark them on a chart that can show change. For the next three weeks, try to create a steady reduction in your use of each of these natural resources. Others in your household can assist. If you need help reading the meter, your utility company may guide you.

What does it say? –

STUDY: Romans 1:18-23

GOLDEN TEXT: Romans 1:21 = *Though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened.**What does it mean?*

The creation is good, and it draws our attention to the Creator. Two responses are essential, and without them our lives can become detached, delusional and degraded, as the Apostle Paul argues in the last half of the opening chapter of Romans. *First*, we are to honor God, respecting him and lifting up his reputation among the other people in our contacts. This is the needed horizontal response to the reality of the beneficent Creator and his creation. Older translations use the word “glorify,” which means to enhance his reputation, or honor him. *Second*, we must give thanks to the Creator for all he gives in and through his great works. This is the needed vertical response to our great and good Creator and his creation.

1. Which is more important, honoring God or giving him thanks? Or are they equally important? Thoughtfully explain.
2. Why is honoring God so important? How much of the time should we honor him? What difference does his reputation make?
3. Why is thanking the Creator so important? How much of our time should we thank him? What difference does divine gratitude make?
4. Why do lives that do not honor God, or thank him, become detached, delusional and degraded? If we honor the Creator in the intentional care and protection for his creation, are we less apt to become detached, delusional and degraded? If we thank God for his creation, are we less apt to pollute and deplete it?

What are we going to do about it?

5. What is most lacking in our time—honoring God or giving him thanks? Why is this happening? What can you do about it?
6. Which is the more powerful way of recognizing the goodness of God's creation—honoring the Creator or giving him thanks? Or are they equal? Why?
7. How have you honored God in the midst of other people, in the last 72 hours? How could you honor him more? How could you honor him better? When is the last time you really thanked our Creator?

Learned Lesson: The two most vibrant modes in our relationship with the Creator are (1) vertically to thank him personally, and (2) horizontally to glorify him by enhancing his reputation among all other people.

Passion Action: Sometime today write a brief paragraph that mentions three people or organizations in your community that have honored the Creator by doing measurable good for our shared environment—whether they are volunteers or paid, whether they are religious or not. Send that paragraph to your pastor (for the church newsletter) and to the local newspaper—and see if both will publish it. And thank the Creator for what these, his exemplary creations, are doing.

What does it say?

STUDY: Hebrews 1:1-9

GOLDEN TEXT: Hebrews 1:3: = *He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful Word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.*

What does it mean?

In Preparation we remember whose Passion we celebrate: the one who “sustains all things.” In physics, the search for a *unified field theory* of all physical forces has not yet produced the desired results, and scientists may or may not succeed in this significant effort. However, we already have a unifying explanation on a much deeper level than science. We have the “*unified person theory*” of Scripture. That person is the Lord Jesus Christ, who causes all the phenomena to function. Because he is always present in all phenomena, our own behavior and attitudes matter. God cares how we express our service and worship. As we prepare to celebrate Jesus’ death and resurrection for us, remember how Jesus is the “exact imprint of God’s very being.”

1. In your understanding, is Jesus as essential as the Bible presents him? How significant is Jesus? How much does he matter to you?
2. The author also says Jesus is “sustaining all things by his powerful word.” Is this a word that is spoken—as in “Let there be light!”—or is it a thought or effective communication in some other way? Does Jesus still have this power today?
3. Why is communication—“his powerful Word”—the basis of Jesus sustaining all things in creation? Is the universe so deeply based in relationships? Is communication at the very root of everything? Is great communication central to Preparation?
4. One of the most elemental motivations of science is to uncover the deeper phenomena that explain the studied phenomenon, and then to discover the phenomena deeper than those phenomena—and the ultimate causal factors. Is this a spiritual drive, too?

What are we going to do about it?

5. Which is the better method of finding the *ultimate* sustaining power of the creation—spiritual inquiry or scientific inquiry? Which is more open-ended? Which is less restricted? Could spiritual and scientific inquiries come to similar results?
6. Does the knowledge that Jesus sustains everything transform our ordinary experiences? Why or why not? Hug a pet or hold a plant while you concentrate on the fact that Jesus holds that pet or plant together. Does your experience of the pet or plant change? How?
7. Since our Lord Jesus is sustaining everything, what responsibility do we have to take care of what he sustains? Or does Jesus free us to abuse anything he sustains? Is Preparation a good time to restore our awareness of his presence? And take care?

Learned Lesson: The precious Word of Jesus sustains the world, and we honor him whenever we treasure, protect or improve his creation.

Passion Action: Use free natural light by opening the window blinds at or soon after sunrise—more on the sunny side of your building on cool days, and more on the shady side on hot days. Save energy for light and temperature control—and safe utility bill money as well.

What does it say?

STUDY: Genesis 41:9-16

GOLDEN TEXT: Genesis 41:16 = *Joseph answered Pharaoh, "It is not I. God will give Pharaoh a saving answer."* [literal translation]

What does it mean?

Literally, after abuse suffered at the hands of many and after years in prison, Joseph's first words are "God will give Pharaoh a saving answer," or it could be translated "...an answer of peace." Joseph spoke confidently even before hearing Pharaoh's dream. A massive ecological disaster with wrenching human consequences is about to unfold, potentially devastating Egypt and much of the "known world" around it. Seven years of ruinous famine are about to strike everyone—beginning in just seven years. With time to prepare for the famine through wise distribution of resources and planned food storage, God gives warning to the authoritarian, highly trained leader of the most powerful nation of the known world at that time: the great Pharaoh of Egypt.

1. Why does Joseph speak with such hope? Does God give him insight? Did the "ups and downs" of Joseph's life help shape his *optimistic-realism* perspective?
2. Why are Pharaoh's dream-interpreters so fearful? Why do they not have a hopeful interpretation? What does Joseph have that they are missing?
3. The original Hebrew is stronger, literally saying "God will give Pharaoh an answer of shalom," where *shalom* means peace, wholeness, happiness and welfare. How do you think Pharaoh reacts to Joseph's first comment? How do Pharaoh's advisors, who do not know the Lord, react?
4. After hearing Joseph's interpretation of the dream, Pharaoh appoints Joseph to be the prime minister of Egypt. What does Pharaoh see in Joseph? Why does he think that Joseph has a mastery of *environmental and governmental* solutions?

What are we going to do about it?

5. Does an attitude of hope help us see and act on solutions? When are we more apt to give ourselves thoroughly to solve problems—when things seem hopeless or when we are confident that the Lord will provide a way?
6. Have you had major ups and downs in your life? Has the Lord, the Creator, ministered to you with help and hope when things were very bleak? How does that survivability impact the way you see new challenges to the world around you?
7. Joseph's plan did not reduce the ecological disaster, but rather helped tens of thousands of people survive it. Is preemptive protection of people more important as reducing damage to the creation? Should facing ecological stress have two tracks—protecting people in the disaster and reducing the dimensions of the disaster? Which matters most?

Learned Lesson: The promise of salvation is offered through the Creator's faithful servants in the most unusual circumstances

Passion Action: Skip fast food for the rest of Preparation, or else eat fast food only on special occasions. Eat more vegetables and take time to enjoy more the natural flavors of good food as the Creator intended—and thank him profusely.

What does it say?

STUDY: John 17:1-11

GOLDEN TEXT: John 17:11 = *And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.*

What does it mean?

The extraordinary prayer of Jesus—for us—shortly before Judas betrayed him. The repeated theme was for our unity, even modeled after the unity of Father-Son-Holy Spirit. This passionate and focused prayer has repeatedly been dishonored as men and women so easily start new churches and movements, and separate from other brothers and sisters “in his name.” However, nothing is more important than bringing the Body of Christ to labor together and to speak with one voice—regardless of whether church bureaucracies ever merge. And nothing would be more potent for restoring environmental justice and creation care than for Christians around the world to do and say what is right—together!

1. Jesus' love—and confessing Jesus Christ as Lord—should be more than enough to unite us. Why was Jesus so aware that the temptation to “split, splatter and splinter” was so potent? How did he know that we would divide so easily?
2. What causes us to divide? Jesus urges each of us to take the initiative for reconciliation if there is an offense, whether we caused the offense (Matthew 5:23-26) or if someone else did (Matthew 18:15-20). Can we work with people with whom we disagree?
3. Is Jesus' concept of unity for us merely to sing together, hold hands or hug—or collaboratively to obey his instructions? To care for his creation? To work for environmental justice? To love our neighbors as ourselves?
4. Jesus prays that believers will be as united as he and the Father “*are one*”! What unites the Trinity? Sacrificial love? Uncompromised purpose? Mutual accountability? Eternal righteousness? Would these Divine attributes help empower the Church in creation-care? Would they help embolden our love our neighbors across national and ethnic boundaries?

What are we going to do about it?

5. Do we usually divide over personalities, beliefs, minor behavior issues? Could the bigger issues like surviving ecological disasters and pursuing environmental justice and caring for God's creation help us to become the answers to Jesus' unity prayer?
6. Much of the divisiveness of the Church has been based on ethnic and national differences. Could depleting resources and increased pollution magnify ethnic and national tensions and make the Church more divided? Could Bible-based leaders have the courage to lead toward the potent unity Jesus clearly desires? What would it take?
7. Where is there hope if the Church remains divided on environmental justice and creation-care? Who could step forward? What would Jesus think if we *ignored* his great prayer and *shirked* our responsibilities?

Learned Lesson: The Creator is passionate about the unity of his followers in obedience to him.

Passion Action: How is your church setting a good example for creation-care? Can it collaborate together with other churches to make a greater impact—and to help fulfill Jesus' prayer?

What does it say? –

STUDY: Revelation 22:1-7

GOLDEN TEXT: Revelation 22:1 and 2 = *Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life, with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.*

What does it mean?

Vibrant nature parks are not for earth only. The model city, the heavenly city, New Jerusalem, has a Central Park dominated by the River of Life as well as the Tree of Life, with trunks on both sides of the river.

1. Will we need to eat and drink for nourishment in New Jerusalem? Will it still matter how we take care of plants and animals? Would it be heaven with no responsibilities to the Creator?
2. The Lord himself was the rock from which the good water flowed for the Israelites in the wilderness. Is this partly why water “bright as crystal” flows from the Lord’s throne? (Revelation 22:1)
3. What does it mean to say that the leaves of the Tree of Life are “for the healing of the nations”? What kinds of healing? Is this healing for the nations represented in heaven or on earth? Or both?
4. Is this the same Tree of Life that was once planted in the Garden of Eden? Is this a restoration of purity and innocence?

What are we going to do about it?

5. Can you speculate about the twelve kinds of fruit of the Tree of Life? What fruit do we need now—does God want for us now—and for eternity?
6. If we will be visiting a splendid park regularly in heaven, should we start getting used to healthful parks that we can visit on earth? Can we make our earthly parks more attractive?
7. How are “*the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations*”? Now are there medicinal leaves? Do all leaves reduce CO₂ and exhale precious oxygen? Does it matter how many trees we have? How many trees have you planted or protected?

Learned Lesson: Life-giving vegetation is an eternal provision of the Creator for his children.

Passion Action: Think of all the places you (and others you help recruit) can plant trees (or pay an expert to plant them): at church, in your yard, in a park, at a school, at your place of work, along the highway. *Now start planting!* Remember that trees help us in so many ways: they are beautiful, they provide shade, some provide edible fruit, they all absorb CO₂ and release O₂, they help soil retain water to reduce flooding, and they can be harvested for other good uses later.

What does it say? –

STUDY: John 4:7-14

*GOLDEN TEXT: John 4:10 and 11 = *Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water?"*

What does it mean?

Clean water is essential to life, and the living water of the Holy Spirit is essential to vibrant spiritual living. Jesus caught the Samaritan woman's attention—and our attention—by offering to us the living water, the *real water* for which we especially thirst.

1. What is living water? What satisfies the thirst of the soul? The spirit? How could Jesus offer the living water to this Samaritan woman?
2. How is Jesus' living water similar to physical water? Our bodies are about 90% water. What proportion of our spiritual life is the living water? Should it be 100% living water?
3. Moses taught that the Rock that followed the people of Israel in the wilderness and was their endless, living water source was the Lord himself (Deuteronomy 32:4-18). Did the Rock supply spiritual water or physical water—or both? Does Jesus have this in mind in talking with the woman at the well?
4. Why does Jesus say "gift of God"? What/Who is the gift? What is the price of the living water? Who has paid this price?

What are we going to do about it?

5. What is Jesus' style of evangelism in this text? Is this mere clever engagement, or does it have a point? How can we use Jesus as a model in our "living water" outreach to others?
6. Have you received the gift of living water? Does it continue to flow? If not, what can you do about it? What will Jesus do? Does Jesus' resurrection from death build our confidence in his living water? How?
7. Since so much rests on our abundant supply of clean spiritual and physical water, what should we do to make it more clean, safe and abundant? And then to keep it that way?

Learned Lesson: The living water of the divine presence fully satisfies the deepest human thirsts.

Passion Action: Think of all the ways can you conserve water: take shorter showers, take baths only as an occasional luxury, reduce water-usage of your toilets by placing a brick or a full bottle in the tank, and turn off the water while you are brushing your teeth, shaving or scrubbing your hands. Ask others. What else can you do? What else can you do to honor the Creator for his gift of water?

What does it say? –

STUDY: Genesis 1:26-31

*GOLDEN TEXT: Genesis 1:26 = *Then God said, "Let us make humans in our image, in our likeness, and let them be rulers over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."*

What does it mean?

The context of Genesis 1 and the word used for “dominion” or “rule” in these verses make it crystal clear that the Creator never turned over to man and woman the actual ownership of his earth. God gave us humans the responsibility of taking care of the earth. There can be no grounds for misreading this text to justify selfish exploitation of the Creator’s assets. In fact, Adam and Eve were doing just fine until they started to act as if they owned creation, and could do with the fruit of the trees what they willed. Then they foolishly tried to hide when the real Owner came calling! It is no surprise that Herod wanted to kill the one “born king.” Later, the Governor Pilate seemed clueless when Jesus said that any power Pilate had came from the Creator (John 19:11). Human failures to distinguish stewardship from ownership are legendary.

1. Is being a steward of creation part of being the Creator’s image, as man or woman? Is being the Creator’s stewards a part of our DNA?
2. In this the first recorded use of the word “us,” when God said, “Let us make humans,” is the “us” referring to the Trinity, or is the Creator working with angelic help? Why in the creation of humans did it take a “team”?
3. What personal communications with the Creator help guide our stewardship? How do Scripture reading, prayer, attention to details in creation, and studying nature help us understand how to be better stewards?
4. How does studying the natural sciences help us to achieve good stewardship? Should natural science be taught without stewardship to the Creator?

What are we going to do about it?

5. How many examples can you give of the way your family, church, work, leisure, and other assets of your life include good examples of creation-stewardship?
6. For the next generation, how should we teach and exemplify stewardship of the creation? Are there new opportunities and issues of stewardship?
7. Are we responsible for everything that happens on the earth? What is the extent of our stewardship? Can we take too little responsibility? Should we ever follow Pilate’s example and try to wash our hands of responsibility (Matthew 27:24)?

Learned Lesson: From before the first human was made, our role as steward for the Creator was clearly included in human DNA.

Passion Action: With two or three other informed people that also care deeply about God’s grace and goodness in creation, take an hour or more to talk together in a quiet part of a park or in the neighborhood of your church or home. Pray together for the Creator’s wisdom and jointly consider how to address the two or three primary green issues for your community.

What does it say? –

STUDY: Leviticus 25:8-13 and 35-38

*GOLDEN TEXT: Leviticus 25:10 and 35: ...*Proclaim liberty throughout the land, to all its inhabitants...* ³⁵ *If any of your countrymen become poor and is unable to care for themselves or their families among you, help them as you would also an alien or a temporary resident, so they can continue to live among you.*

What does it mean?

Can the Creator's love be "institutionalized"? For the purposes of social and ecological care, properties in the "promised land" of Israel were to be redistributed every 50 years, so that every family had a place—both as a home and a base of economic power. This Biblical care for everyone's access to the earth's resources was also the affirmation of universal personal liberty. No wonder Leviticus 25:10 was inscribed on the American Liberty Bell, because the Bible text that (1) establishes the divine endorsement of universal liberty (2) requires continuing fair redistribution of wealth. *Liberty is based upon both this divine endorsement and this empowering endowment.* Previously the Israelites were slaves that had no property, and they could not settle in their wilderness wanderings. Such shared access to resources was divinely revolutionary. It was the Creator's primal love put into policy.

1. What do you think the Hebrew people hearing this plan said or thought? How important is it to have your own access to resources—and to be able to pass that right to your children?
2. Why did this empowerment apply to "all the inhabitants," not just to the citizens? After having been slaves so long, was empathy for others important? Does the stewardship of earth's resources pass on to all Adam and Eve's descendents?
3. How is "liberty" here different from just "doing as you please"? Why does it include caring for the earth and caring that everyone shares in earth's resources?
4. In how many different ways is our Creator the "author of liberty"? Can true liberty include abusing the earth? Why or why not?

What are we going to do about it?

5. Are you "liberated" in this Biblical sense? What do you need in order to be liberated? How are you empowered spiritually? Economically? Socially?
6. What empowers your choices? Have you experienced this liberty? How did it happen? How loving is this Leviticus liberty?
7. How can policies—family policies, church policies, social policies, government policies, educational policies—be changed to embrace more of the Creator's gift of liberty? And more of empowerment of others' liberty and to resources?

Learned Lesson: All people are granted by the Creator the endowment of liberty, secured in his DNA as liberator—especially shown in the Exodus and in Passion Week.

Passion Action: To save gasoline and benefit everyone's lungs: do not idle your car more than 15 seconds. Should there be advisory signs at the pick-up areas at church, school, work, the train and such like—asking people to turn off their engines before 15 seconds of idling—for individuals' health, such as asthma, and to save resources for the grandchildren and for the environment?

What does it say? –

STUDY: Isaiah 43:15 through 21

GOLDEN TEXT: Isaiah 43:19 and 20 = *I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. The wild animals will honor me, the jackals and the ostriches; for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people.*

What does it mean?

From the beginning of this selection in Isaiah 43:15, we are brought back to the Creator himself—the Creator of all of nature and also of the nation of Israel. The Lord of all is the one speaking to the people through the prophet Isaiah, saying that he is “*about to do a new thing.*” His creative work continues and includes caring for his people as well as nurturing his animals. His later ministry in the Passion of Jesus Christ is further evidence that he is always ready to do a new thing—for the benefit of all his creation.

1. Does the Creator continue to create? Are the new things the Creator is doing “good,” like at the beginning? Are natural processes shifting? What is the Creator’s work now?
2. When does the Creator put rivers in the desert? Was it only with the miracle rock of Exodus? Can we help him? Is irrigation a godly work? Can we participate in making the Creator’s work “good”?
3. How do the animals honor the Creator? Why are only the jackals and the ostriches mentioned here as giving honor to the Creator? Do they stand out in some way? What other animals honor their Creator? How do we know they honor him?
4. Are the needs of people primary in this text? Within an environmental crisis, what tensions can there be between animal and human welfare issues? How would the Creator resolve the tensions?

What are we going to do about it?

5. Did the Creator do a new thing in Isaiah’s time? In Jesus’ life, death and resurrection for us? Are we ready for him to “*do a new thing*” for us again? Does the Creator change? Can we move with God? How is the Creator different from a stone idol?
6. Twice in two verses we hear about “*rivers in the desert.*” How important is water? Do we truly treasure water? Do we protect water enough? What can we do better?
7. Can “*rivers in the desert*” also be a spiritual metaphor? In what kinds of spiritual deserts are you or others you know? What are the sources of refreshment during spiritual droughts—when we do not feel the Creator’s presence? Where do we find those rivers?

Learned Lesson: There is nothing old about the Eternal Creator ready to do a new thing, and also calling on us to be vibrant enough to move with him

Passion Action: If it is chilly, why not put a sweater on and nudge the furnace thermostat down (or the air-conditioning thermostat up) at least one more degree? You could also set the thermostat far lower and use a high-efficiency space heater in those parts of your home where you actually need heat. The fuel you save will later be greatly appreciated by grandchildren on every continent.

What does it say?

STUDY: Acts 17:22-34

GOLDEN TEXT: Acts 17:29-31 = "Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by human design and skill. In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he set a day when he will judge the world with justice by a Man of his choosing. He gave assurance to all by raising him from the dead." [literal translation]

What does it mean?

As incomprehensibly great as he is—Creator, Source of life, Sovereign of world history—he is always at-hand, always close, in his relationship as loving and empowering Father, as Paul states in Acts 17:27 and 28. Paul concludes his talk with the philosophers of Athens by asserting that it is time to repent from our sins, especially the sin of trying to reinvent God through clever idolatry. Far from being a lifeless idol, the Creator is alive, life-giving, and death-conquering. Paul knew that the report of Jesus' resurrection would not be well-received. However, this true Gospel needed to be spoken, even in Athens, and people were moved to accept the message

1. When talking with philosophers, why was it important for the Apostle Paul to teach the immediate presence of the Creator? And to announce the public proof of the resurrection of Jesus? How did that information contrast with much of religious teaching?
2. Why does the Apostle Paul seem to mix the images—with us living and moving in God and being his descendants as well? Is he referring to God as the Holy Spirit and the Father at the same time? Is this a "stretch" for the Creator?
3. With what you know about Athens and the strong curiosity of the philosophers there, was the Apostle Paul connecting to their worlds? Why is he emphasizing the closeness of the Creator—and his power over death—rather than glorious thoughts and great myths?
4. In verse 24, the Apostle Paul reminds his listeners that the Creator "does not live in shrines made by human hands." Where does he live? Does Paul say? Why does he not have to say it? What difference does it make in our care for his creation?

What are we going to do about it?

5. Since God does not live in human-made shrines or temples—he must live in his creation and in our hearts. Does your heart-shrine take some care to maintain? Does the Creation-Temple need maintenance?
6. Why does the Apostle Paul say that God is master of everyone's history "so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him"? How have your experiences pushed and led you in your search for God? How could we learn better?
7. Why did the report of the resurrection of Jesus become the point of decision at Athens? Is life so precious that the Creator renews and restores it? In our care for our own lives and for his creation, do we model the boundless value God gives to life?

Learned Lesson: All the life-death-resurrection issues hinge on the unique ministry of the Lord Jesus, especially his work during Passion Week

Passion Action: Act in resurrection hope by installing heavier curtains on the windows and sealing up all air leaks in your church, home and place of work. This helps save energy in every season.

What does it say?

STUDY: Philippians 2:5-11

GOLDEN TEXT: Philippians 2:10 and 11 = ...*At the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

What does it mean?

Sadly, much of the talk of civic responsibility among Bible-based people has been a tremendous disservice both to God, to country, and to humanity. Too often people have identified Christian commitment with only one or another urgent issue—rather than the whole authority of God over every dimension of personal and civic life. Abraham Kuyper, the former Dutch prime minister, correctly said that there is not one cubic centimeter in the whole universe, but that God says, “This is mine.” When people get wrapped up into only one or two issues, they often can become tone-deaf to other priorities of God. They themselves then “cherry-pick” what they will do “for God”—making themselves, in effect, Lord, rather than the Lord Jesus Christ. Simply, as the base of the Creation-Care Box says, *there is One Lord, and he has many issues.*

1. The word “Lord” means boss. Over what aspects of his creation is Jesus Christ the boss? Is there anything that is not a “God-issue”? Is he the Lord of the way we pollute and deplete his creation?
2. The word “Lord” is also one of the most common names for God in the Old Testament. What does it mean for the creation that the great Carpenter of Nazareth is also Lord of the universe? Does this make creation-care intensely important to followers of Jesus?
3. The name “Jesus” means “Savior.” Why does this name supersede and hold sway over everything else? Is salvation so needed by everything?
4. Why is it important that every knee should bend in honor of Jesus? Does that include the knees of the evil powers “under the earth”? Does it include every human knee on earth?

What are we going to do about it?

5. Is any power or authority greater than the Lord of creation? Does Jesus’ authority and love matter enough to us to care for his creation—for his name’s sake? Because he is Lord of all, is there any environment where people live that is of no concern to us?
6. Can you imagine all people worshipping Jesus and confessing him as Lord? When will we draw all people to Jesus? Would it help to love every one now, and to take responsibility for the creation in which we all live?
7. What would bring you to your knees before the Lord Jesus Christ in the outdoor environment? At home? Church? Work? Play? Leisure? Could getting on our knees to plant trees or to pick up trash also count as acts of worship? What posture should we take to prepare for Passion Week?

Learned Lesson: Jesus Christ’s humble service and obedience in Passion Week earned him the extraordinary cosmic recognition that only he deserves.

Passion Action: There are many ways to say “Jesus Christ is Lord” in both accountable behavior and affirmations of belief. Review your *Green Journal* (begun at meditation #5) and make marginal notes recognizing many ways your experiences, actions and attitudes affirm the Lord.

What does it say? –

STUDY: John 1:29 through 34

GOLDEN TEXT: John 1:29 = *The next morning he sees Jesus coming toward him and says, “Look! The Lamb of God! The one taking away the sin of the world!”* (literal translation)

What does it mean?

The cosmic salvation so strongly prophesied by John the Baptist speaks to us in our time every bit as much as it did to the people in Jesus’ time. The salvation of the whole world is needed, not merely people’s souls or isolated lives or future realities. Jesus’ ministry and message transformed the world—especially his gift of himself to us on Good Friday and the rest of Passion Week. As the Apostle John writes he has a great appreciation of the world impact of Jesus’ life and ministry. After all, about one quarter of the times the word “world” (the Greek word “cosmos”) is used in Bible are found in the Gospel according to John—most memorably here in John 1:29 and also in John 3:16. (See also John 1:9, 10; 4:42; 6:33; 6:51, and such like.)

1. What is the sin of the world? Did it go all the way back to Adam and Eve rejecting the Creator’s authority? How was the world affected by human sin?
2. Does the way the Apostle John starts his Gospel story (John 1:1-5) give a hint of the cosmic impact of the Gospel and the total impact of Jesus’ saving ministry on all creation? Why was it important to say that the Word created all things?
3. Why call Jesus “the Lamb of God”? What special roles did lambs have in the Old Testament? What was their role in Jesus’ time? Did Jesus play that role? Does his ministry in Passion Week fit John’s and Isaiah’s descriptions (Isaiah 53:7)?
4. Why does Jesus take away the “sin” of the world? Why does it not say the “sins” of the world? Is the main issue the deep sin condition that needs to be repaired and transformed?

What are we going to do about it?

5. How does salvation through Jesus’ ministry impact individual lives? How does it impact families? How does it impact communities? How does it impact the environment? What else does salvation through Jesus’ ministry impact?
6. Is the real issue “sin” rather than “sins”? What is the “sin” that matters? How does that make a difference in your behavior? In your relationship with God?
7. Does the spiritual song “*He’s Got the Whole World in His Hands*” help capture the cosmic size of salvation? What other songs carry this message? How will you celebrate this cosmic sweep of salvation today by talking? Singing? Working? Helping?

Learned Lesson: From the before the beginning of his earthly ministry, Jesus’ role as the holy sacrifice for our sin was understood and announced.

Passion Action: When people know the Lord’s example, and when they see that they can significantly benefit the next generation’s environment, they may give generously to a worthy green cause. Start with your own church or community: Is there anything that all agree should be done if there were the money to pay for it to happen? Replace the old church furnace or central air-conditioning with a modern, high-efficiency unit? Fix or replace aging window units? Commit yourself to a significant gift and call some friends to see what support you can raise for such a timely, mutually-beneficial cause.

What does it say?

STUDY: John 12: 17-26

GOLDEN TEXT: John 12:24 = “*I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.*”

What does it mean?

Right after Jesus’ splendid Palm Sunday entrance into Jerusalem, we have his only recorded encounter with visitors from Europe. They were Greeks who came to worship the Creator in Jerusalem during the Passover Feast that was about to start. Perhaps they had no background in the Old Testament and prophecies about Jesus’ suffering for us. Instead, Jesus turns to shared creation experience to explain to these foreigners what they were about to witness personally: *Jesus’ own astonishing death and resurrection to multiply life for all.* These European tourists came for Passover Week and witnessed the original Passion Week. And what was Jesus’ creation lesson? Specifically: a good death can lead to multiplied, fruitful, life-giving results. Perhaps with this “creation-key” they were prepared to unlock the meaning of the public execution and resurrection of our Lord. After all, some organic principles are shared between the spiritual and the biological dimensions of the creation.

1. Is death the enemy only because of sin (1 Corinthians 15:54-56)? How can death benefit us when it comes to wheat? How does Jesus’ death benefit us?
2. Do you think this simple parable helped these visitors trust his mastery over death and life? Was their experience of Passion Week different from others’?
3. These Greeks came from a country especially known for its high culture, education and sophistication. Why did Jesus use such a simple parable with these cultured people? Does the wheat parable have universal appeal and meaning? Does it apply to us?
4. Does Jesus often teach paradoxically—the last will be first; die to self and you can live and give life, give sacrificially and be blessed? Are there evidences of these paradoxes in creation itself?

What are we going to do about it?

5. Can we reinvent organic multiplication? While we can improve vegetation through careful science and technology, can we recreate it? Can we always trust technology to fix our ecological problems? Or do we need to “protect and improve” created nature?
6. When it comes to the Creator’s organic processes, what works best: arrogance or respect? How did even the Creator utilize one of his created principles about death and life?
7. Does the fruit of the Spirit in our lives require a kind of death to self, too? (Galatians 5:22-23) Can we command either nature or the Holy Spirit to do just what we choose?

Learned Lesson: A pattern of sacrificial death and beneficial resurrection is long established in the creation—in planting and harvesting—and Jesus’ death for us and powerful resurrection is the most cosmic fulfillment of that pattern.

Passion Action: A great way to recycle resources is to “freecycle” (www.FreeCycle.org): keep stuff out of landfills while also graciously benefitting others in your community. Give or get good used items for free. After all, in God’s providence, one person’s trash is another person’s treasure.

What does it say?

STUDY: Psalm 23

GOLDEN TEXT: Psalm 23:4 = *Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for you are with me;*

What does it mean?

As Jesus walked through Passion Week, he was vividly aware of the valley of the shadow of death. He walked that valley for us. In one of the most well-quoted and treasured Psalms, David gives a precious life perspective: no need to fear, because the Lord is always near. He expresses it as a confession to the Lord: *I fear no evil, for you are with me.* The Creator's presence everywhere in creation makes all the difference. It is testimony to the huge burden Jesus carried for us that he even struggled with full awareness of the Creator's presence.

1. Where is the valley of the shadow of death? Have you been there? What was it like? What got you through it?
2. Wherever there is temporal life, there is also death. Is there any place on earth that is not part of the valley of the shadow of death? Is there any place where this Psalm 23 does not speak to us?
3. Evil will occur; there is no Biblical promise of life on earth without evil and suffering. What is the promise of protection? Is God truly always with us?
4. Why is the LORD's presence important? When do we need him? Do we need anything else? How does he show his presence? Why did Jesus conclude the Great Commission with a promise of his presence? (Matthew 28:20)

What are we going to do about it?

5. What difference has the Creator's presence made in your life? Does it help to know that Jesus even went through the experience of death itself? And conquered death, too? Can you share stories of your experiences of his presence?
6. In his last sermon, Moses said, "The Lord is your Life." (Deut. 30:20). Even before he died for us and arose again, Jesus said "I am the Resurrection and the Life" (John 11:25). How does having "Life" with us change the valley of the shadow of death?
7. Is there any "valley" of the pollution or depletion of creation that is off-limits to the Creator's presence? Is there any ecological mistake that is completely hopeless?

Learned Lesson: We can go anywhere with the confidence of the Creator's presence, even if we go through extreme pain, torture or death, because he is there with us.

Passion Action: Your decision can save now lives, save fuel, and greatly benefit the environment: drive slower on the highway. Most cars were designed to be the most efficient at 50-55 miles per hour, and at that speed there are far fewer fatal accidents. You will not only benefit the environment by burning less fuel, at that speed you may even wisely choose to drive less often, and even enjoy it more when you do drive.

What does it say?

STUDY: Revelation 3:14 through 22

GOLDEN TEXT: Revelation 3:14 and 15 = “And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the origin of God's creation: I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either cold or hot.”

What does it mean?

In Revelation 2 and 3, Jesus dictates seven letters—to seven different churches. Each letter addresses particular issues, all of which may be relevant to us. In this letter to the church in Laodicea the Lord Jesus reminds them that he is the Creator, the primary source of the creation. He also calls himself the “Amen” and literally interprets that word in terms of its core Hebrew double meaning, faithfulness and truth. “Amen” is the primary Hebrew word for truth, and Jesus in other places calls himself the Truth. (John 14:6 and John 18:37) Since we have faith and trust because of the truth of God, “Amen” is the primary Hebrew word for faith, too. We trust whatever and whoever is true—especially the Holy One who is Truth. The Hebrew word “Amen” is a great name for the Lord Jesus, because he is the faithful Truth, and he boldly speaks the truth to all. This great Amen finds himself kept outside the church (verse 20), as he was not always welcomed in the ancient Temple either. We could guess whether the church is shortsighted and careless, or perhaps embarrassed by some of the bloody ministry he Lord Jesus accomplished for us in Passion Week. Could the present church be as unfriendly to the historic Lord Jesus as were the religious leaders of his time?

1. In prosperity (verse 17), can church or group become more detached from the creation and from their origins in God? Have they forgotten accountability to the Creator?
2. Why does Jesus say that the people in the church at Laodicea are “neither cold nor hot”? What do we need to do to become cold or hot for the Creator?
3. Why does Jesus say that he is standing outside the church and knocking at the door? Is it possible to “do church” without him? What could keep the Creator “outside”? In Passion Week, why did some religious leaders what Jesus out? Could we make the same mistake?
4. Without a vibrant relationship with the Creator, what does the church become? Why is eating together with the Creator so important (verse 20)? What are the benefits? What does the Creator seek? Does it matter that all the food ultimately came from the Creator?

What are we going to do about it?

5. How can you make it utterly clear that the Creator is always central to your church? What does it mean to invite the Creator in? Is there anything Jesus did or said that would seem “out of place” now in your church? *Sit at the table and write him a brief invitation.*
6. How should we eat together with him? What should be changed? What does he want to talk about at the dinner table? To prepare for dinner with the Creator, what are four timely actions steps? Do we really *want* him to eat with us?
7. What would make the Creator feel utterly welcome in your home? What sends the “wrong messages” to him? How can they be changed? *Discuss this with your family.*

Learned Lesson: Jesus Christ is knocking and seeks our personal attention and fellowship.

Passion Action: Walk through your home and consider “What would the Creator like changed?” Make a list and do at least one of the items today.

What does it say? –

STUDY: John 13:31-38

GOLDEN TEXT: John 13:34 and 35 = "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

What does it mean?

In the context, Judas has just left the Last Supper, shortly after Jesus implied that Judas would deliver him up to the authorities. When he was about to leave, Jesus added, "Do it quickly." The other Apostles were not fully paying attention and virtually missed Jesus' very next statement—where he gave the "new command...Love one another as I have loved you." Oddly, the subject was then immediately changed when Jesus then predicted Peter's denial. Still, the day before Good Friday is appropriately called Maundy Thursday in honor of this great teaching of Jesus on that day. *Maundy* comes from the Latin 'maundatum,' meaning 'command.'

1. In the two short verses of the Golden text, Jesus says "Love one another" three times. Why did he use such repetition and emphasis? Is it a point we need to repeat again?
2. What did Jesus use as his standard of love? How much did he love the Apostles? How much does he love us? How did he demonstrate his love the next day, Good Friday? Can our love for one another reach this standard?
3. Why did Jesus make obedience of this command the defining mark of our discipleship? Did he make any other standard equal to it? Does John 13:35 still apply?
4. Why in the text is this "new command" surrounded by the first references to Judas' betrayal and Peter's denial? How are betrayal and denial of the Creator still issues of human life?

What are we going to do about it?

5. If we "love one another" as Jesus loves us, will we gladly sacrifice convenience and cost for achieving healthy environments for the grandchildren on every continent?
6. Does our disproportionate use of earth's resources border on a betrayal of Jesus and his teachings? Do we ever deny him? What can we learn from Judas and Peter?
7. Why was "Love one another" introduced on the same day as the first holy foot-washing and the first Lord's Supper? Could helping clean-up someone else's ecology count as holy foot-washing today? Please explain. Could protecting someone else's food sources honor the Lord's Supper now? Please explain.

Learned Lesson: Jesus' "new command" has a standard: "...as I have loved you." Our love for others may involve, therefore, sacrificial commitment on our part.

Passion Action: Our creation of CO₂ and other green-house gasses can cause fatal environmental changes where you are and elsewhere in the world. Measurably reduce that hazard by better sealing and insulating your home—and put the furnace thermostat down one more degree, or the air-conditioning thermostat up one more degree.

What does it say? –

STUDY: Matthew 27:45-54

GOLDEN TEXT: Matthew 27:50-53 = *And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split. The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people.*

What does it mean?

What a moment! When the Apostles are paralyzed by fear, when dishonest religious leaders move swiftly to destroy Jesus, when a brutal government tortures Jesus to death, it seems that only the creation responds appropriately: (1) It is dark in the middle of the day (verse 45), (2) the earth quakes, (3) rocks split, and (4) tombs of holy people are opened and (5) life returns to corpses. Even (6) the thick, inert Temple Veil is torn open from the top, as by the Creator himself, opening the holiest place to all. Only God's good creation seems to understand, and then some of the soldiers notice and at least conclude: "Truly, this was the Son of God."

1. Did creation always respect Jesus? Why did everything—from storms to swine, from lunches to lakes—honor and obey him? Why are people so different?
2. Why the darkness? Was Jesus bearing our sins too gruesome for the creation to watch? Who is the light of the world?
3. What caused the disturbance even within the earth, with the earthquake and the opening of specific tombs? Can creation have a convulsion of deep sadness?
4. Why was life restored to some corpses of holy people? Did Jesus death for us on the cross start pouring out life immediately? How does his death give life now?

What are we going to do about it?

5. How good is the creation? How did it respond to Jesus' death so well? Does the creation always honor the Master? Is this one more reason to improve and protect it?
6. Is there anything passive about Jesus' Passion for us? Was Jesus in charge, even from the cross? Is there ever an excuse for us to fail responsibility to the Creator?
7. How can we honor the good creation today for its so splendidly honoring the Creator that first Good Friday? Can you draw from the life-giving death of Jesus to do some good for life in the creation now?

Learned Lesson: The cosmic, tragic significance of Jesus death for us on the cross was understood and expressed by creation itself—while people misunderstood.

Passion Action: Today, in honor of our Lord and in respect for the creation, have a "MCD": a maximum conservation day. Be creative: (1) use a maximum of one light bulb at home or work; (2) take a slightly "cool" shower for less than one minute; (3) walk to work, school or the store even if it is a couple miles; (4) do not cook or eat cooked food; (5) eat half as much in each meal; (6) and *maximally* conserve in other ways—without just staying in bed! Today you can identify with creation's own *grieving* over the cost of our redemption—and even *identify* with how our grandchildren may live if we fail in our creation-care now—all at the same time.

Holy Saturday

Bible-Meditation #40: The Flesh—Jesus' Battle Ground [prayer: awareness]

What does it say?

STUDY: Romans 8:1-11

GOLDEN TEXT: Romans 8:3:= *For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son, in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh.*

What does it mean?

On Holy Saturday we remember the pains and sorrows of Good Friday and anticipate the extraordinary victory of Resurrection. Creation itself is never neutral, for it belongs to God, and it is filled with the presence of its Creator. We know that creation is also a battlefield: sin, lawlessness, crimes, rebellion, perversion and godless behavior all occur within the creation. The reason: *What is done in the flesh matters.* In fact, the potent word “flesh” in this Romans 8 text reminds of many facts, including (1) our flesh’s daily dependence on the Creator, (2) our fleshly temptations that lead us away from him, (3) his coming in the flesh in Jesus Christ, and (4) our flesh and bodies being his temple.

1. How was the law weakened by the flesh? Was the law by itself ever meant to be our Savior? Does what Jesus did on holy week help restore us to God’s intentions.
2. In what ways was Jesus Christ “in the likeness of sinful flesh”? Why was that important? Were there limits?
3. Was the location of the condemnation of sin important? Did the condemnation have to occur in the flesh? What gets condemned—the flesh or the sin that can pollute the good flesh? Can the flesh then be liberated from sin?
4. Is the flesh or the Spirit our guide? Is it a “put-down” to say that “we do not live according to the flesh”? When we live according to the Spirit, are we fully in the flesh? Why not, since he made the flesh? Can we follow the Spirit now anywhere but the in the flesh?

What are we going to do about it?

5. Why does religion so often detach itself from the flesh, rather than redeem and transform the flesh? Why does religion so often detach itself from creation? What would it take to redeem Creation?
6. The flesh is an important part of creation. Does creation’s liberation from sin and selfishness matter? Can we help continue Jesus Christ’s work by actively condemning the sin and selfishness that so often damages creation—polluting and depleting?
7. Does Jesus Christ’s presence as flesh (John 1:14) and in the flesh (Romans 8:3) redeem and raise the value of all flesh, and of the rest of creation? How do we show our esteem for his presence and work in creation?

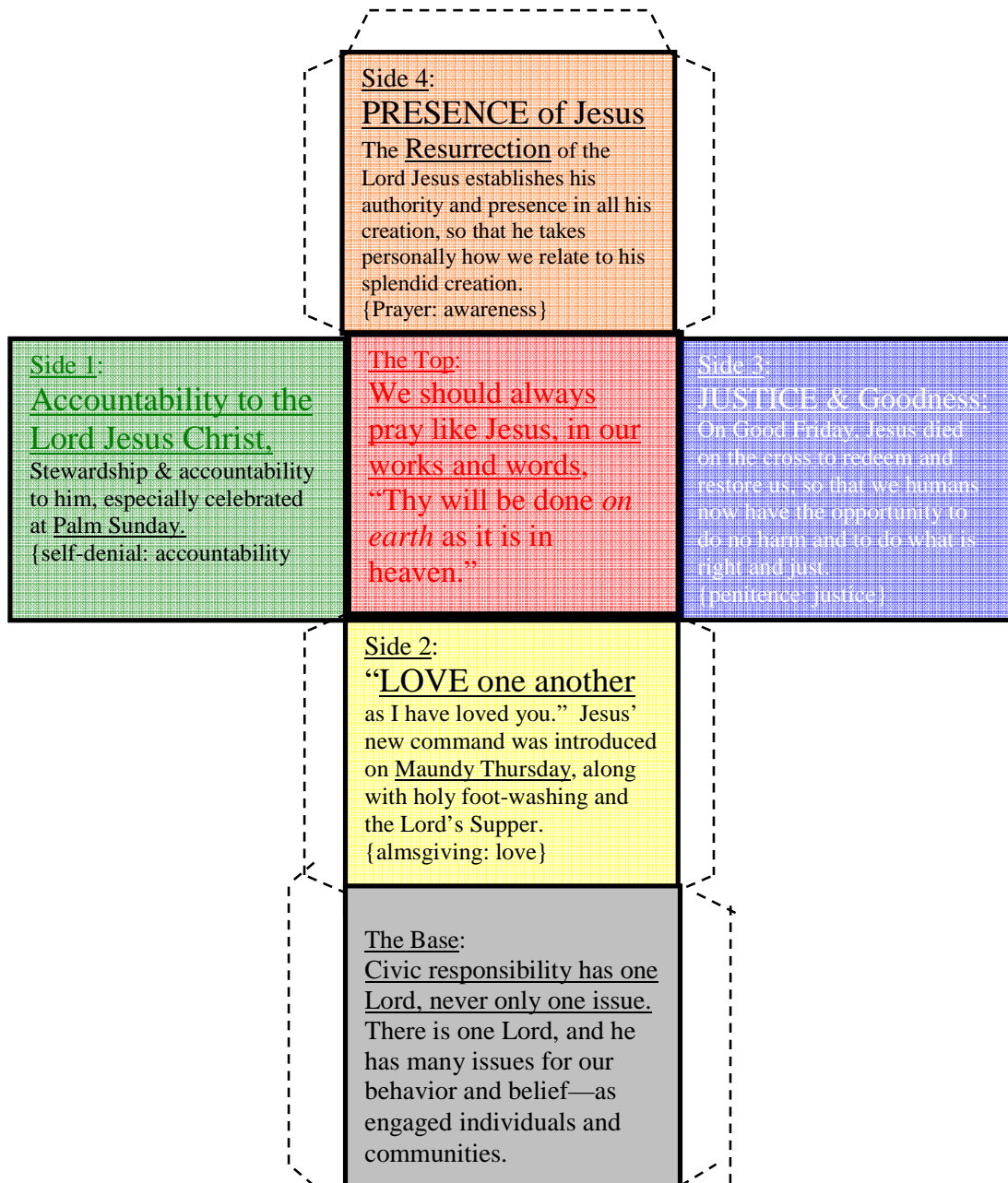
Learned Lesson: The bold, bloody ministry of Jesus Christ from Good Friday through to his Resurrection, Jesus had to do in the flesh to liberate us from the power of sin in the flesh.

Passion Action: Relationship with God is never merely “spiritual.” What we do in the flesh always matters especially. After all, *our own bodies are the Creator’s temples.* Using your *Green Journal* (meditation #5) review your *Green Preparation* experiences, and select those changed behaviors you especially want to continue—to honor the Creator and to express your deep gratitude to him.

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Appendix A: Solution to the Creation-Care Box-Puzzle:

One Lord—Never One Issue
One Life, One Shalom, One Earth, One Humanity
The Four Sides of Creation-care



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Thanks to Ms. Stephanie Skiles for splendid graphic work.

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Appendix B:

Interconnections of Creation-Care with other Biblical Principles

Creation-care is an essential part of an intertwined bundle of Biblical behavioral principles for civic engagement, including these especially significant seven:

1. Seek reconciliation between all people and the Creator, between each human person and group, and between all people and creation. By God's grace, redeem local Church, friendships, communities, and national activities to create affirmation, understanding and collaboration—to celebrate sincerely the truths that all people come from one Creator, one blood, one set of original parents—and that all can be for one Kingdom of God and one Church, the fully functional Body of Christ. Too often ecological policy has divided races, favoring one over another. It is time for ecological policy to favor the whole human race.

2. Protect religious freedom and liberty of conscience. God has ordained the two co-existing institutions of church and state as distinct and independent of each other with each having its own areas of responsibility. We affirm the principles of religious freedom and liberty of conscience. The church has the right to promote care of God's creation. "The earth is the LORD's" was first a motto for God-based social transformation (Exodus 9:29). Alternatively, if we do not protect and improve the creation, we leave more opportunity for political tyranny and the abuse of religious liberty—witness the strength of the Islamic fundamentalists and the religious intolerance they propagate as they exploit petroleum monopolies.

3. Nurture family life and protect children. From Genesis onward, the Bible tells us that the family is central to God's vision for human society. Marriage is the covenant relationship between one man, one woman and One God—and it is the basic building block of society. It is in the family (whether intact or not) that we learn mutual responsibility: we learn to live in an ordered society with complementary and distinct roles. Shortages of resources and ecological disasters put at risk the sacredness and vitality of family life, so that creation-care is measurably pro-family for every continent.

4. Protect the sanctity of human life and safeguard its nature. Because God created human beings in his image, all people share in the divine dignity. In the Bible, God sometimes reveals his calling and care of persons before they are born, so the pre-born share in this dignity. Abortion, euthanasia, and unethical human experimentation can severely violate this God-given dignity of all human beings. The active care for every human life must not stop at birth, but merges into active, holistic creation-care. After all, the ecology of humans that have been born is *at least as important* as the ecology of the unborn.

5. Promote economic justice and support protections for the poor. Since the poor of our country and the world are the first to be hurt by pollution, resource depletion, global warming and rising sea-levels, creation-care will help to reduce some of the harmful effects of poverty and provide fair resources access.

6. Recognize and protect human rights. Curiously, the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) did not include safe environment, clean air, fair share of well-managed resources, or any other environmental rights in any of its 30 articles. However, environmental rights are basic to the rights that are claimed in the Declaration. For example, without a healthy and safe environment, the basic right to life is compromised, the basic right to liberty is severely limited, and the basic right to the "security of person" is meaningless. By any measure, creation-care is increasingly central to the protection of human rights.

7. Reduce violence and the motivations for violence, and promote non-violent conflict resolution. Wars and violence in the future will more likely be related to creation-care issues, especially if the environment is increasingly polluted and resources become more dramatically depleted. Peace-loving people must be proactive for creation-care deliberately to reduce the temptations for war and the disruptions of civil life caused by a harmed ecology.

Most of these points are outlined also in the National Association of Evangelicals' excellent 2004 document [For the Health of the Nation](#). See www.nae.net

Appendix C:

References and Sources will be added here...

- Excellent web addresses*
- Excellent books from Biblical point of view*
- Quality DVDs*

...from the Green Bible Society, World Evangelical Alliance, and other responsible sources.

Appendix D: Meet the author of *Green Preparation*, the founder of the *Green Bible Society*

Paul de Vries, Ph.D.

Paul de Vries, PhD is a speaker, author and president of the New York Divinity School (NYDS). NYDS is “*Christ-centered, Bible-based, Spirit-led,*” and it offers leadership and ministry training for pastors and lay people. Dr. de Vries also serves as an at-large member of the governing *Board of the National Association of Evangelicals*, actively representing about 40 million evangelical Americans.



Dr. de Vries earned the Ph.D. (in philosophy, 1978) from the University of Virginia, also completing substantial graduate training in education and in ministry. For 30 years he has led in evangelical higher education administration, *designing innovative programs to help incarnate enduring Biblical truth with people’s learning, loving, leading and living.*

Dr. de Vries founded and directed (1983-1989) the Center for Applied Christian Ethics (CACE) at Wheaton College (Illinois) where he was also an associate dean and a tenured professor. CACE was the first ethics center at any protestant college. He also earlier founded and directed the first Office of Volunteer Community Service at the University of Virginia and led in establishing an affordable housing information network in Illinois—all of which remain thriving programs. He was the lead American scholar in the Moscow-based “Ten Commandments Project” (1989-1995), and he is a

charter-member of both the Society for Business Ethics and of the Society of Christian Philosophers. He is also the founder of the International Research Institute on Values Changes, with unique work accomplished mainly in Moscow, Beijing and New York.

For six years, he held the endowed Chair in Marketplace Ethics at The King’s College (NY), and after 9/11 he was appointed director of the Counseling and Training Taskforce for NetworkNYC, a large cluster of evangelical Churches and ministries. He was the only protestant addressing (or even invited to) the bicentennial of Jesuit education in America, attended by 2,000 Catholic scholars (1989), and he and a team of Jesuits won second place for the Catholic Book Award (1990). He is properly credited for inventing (1982) the term “*methodological naturalism,*” a concept that clarifies a central issue in the philosophy of science and in the continuing evolution debates. Dr. de Vries is also honored in *Madison’s Who’s Who* and in *Swarthmore’s Who’s Who*.

Dr. de Vries is the lead author of four books, *The Taming of the Shrewd* (1992, Thomas Nelson) *Ethics Applied* (1999, Simon and Schuster), *Business Ethics Applied* (2000, Pierson Education), *Manufacturer’s Manual* (2006, Friends of the Earth), and the author of dozens of published articles, available upon request. He is also both an advisor and a contributor to the *Green Bible* (2008, HarperOne), and he has consistently helped draw public attention to key Biblical issues—including especially creation care, racial reconciliation, human life, religious liberty and marriage.

Dr. de Vries founded the round-table discussions with the NY Board of Rabbis and NY Evangelicals. He has started the Achievement Centers for Excellence, partnering with leading churches and universities to address the education gap affecting many minority and inner city youth.

Dr. de Vries is the husband of Victoria de Vries, father of Tor and Chrissa, and father-in-law of Bonnie—all of whom are devout Christians who have earned the highest degrees in their professions. Dr. and Mrs. de Vries also have two grandchildren: Aiden Victor (2004) and Eleanora Jean (2008). *Most importantly, Paul de Vries loves the Lord Jesus Christ, and he seeks to honor, glorify, please and enjoy the Lord God in and through everything.*

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Church Station, Box 3277, New York, NY 10008 917-668-4000