

The Ripple Effect – Is God Green?

Today we are wrapping up this series, “Ripple Effect”. Throughout this series we have been looking at the character traits of God, discovering the things that God cares deeply about, and asking the question, “What can we do about the things God cares about?”

Now I have to admit that this has been a very challenging series for me personally. It’s not easy to look at world-wide issues like AIDS, malaria, global hunger, slavery, or human trafficking. Gospel means “Good News” and in the past few weeks we have been looking at humanity at its worst. We need to remember that “Good news” doesn’t necessarily mean news that is easy to hear. Jesus was very challenging with his Gospel. He told us that following him was not going to be easy, but it would lead us to find the life that really is life because we would be about bringing his compassion and justice into reality in our world...on this earth.

If you have missed either of the last two weeks, then I would strongly encourage you to watch or read them. You can find them on our website at www.spwired.com. I preached one of those messages and it wasn’t easy to preach. I listened last week and it wasn’t easy to hear, but I believe these are the messages that are critical to us truly living out our faith. I also found some amazing good news in them. It is easy to believe the lie that in the face of these global issues we are powerless. But the good news is just the opposite! Because Jesus cares about these things, he takes what we offer and makes our little gifts and actions ripple out to have a tremendous effect! The good news is that we are not powerless. We are powerful. That’s exactly what the ripple effect is all about; small things making a big difference!

What we’re going to do today is to take a brief look at something else God cares deeply about...our world, creation. We’ve been looking more specifically at how God cares about people, who are part of his creation. Today we are going to widen that out to include all of creation. Then we’re going zoom it back in to take a little time to bring all of these messages together and take a look at how the ripple effect works in our lives.

So “**IS GOD GREEN?**” Now when I ask that question, I am not suggesting that God has a political agenda. This is not about politics, it is about our role as followers of Jesus to care about the things God cares about. The question really is, “does God care about the earth, about creation?” And I think scripture clearly tells us “yes, God does care.” The first story in all of scripture describes the world in all its wonder, filled and teeming with life, as the careful work of God’s hands. God brings it all into being and calls it “good”. **“God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.” Gen 1:31 TNIV.**

Now it’s interesting...in the Old Testament there is no word for *nature*, there is just the word *creation*. The word *creation* carries a certain theological significance, it makes a statement. If there is a creation, then there is a Creator. And this Creator cares for his creation. And in his creation there are *creatures* (people around here call them critters); beings that are given life by their Creator in order to reflect and participate in something glorious. Then there are human beings, and the Bible says that human beings are part of creation, but we are a special part that reflects the image of God in a way that no other part of creation does. We are creatures gifted by our creator with the capacity to reason, choose, invent and communicate. Humans are critters that can twitter.

Jesus gives us a clue as to how important creation is to his father. In **Matthew 6:26 TNIV**, Jesus says, **“Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?”** You can see in this one saying the same understanding that comes out of the Creation story in Genesis 1. God is a creator God who cares for all of creation. At the pinnacle of that creation are human beings, created

“in the image of God” and with whom God desires a special relationship. Because we are, according to the Bible, the apex of creation, God gives us the responsibility to be stewards of his creation. Here’s how the creation story puts it in Genesis 1.

God spoke: "Let us make human beings in our image, make them reflecting our nature. So they can be responsible for the fish in the sea, the birds in the air, the cattle, And, yes, Earth itself, and every animal that moves on the face of Earth." Genesis 1:26 from The Message

Other versions of this text use stronger words; words like “dominion” and “rule”, but the spirit of this passage is captured well by The Message. The over-riding idea of God’s plan in Genesis 1 is stewardship. God is not setting human beings free to have complete autonomy in the way creation is treated. God is expecting that human beings will act on behalf of the Creator.

I believe Christianity actually offers us the best perspective from which to view and care for creation. It goes beyond “being green” for being green’s sake; beyond preserving our resources. Biblically, caring for creation connects to worshipping God. We don’t worship creation, but by caring for creation we honor and serve our Creator – the one who calls us to be good stewards. Really what this means is that being a responsible steward of the earth is holy thing. It’s not about our political platforms; it’s not about whether we believe global warming is fact or fiction; it’s not about whether we believe there’s enough oil in the earth to last 10 years or 1000 years. For the Christian, there is one compelling reason that rises above all of that; our God is the God of creation and our God cares about his creation and our God wants us to be responsible stewards of his creation. That’s a Biblical mandate. I don’t think we probably have much disagreement over that. The problem is actually doing it. It’s not always convenient.

Many years ago I lived in Chillicothe, MO. They had the recycle thing down...they made it so easy, so I was really dedicated to recycling. It was a great system. Put your non-recyclable trash in special colored trash bags which cost more (enticement) and put your paper, plastics, and metals all mixed up in one big container. Set it all out on trash day and you were done. They did the rest. It was great and I was very committed to being a good steward of the earth through recycling.

Then we moved to another town. I didn’t have to buy more expensive bags for the trash and the recycles had to be sorted, but they still picked it up at the curb. So I was still fairly committed.

They we moved to another town. They didn’t pick up our recycles at all. I had to sort them and deliver them to a recycle center. Suddenly, my worship of the Lord through caring for the earth came to a stop. It was just too inconvenient. As God would have it, a strong leader in our church and someone who became a good friend was a man named Dennis. Dennis went back to school later in life to get a master’s degree in waste management analysis. He clearly saw taking care of creation as an important part of his faith. One of his jobs was to analyze land fills. He literally marked out sections of land fills and sorted through the content to get a picture of what kinds of waste were there. He discovered that the vast majority of junk filling the land fills were recyclable, and of course, they were the materials in the fill that took the longest to decompose. His point was that we would need fewer land fills and the ones we have would serve us much longer if we could keep recyclables from getting there in the first place.

That week, we began storing our recycles in our basement and I began the bi-weekly process of taking them to the recycle center. Yes, it’s inconvenient and sometimes I am not a cheerful servant, but for me part of being a steward of the earth requires recycling.

You know the basic things you can do to care for God’s creation. Reduce, reuse, recycle. Be mindful of waste and energy consumption. You can take it much further than that if you want to, but if you aren’t doing anything, start there.

It's a ripple effect thing. Small things we can all do can have a dramatic impact on big picture issues. And over the past three weeks, our focus has been on a pretty wide scope. The point has been clear that we are not powerless against what may seem to be insurmountable issues in our world. We don't have to do it all, but if we do something, the ripple effect can be huge. Just to quickly go back to some of these big issues we've talked about in the last two weeks and fill in the bigger picture. In the fight against Malaria in Africa, **Nothing but Nets will distribute over 1 million nets in 15 central African countries this year alone.** That's the potential protection of 4 million people. The ripple effect.

In rural Nicaragua, over **9000 children, pregnant women, and at-risk elderly eat a nutritious meal every day through Rainbow Network.** \$25 will provide 250 of those meals! In addition, 8000 students will get an elementary education, 900 more students will get a high school education, 2700 people every month will be treated by a doctor, and 1600 people are receiving micro business loans to generate income for their families. Many of you are a part of that ripple effect.

International Justice Mission (Aaron talked about them last week) **has freed over 2000 people from forced slave labor and another 1000 girls from sex trafficking.** And they have only been at this for 10 years, and have already established offices in 33 countries. That's the ripple effect on some big global concerns.

Something else I think we need to see is how the ripple effect works a little closer to home. I believe that our acts of compassion or works for justice with people around us have an effect that goes beyond what we can see. That is so God, isn't it? Some simple action can have long reaching, far reaching effects.

Trella James heard a word of challenge in a Sunday morning message to step outside of her comfort zone and allow God to use her life to have an impact on others. She chose to get connected at Life Choices, where she became an advocate. One aspect of Life Choices is to offer hope and choices to women with unwanted pregnancies. Young women come to Life Choices thinking that they only have one option, abortion. Life Choices gives them hope that God will provide for them and that they do have more options; options that may save them from years of emotional and spiritual trauma.

One of the ripple effects of what Trella and others like her do can have very far reaching effects. In some cases, these women choose to give their babies to an adoptive family, and the unwanted baby (previously a source of anxiety and stress for the birth mother) becomes the precious gift and blessing to a family. And that's as far as we get to see. But I believe the effect goes way beyond that into that family's future and the people who are blessed by them.

And the ripple effect can even be seen in something way simpler than that. I heard this story just last Sunday from Fred Warden, one of our First Impressions team members. A couple of weeks ago, Fred was at the lobby door, as usual, when a relatively new member, Keenan Cortez, came up to him. Keenan recognized Fred as the guy who helped his family when they visited Saint Paul's for the very first time. I talked to Keenan this week and he said he just wanted to let Fred know what a difference Fred made to them. It was their first Sunday, and if you asked Fred, he'd probably say that it's something he would do for anyone (he better say that!!!), but if you ask Keenan, Fred went above and beyond to make his family feel welcome and at home. Keenan's family was a little early and Fred took the time to show them around and let them know what was going on in different parts of the lobby and the church. Keenan said that Fred's hospitality was the absolute difference maker in their decision to come back to Saint Paul's. As they kept coming back they found Fred's welcome and kindness echoed in the actions and welcome of others and that made Keenan comfortable to approach the church about a ministry idea. This fall, Keenan led the charge to start a Tuesday Night Men's group called "Iron Sharpens Iron". Now several men are connecting with each other, they are

studying the Bible together, encouraging each other to live out their faith, and looking for projects where they can serve the community. They have already asked to adopt a family for the Christmas season. All of this coming out of some simple actions by one guy to make sure a family felt welcomed here at Saint Paul's. There is no telling how far the ripple effect will go!

When Fred was telling me about this story and how much it meant to him, he became a bit emotional, and he said, "I forgot how much simple things can mean to people. I didn't realize I could make that much of a difference.

And that's the ripple effect! It can be in the form of a gift that can change a life half a world away or it can be in a simple act of kindness or concern to someone right here that may have a greater significance than we will ever know. So how about this for our challenge? This week, try to start the ripple effect every day through some act of compassion or kindness or simple extra effort or gift. You never know how far it may go....and that is the good news!

Series title and concepts courtesy of Pastor John Ortberg of Menlo Park Presbyterian Church, Menlo Park, CA.