

Park Street Church Green Initiative

In Praise of the Creator Devotional



Introduction

We hope that you will use this devotional to remind yourself of the glories of God shown in creation, to commit your green efforts to God, and to consider new ways that you can serve God.

--The Park Street Green Initiative Team

Sunday

Praising the Creator

God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground – everything that has breath of life in it – I give every green plant for food." And it was so. God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning – the sixth day.

--Genesis 1: 28-31

For the Lord is the great God, the great King above all gods. In his hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to him. The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land. Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker; for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care. --Psalm 95: 1-7

God made all: heaven and earth, land, sea and sky, vegetation and animal. Humans were made last, in God's own image. God first ordered humans to increase, to fill the earth, to subdue it, and to rule over all creatures. Then he gave us control of all his creation.

What are we to make of God's direct command of ruling over the earth? One interpretation is to rule over all the earth as a victorious army would after defeating a rival. But why would God deem everything he had made to be "very good (v. 31)" and then tell us to go conquer it as if we were an army? It seems much more likely that God's instructions are for us to be caretakers or stewards of all his creation. He has left us in charge of an earth full of goodness, and we are called to make decisions as to how to care for all He has created.

Questions for consideration:

- What are your favorite aspects of God's creation? (The view from the top of the White Mountains? A star-studded sky? The sound of the ocean along a rocky coast?)
- How can you be a better caretaker of God's creation?

Andrew Glenn is a member of the Green Initiative. He led the drive for a better recycling program at Park Street Church.

Suggested Prayer:

Give thanks to God for all of your favorite aspects of his good creation.



Monday

Consumer Responsibility

By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you will return. --Genesis 3: 19

One of the effects of our consumer culture is our alienation from the way and the places in which things are produced. Our first contact with the things we consume is when we buy them. How they got there and from where is not supposed to be our concern. The FDA and product brands are there to give us confidence in the quality and safety of what's being offered. This system has been very effective in ensuring adequate supplies to ever growing populations, but I believe that it has two problems that Christians cannot be indifferent about.

First, it shifts the responsibility for good stewardship away from the consumer onto large, anonymous institutions - the government, the retailers, the producers. In theory, these are supposed to do the right thing, and they are accountable to the public. When we stand before that wall of cereal boxes in the supermarket, our desire to be informed and do right doesn't go very far. All we can do is try to read labels and choose between products. It is all but impossible to know or have meaningful influence on where the money goes after the purchase. What sort of exploitation or prosperity does it promote? What does it do to livelihoods, communities or the environment?

Second, this system eliminates any notion of community. It doesn't just shield the producers and the consumers from each other, but it treats them as exchangeable entities. The more it succeeds to create standardized tastes, the more efficiently it can serve them. Of course, there is a revolt against this dehumanizing tendency underway. That's why micro-brews are popular, "hand crafted" is a desirable quality and Dell laptops can be ordered with a customized lid. We want that personal touch, or that feeling of exclusivity, and may even be willing to pay extra for it. But in the end we feel entitled to being served in exchange for our money. The process doesn't require any personal involvement, relationship or sacrifice.

How are we to remain thankful and answerable to God our provider? My point here is not to romanticize agrarian self-sufficiency or the good small-town life of a bygone era, but to reflect on what has been lost, and to suggest ways to stay in touch with nature and each other in our purchasing decisions. As an example, I'm thinking of the initiative that sprang up in our neighborhood to purchase eggs. The idea is simple: Every other week, one of the 20-odd participating parties drives to the farm in Bedford to pick up the pre-ordered amount of eggs. These are placed in a secured cooler on someone's porch, where everyone picks up their eggs and leaves the money in a box. The savings may not be vast, but the project has connected people in our community and led to conversations about what we value and why. Everyone's honesty and dependability is required. We have experienced the natural variety of the product; there isn't always the number of "large" eggs that we want. All of us have personally seen the place and talked to the people who produce our food.

Joel Roth-Nater is a former elder of Park Street Church and a member of the Green Initiative. He enjoys riding his bike to work.

Suggested Activities:

- Learn to make something you would otherwise purchase.
- Teach yourself a manual skill and connect with others doing the same.
- Involve yourself personally in the procurement of a product that you usually take for granted.



Tuesday

Service Through Simplicity

When Jesus saw the crowd around him, he gave orders to cross to the other side of the lake. Then a teacher of the law came to him and said, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go."

Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." --Matthew 8: 18-20

A few weeks ago our friends Tim & Jen visited just prior to a major transition. They were leaving their safe & comfortable church where Tim was a pastor for more than five years to move to Galveston, TX to serve the victims of Hurricane Ike in whatever way they could. They had no idea what their job would be, how long they'd be in Texas, or where they were going to live. But they did know they were called, and that was enough for them.

Tim & Jen's willingness to uproot their lives was a blessing to us and caused us to examine what it means to truly follow Jesus. While for some this may mean packing everything up and moving someplace altogether new, for us, right now it means:

- Making choices toward simplicity through buying less, and therefore producing less waste
- Considering where the things we do buy will end up when we're done (i.e. can it be recycled?)
- Enjoying activities, like starting a vegetable garden, that remind us of God's abundant provision
- Committing all of these activities to God, so that in all that we do we focus on Christ.

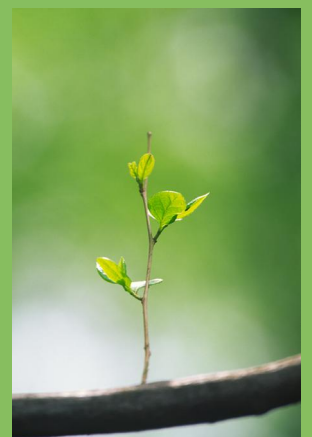
Suggested Activity:

Spring clean your closet and donate anything you're not using.

Suggested Prayer:

Ask for contentment with what God has given you, and seek ways to worship him that are spiritually and ecologically fulfilling.

Brian and Courtney Bassett are involved with the Green Initiative and Park Street Union, and Courtney is one of Park Street's wedding coordinators. They live in Natick, MA.



Wednesday

Revelation Through Creation

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world. In the heavens he has pitched a tent for the sun, which is like a bridegroom coming forth from his pavilion, like a champion rejoicing to run his course. It rises at one end of the heavens and makes its circuit to the other; nothing is hidden from its heat. --Psalm 19: 1-6

For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. --Romans 1: 20

I am never more convinced of God's existence in the world and in my heart as when I contemplate creation. Mountains and trees are what do it for me, though I've also been moved to praise by the intricacy of a fungus clinging to life on the side of a tree. Whenever I'm backpacking, I find myself unconsciously humming praise songs as I see wonder after wonder. When I'm walking on a city street, a wisp of cloud or strong oak reminds me to pray to the Creator. Whether it is a cat's purr, a stunning storm, the complex simplicity of DNA, a flaming maple, the warmth of the sun, the leap of a dolphin, or the way that gravity tethers us to the Earth, I believe that something in God's creation touches everyone. Whatever it is that touches you in creation, follow that feeling to a greater understanding of the Creator.

Creation offers a glimpse of his character, of his power, glory, and provision. Through creation, God both cares for us and reminds us that what control we have he granted us; he gave us farming and storms that destroy the farms. We revel in the beauty of a crushable butterfly and of the untouchable stars; we serve a God who cares about a hair falling from our heads yet is immeasurably greater than us. The mysterious universe even gives us an example of how we can love something beyond our comprehension. Just as an artist's or engineer's work illuminates their character, so the entire universe whispers and shouts about its creator.

When I realize the care and power that God put into making the world and that it offers a clouded mirror of its creator, I must take care of that world.

Abigail Gabrielse is involved in Café, FOCUS, and the Green Initiative at Park Street. She loves backpacking.

Suggested Activity:

Write and pray a psalm of praise about some aspect of God's creation.

Suggested Prayer:

Thank God for providing a glimpse into his character through creation.



Thursday

Sharing God's Bounty

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments. --Matthew 22: 37-40

I love to fly fish for trout. I love nearly everything about it: the insects, the rivers, the geology that formed the land, the fish that live and spawn there, the methods of reading the water, the perfect cast and realistic presentation of a dry fly.

Most trout are found in beautiful regions where the rivers are clean and the natural world has remained unharmed or, at the very least, set apart and protected. There was a time, however, when anglers (aka fishermen/women) struggled to maintain the natural condition of trout waters. In the intermountain west, trout rivers supplied farmers with much needed water for their crops, while anglers needed only minimum flows to support trout populations through the winter. Years ago when the debate began, a compromise seemed impossible. But over time it became clear neither side was backing down. Eventually the two sides reached an agreement and, for the first time, began regarding each other as neighbors.

Jesus tells us, "Love your neighbor as yourself." Imagine how hard it must have been for the farmer to love his angler neighbor who wanted to limit his irrigation. Or imagine how difficult it was for the trout angler to love his farmer neighbor who cared so little for the health of the river. It is likely that in the process of reaching a resolution, very few of those in the heat of the debate actually loved their neighbors; however, the practical aspect of Jesus' command prevailed. The solution of respectful coexistence allowed both parties to win. The farmers received more than enough water to irrigate their fields and the anglers protected the trout habitat with consistent flows throughout the year.

Obedying this command is difficult to be sure, especially when vast differences separate us. But for the Christian, joyfully submitting to one another in love should be a way of life. Loving our neighbor not only serves a very practical function but more importantly, it reflects Jesus' love in our lives.

Matthew Lenig is an elder of Park Street Church and a member of the Green Initiative.

Suggested Activity:

Consider your outdoor activities' impact on your neighbors.

Suggested Prayer:

Ask God to open your eyes to ways you can love your neighbor and help others enjoy creation.



Friday

Looking for Spring

For by him all things were created... all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. --Colossians 1: 16,17

I am making everything new. --Rev. 21: 5

Spring is an exciting time, especially for people who live in the frozen north, as I do in Wisconsin. Today, returning to our house, my wife and I paused and glanced over our flower beds. She gave a little cry of joy as hidden beneath dead leaves and other leftovers from winter was a spot of green. As we bent to look, we saw another and then another: the first signs of resurrection. Frozen in below-zero soil just a few weeks ago, the flowers are coming back to life. As we looked around what was still a pretty dismal landscape, we realized that these tiny dabs of green are not the only sign of hope. We looked carefully at the branches of the lilac bush in the corner. Sure enough – it had buds. We heard the unfamiliar sound of birds chirping in bare branches; as if, like Aslan, they can sing the leaves back onto the trees.

The miracle of springtime is unfolding all around us. No matter how cold and endless the winter has seemed, and no matter how weak our faith, spring always comes. It comes with an explosion of new life, with fresh light, with vibrant new colors, with sounds of birds and water and melting snow. It is the sights and sounds of life overwhelming death. The outcome may have seemed in doubt a short time ago, but today the end is clear. Winter's defeat is inevitable. Spring is going to win.

After a long Wisconsin winter, that fact by itself would be enough for me. But there is more. I remember the words of St. Paul in Colossians 1: "All things were made by Him, and for Him...and in Him all things hold together." When I look at a new leaf unfolding from a bud, or watch a bird scratching for food, I realize that I am seeing God create life once again. The power of Jesus himself is unfurling that leaf, and his joy reverberates in the bird's happy chirps. I know that as I ponder the mysteries of a leaf's tiny veins I am studying God's word – his revelation of himself in Creation – just as surely as if I were reading John 3:16 in the original Greek.

And there's even more. For as winter seems to assault and defeat the forces of life, God's creation is under assault in our world today. On every side, from toxins in the water to destruction of great forests to the melting of glaciers that have lasted for thousands of years, it feels as if winter is upon us. It is a winter of sin, selfishness, greed, cruelty.

But there is hope! Winter can't hold back spring, and the forces of evil that would destroy God's good creation cannot hold back his ultimate purpose of restoration and redemption. Why? Because God is the one doing it, and because he is doing it by the same power that brought us salvation. Things may look grim from time to time, but when spring comes, it always feels as if it was inevitable. Because it was. That's why I am doing everything I can to start to heal creation now. How about you?

Rev. Ed Brown is the Director of Care of Creation Inc, and the author of *Our Father's World: Mobilizing the Church to Care for Creation*.

Suggested Activity:

Take lots of walks as spring comes to your neighborhood. Let every new leaf and every bird's song draw your soul toward God who made it all.

Suggested Prayer:

"Thank you, Lord, for bringing spring and new life into the world one more time and for reminding us of the day when you will make all things new. Have mercy on all of your fallen creation, speed your return, and grant us strength to join you in working toward the day of restoration."



Saturday

Considering Your Impact

But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side...But a Samaritan...when he saw him...had compassion. He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him...Which of these...do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise." --Luke 10: 25-37

A sweater isn't really just a sweater.

We recently saw a beautiful cashmere sweater on sale. After admiring its stunning appearance, soft touch, and low price, we recalled hearing about damaging environmental and social impacts of cashmere production. We went to Google to prove our sweater wasn't harmful but found the opposite. The Chinese cashmere trade is causing enormous damage—over-grazing of cashmere-producing goats has turned grasslands into deserts and led to some of the worst dust storms on record, unleashing pollution throughout China and neighboring countries, and even reaching Los Angeles. We faced a tough decision: should we really not buy the sweater?!

Who is my neighbor?

As we weighed this decision, we remembered Jesus' story of the good Samaritan. When told, "love your neighbor as yourself", we desperately search for a more comfortable path to obedience, asking "But who is my neighbor? I live in Boston, not China! And even if they are my neighbor, what can I really do to serve someone thousands of miles away?"

In today's interdependent global village, members of a far off land are in a real sense my neighbors. Jesus appeals to us to be like the Samaritan – while it may not seem like the same tangible compassion, our "sacrifice" of not buying the sweater – or other products that cause environmental or health damage – directly improves our global neighbors' well-being and can be a true form of love.

However, the time, energy, and inconvenience of investigating the impact of our multitude of purchase decisions seems daunting, much as the task of caring for the man on the road must have seemed to the priest. He chose to pass on the other side of the road, possibly thinking, "I would like to help, but I have much to do and helping this man will drain my time, energy, and money."

But we mustn't walk on the other side of the road. Instead, as Paul said, "whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." Let us press on to be consumers to the glory of God, showing love to our global neighbors and honor to Christ by informing ourselves, consuming less, and considering our impact on the earth and on others as we make our purchase decisions.

Jeremy and Tracy Foster started and continue to run the Park Street Green Initiative.

Suggested Activity:

Pick an area of consumption in your life, and seek to better glorify God with your purchase decisions.

Suggested Prayer:

As you eat a meal, shop at the store, or balance your checkbook, give thanks to God for the complex global system that provides our daily bread and beyond. Ask for the wisdom and discipline to inform yourself to make good purchase decisions. Ask for blessing upon each of the many hands and ecosystems around the world that contribute to the products you buy.



**Thank you for celebrating God's creation with us.
Please go to www.parkstreet.org/green
for further resources.**