

## Longer Articles: Care for God's Creation

### ***Caring for God's Earth: Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle***

On average, US citizens consume their weight in stuff every day. While we don't drink, buy, or use that amount of material directly, this is the per capita sum of all we consume daily in our nation – metals, minerals, fuels, food, wood, etc. That's over 60 times the consumption of a typical person in the world's poorest nations. Sound like a lot of stuff? Keep in mind that the typical product requires 30 times its weight in materials to produce, ship, and market. All this consuming results in each American discarding 1,300 pounds of trash per year.

If everyone on earth consumed at the rate of the world's consumer class (the wealthiest 20% of the world's population), we would need two more planets like this one to meet our needs.

We can make a difference by adopting a simple philosophy of *reduce, reuse, and recycle*. Buy less and consume less. Avoid products that damage the environment. Here are some specific ideas:

- Pack lunches in reusable containers rather than in paper or plastic.
- Use glasses or mugs rather than disposable cups.
- Take your own bags to the grocery store; buy products in bulk.
- Use cloth napkins and towels instead of paper products.
- Reuse glass and plastic containers.
- Give old clothing, furniture, and other used household items to charities. Try to satisfy your own household needs at second-hand or consignment stores.
- Compost food and yard wastes.
- Recycle used oil.
- Reuse paper that has one-side clean for taking notes, copying items for your files, or for printing e-mails.
- Participate fully in your community's recycling program. Pick up a can and recycle it; recycling one aluminum can saves six ounces of gasoline. Recycling one glass bottle saves 400 watts of electricity.
- Buy products made of recycled materials. For example, paper with 100 percent post-consumer content uses no wood, creates 35% less CO<sub>2</sub>, uses 50% less water, produces 50% less waste, and demands 45% less energy!

*"No one can serve two masters ... You cannot serve God and wealth."* -Jesus. Live simply, that all may simply live!

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### ***Caring for God's Earth: Energy for Life***

God calls people of faith to heal and protect all of creation, and to care for all of humanity. And yet, we in America live in a society that consumes more than 25 percent of the world's fossil fuels, while we make up only 5 percent of the world's population. We own 35 percent of the world's vehicles, and emit nearly one-fourth of

global carbon output. Meanwhile, approximately two billion people around the world do not have access to electricity.

The world is unstable because of the human dependence on energy resources (as exemplified by conflict in the Gulf). The world's reserves are threatened by our overindulgent lifestyles. And our use of energy from fossil fuels (such as oil) is constantly polluting the environment and hence, according to the Global Tomorrow Coalition, "harming human health, causing acid rain damage to entire ecosystems, and increasing the buildup of atmospheric carbon dioxide and the likelihood of global warming and climate instability." (*The Global Energy Handbook*, p. 192)

Every time you switch on a light, a computer, or an air conditioner, you use electricity. Every time you drive a car, you use fossil fuels and emit carbon dioxide pollutants (every day America's cars belch four billion pounds of CO<sub>2</sub> into the air!). Here are some simple lifestyle changes that could make a big difference in our energy consumption and, eventually, global justice:

- Walk or ride a bicycle to work, to church, to the store ... share rides and limit the number of car trips per day. Every mile you don't drive is a pound less CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere.
- Strive to make one day each week a "car-free day".
- Own vehicles that get 30 MPG fuel efficiency or better.
- Turn off the lights and invest in low-watt fluorescent light bulbs (20 percent of America's electricity is consumed by light bulbs).
- Invest in energy-efficient appliances.
- Run the dishwasher only when full, and turn it off before the drying cycle.
- Hang clothes to dry. Electric dryers are hard on clothes and can use 5 percent of household energy. Hanging up clothes can save 50 pounds of CO<sub>2</sub> per week.
- Install insulation, weather stripping, caulking, and storm windows.
- Adjust the thermostat in your home during the workday and while you are asleep.
- On hot days, block out the sun in warm rooms by closing windows and blinds. Open windows during the cooler evening hours. Plant deciduous trees on the sunny side of the house.

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### ***Caring for God's Earth: Water, Oh Precious Water***

Of all life-sustaining elements, water is the most essential. A person can survive only one week without water; and only earth, of all the planets, has water for the support of life as we know it. We must recognize that we now live in a time of water crisis. Fresh water makes up only 0.8 percent of the earth's total water supply, and much of that fresh water is contaminated. Of 4 billion people on earth, 1 billion drink contaminated water and 2 billion are without excreta disposal facilities. 25 million people die each year in developing countries because of water-related disease; three-fifths of them (15 million) are children.

In many places, water tables are falling much faster than they can be replenished by rainfall, primarily due to irrigating crops. Per capita water use in the U.S. is 1300 gallons per day (100 gallons of this in household, remainder in agriculture and industry – it takes 8 gallons of water to grow one tomato in an irrigated field).

Meanwhile, the fishes of the oceans are in decline. One-third of the U.S. estuarine waters are now closed to shell fishing because of habitat disruption. Besides pollution, over-fishing is also taking its toll on the world's fish stock; since 1970 the world fish catch per person has fallen 13 percent (*Toward Organic Security*).

What can we do? Here are some practical ways to be better stewards of that miraculous life-sustaining gift from God, our precious water.

- Conserve water by taking shorter showers and by installing water-efficient showerheads and toilets.
- Fix all leaks around your house, for example in toilets and faucets.
- Collect rainwater and gray water from your house for outdoor and indoor plant watering.
- Design outdoor landscaping to thrive in your local climate (and thus your yard will not need water other than God's natural rainfall).
- Cut back on the amount of water you allow to flow through your faucets each day. Don't leave the water running to rinse dishes, to shave, or to brush your teeth.
- Reduce ground water contamination by using fewer chemical pesticides on your lawn and garden.
- With your family or youth group, adopt a stream in your neighborhood to clean up annually. (Contact your city or county government to coordinate.)
- It takes a great deal of water to manufacture all the things we use every day. For example, it takes about 150 gallons of water for one Sunday newspaper, and 150 tons of water to produce one ton of steel. If we buy less new stuff, we will use less water!
- The U.S. uses more water to produce electricity than for any other purpose. Decrease the amount of electricity used in your home by turning off lights, buying energy-efficient appliances, turning down the heat / air conditioner, etc.
- Support organizations that are working to improve water conditions in other countries.

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