

# God among the Wild Things

by Arthur Walker-Jones

## How have we gotten to this point? What resources does the church have to address the climate crisis?

### THEME

It would be easy to be a climate change denier. The possible scenarios for the future are so overwhelming, and the challenges we face in reducing greenhouse gases are so great. The facts are becoming well-known. The burning of fossil fuels is increasing greenhouse gases, which are causing the global average temperature to rise, generating more unpredictable weather.

Denying climate change or waiting to see if the scenarios are as bad as predicted would be irresponsible. Climate change is a justice issue. Those who are wealthy have produced the greenhouse gases that are creating global warming and climate instability, but those who are poor are often the first to suffer and the least able to adapt. Humanity faces a problem that must be solved in this generation or our future itself will be at risk.

### PREPARATION

The following study is divided into three parts. Depending on the group and the time available, you might choose to omit one of the readings, omit some of the questions, or expand the study into several sessions. Each part has some background to the passage for you to share, a reading from Job, and discussion questions. If possible, ask participants to read the passages and calculate their ecological footprint online ([ecologicalfootprint.com](http://ecologicalfootprint.com)) before meeting.

### Materials List:

- whiteboard(s)/chalkboard(s) and markers/chalk (for each small group)
- Bibles
- copies of *Voices United*

### OPENING

#### Gathering Prayer

**God our Creator, who was revealed to us in Christ and continues to be present in creation by the Holy Spirit, be present among us. Amen.**

Jesus often went into the wilderness, out on a lake, or up on a mountain to be close to God. Think about when you have had an experience of the sacred in nature. Briefly share that experience. Afterwards, discuss what will be lost if these places no longer exist.

Leading eco-theologians have pointed to the creation theology of God's speeches in the Book of Job (chapters 38–41) as an important resource for supporting climate justice. In *Gaia and God*, Rosemary Radford Ruether points to its ecological humility. In *The Comforting Whirlwind*, Bill McKibben points to its humility and joy.

### HYMN

*Voices United* #238, “How Great Thou Art,” verse 1

### READING 1

The Book of Job begins with Job having learned that all his livestock has been killed or stolen and his children have died tragically. He has foul sores all over his body and sits in ashes scraping the sores. He has three friends who come to comfort him—Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. They sit quietly with him for seven days, but when Job wishes that he hadn't been born or could die to end his suffering, they cannot remain silent. For 27 chapters, the bulk of the book, they argue with Job. The friends believe that God rewards the just and punishes the wicked. If Job suffers, it must

be because he has sinned. When Job questions God's justice, they become increasingly strident and hostile.

Read what Eliphaz says in Job 22:5–9.

### DISCUSSION

- Did Jesus have a similar definition of justice? Can you think of examples in his ministry?
- Eliphaz claims that Job is being punished because: “You have given no water to the weary to drink, and you have withheld bread from the hungry” (verse 7). How will climate change affect access to food and water?

### HYMN

*Voices United* #238, “How Great Thou Art,” verse 2

### READING 2

Job shares his friends' belief that God is just and should reward the just and punish the wicked. But he has a problem. His experience does not match their theology. He hasn't done anything to deserve what has happened to him. As readers, we know from the prologue to the book that Job is “blameless” (Job 1:1), and we learn from God in the epilogue that the friends “have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has” (Job 42:7).

The liberation theologian Gustavo Gutierrez, in *On Job*, notes that in the course of talking with the friends, Job's experience leads him to identify with those who are poor. In the following passage, Job questions God's justice and describes the injustice he sees in the world.

Read what Job says in 24:1–12.

**DISCUSSION**

- In what ways is climate change a justice issue?
- Who has created climate change?
- Who suffers, or will suffer, from climate change?
- How can Christians identify with the poor and suffering as Jesus calls us to do, and how can we do that in the context of climate justice?

**HYMN**

*Voices United* #238, "How Great Thou Art," verse 4

**READING 3**

Philosophers, ethicists, and theologians say that one of the causes of the global environmental crisis and climate change is the belief that humans are separate from, and superior to, the rest of creation, which has value only

as it is useful to humans. In the God speeches, however, God cares for and celebrates wild creatures that are of no use to humans or are even dangerous to them.

Read together these selections from the God speeches: Job 38:1-3, 38:39—39:30.

**DISCUSSION**

- How would you characterize God's relationship with non-human animals in the God speeches?
- How is this different from the assumption of Job and his friends that God runs the world to reward or punish humans?
- What would a more ecological spirituality involve, and what hints does this reading provide?

**ACTIONS**

In small groups, brainstorm actions that you could take as individuals and as a church to reduce your carbon footprint. Commit to one or more.

**CLOSING PRAYER**

**O God, our Creator and Redeemer, remind us of how great your creation is in mighty forests, in great lakes, in majestic mountains, in surging seas, in star-lit skies...**

**Exalt us to find joy in your creation in the songs of birds, in the laughter of children, in the babble of a brook...**

**Inspire us to love and care for all creation in reducing our ecological footprint and in working for climate justice. Amen.**

**Arthur Walker-Jones** teaches Biblical Studies at the University of Winnipeg.

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