



Date: 22<sup>nd</sup> & 29<sup>th</sup> September 2024

Theme: **Caring for Creation: Rest for the Earth**

Bible Reading: **Leviticus 25:1-12**

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## PREPARATION FOR GROUP LEADERS

Please remember to contact your group beforehand to remind them of the date and time of your meeting. Please make yourself familiar with all the material and Bible passage. The hymns *God in his love for us lent us this planet* (Singing the Faith **727**) and *Touch the earth lightly* (StF **729**) may also be particularly helpful to draw upon.

## PREPARATION FOR ALL PARTICIPANTS

We are currently in the season of 'Creationtide' which runs from 1<sup>st</sup> September until 4<sup>th</sup> October, a period of time set aside within the wider season of Ordinary Time (from Trinity Sunday to the Sunday before Advent). Creationtide is a specific time to think about the world that God has created and our responsibility as stewards of creation to care for it.

Before the session, either reading your Bible at home, or borrowing a copy from the church, **please read Leviticus 25:1-12** (Old Testament – third book). Think about what the reading may say about balance and rest for the earth, and come with your thoughts so that these can be shared in the group.

## STARTING THE SESSION: FINDING OUR ROOTS

As you gather together, talk about your answers to the following questions:

- 1) *What is your favourite part of God's world?*
- 2) *What concerns you most about the climate crisis?*
- 3) *How are you caring for God's creation?*
- 4) *Is your church working towards an Eco award?  
Is this raising your awareness of what you can do?*

## A PRAYER

Awesome God,  
we thank you for the beauty of your creation which we see all around us;  
for all that brings us pleasure and delight,  
and that makes us think "How great are you God."  
Forgive us for those times when we have taken your creation for granted,  
sometime acting thoughtlessly or misusing the gifts you have entrusted to us.  
By your Holy Spirit help us to see what we can do  
to care for creation and to enable the Earth to rest.  
May you inspire our conversation and discussion  
that we may know you at work in our lives and our world.  
In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

## READING THE SCRIPTURES

Read together the Bible passage: **Leviticus 25:1-12**

### Background Information:

Leviticus is seen as a book of laws or instructions, and in this passage there are instructions about the Sabbath year and the Year of Jubilee focussing on giving rest to the Earth. The Lord speaks to Moses on Mount Sinai (the normal place where the Tent of Meeting was located), and Moses is given clear instructions to sow the fields, prune the vineyards and gather the crops for 6 years and then for the seventh year to leave the land unworked and let nature take its course. John Goldingay explains: "One of their underlying assumptions is that the land belongs to God. People recognize that the week belongs to God by holding themselves back from one day in seven, and that offspring belong to God by dedicating the first fruits of the womb, and that the harvest belongs to God by giving tithes, and they recognize that the land belongs to God by keeping off it for one year in seven."

I loved history at school and took it to degree level. One of the things that I distinctly remember being taught in secondary school is the feudal system and crop rotation; where land is divided up and used to grow different crops each year with part of the land being left fallow. This rotated so there were always two plots that were growing and one plot left fallow. The Israelites didn't practice crop rotation but the idea of the sabbath year enables the land to recover. Today we might ask: How much does the Earth need to recover?

Leviticus 25 also introduces the year of jubilee. Following seven sabbaths of years (49 years) there was to be another year – the 50th year – where the reset button is pressed, and freedom is proclaimed throughout all the land. God the Creator has set a pattern that enables restoration and recreation. God is concerned with new beginnings, and we have been offered a new beginning through Jesus, who sets us free. But I believe that God also offers restoration and healing to the Earth, that the world may be whole. **Romans 8:22-23** gives a picture of the Earth groaning, longing for that new beginning.

## DIGGING DEEPER

*Do you find it helpful to have a season to particularly think about creation and our care of it?*

*How does the worship that is led in your church help with thinking through what it means to be good stewards of all that God has given to us? (Or would you like to see more on this subject?)*

*What examples have you seen of giving rest to the land? How did you react when you saw it?*

*What challenges you as you reflect upon the passage?*

*In our global efforts against climate change, can you imagine what a difference it would make to have a 'Sabbath rest' from all our unnecessary energy use (perhaps one day per week)? How could we work together to give the earth a regular rest?*

*What small changes could you make to care for God's world? Or what ideas do you have to give the earth a rest, that you might commit to as a group, or a family, or a church?*

## ACTIVITY

The next time you go for a walk (however long or short) take time to notice the changing colours of the season, the sounds of creation, and any animals or creatures you see. Give thanks to God for all that you see and hear. Take a bag, and if you encounter rubbish, if you are able, you may like to pick it up (washing hands after!) and reflect on how we don't always care for everything we have been given.

## PRAYING TOGETHER

Together as a group, spend time in prayer reflecting on the beauty of God's creation and our responsibility to care for God's world. You may find it helpful to draw on some of the words in *Singing the Faith* to resource your prayers (hymns 693, 705, 708, 713, 727, 729, 730 may be useful).