

Season of Creation

Small group material introduction and meditation guide

1. Introduction

Welcome to our sermon series looking at “Season of Creation”. At the start of the 21st century the people of the earth have been challenged by what we are doing to our planet. After centuries of over production and over consumption we have realised that we are exhausting the earth’s resources far more quickly than they can be replaced, and that if our children and grandchildren are to enjoy the planet the way we have, we have to make some changes.

As church we have both the influence and divine imperative to be leaders in encouraging the kinds of changes that we need to make to our lifestyles. In South Africa both the Methodist and Anglican Churches have been encouraging their leaders to challenge the congregations to become ‘green’ and have suggested various ways of doing that, such as encouraging recycling and so on.

The Anglican Church of Southern Africa has produced a wonderful resource called “Season of Creation” which we are using for this sermon series. The whole book is available at a cost of R20, but all you need for each week are these single pages for each session (we’re trying to save trees!). I’m very grateful to Rev Rachel Mash of the Cape Town Diocese for her permission to use and adapt the materials and artwork from ‘Season’ for our purposes at BMC.

2. Centring down

Meditation, or centring down, is a method that has been used by the church for thousands of years to focus more deeply on God, and is a practice that can be used in a large group, small group, or even individually. I offer the following extract, from George Irvine’s booklet, “What on Earth should the Church be Doing?”* as a resource for your ‘Season of Creation’ Group:

Let me focus on one of the tools [for a deepened spirituality], that of “centring down”. Think for a moment. Is it not true that when we decide to focus more deeply on God, whether in a group or on our own, our minds are like an overfilled taxi with music blaring, stopping at a pavement with everybody trying to climb out at the same time? Another helpful picture comes from the Aboriginal people in Australia. They say that if we walk for three days we must sit down for a day to give our souls time to catch up with our bodies. Centring down is a way of emptying our minds and spirits so that we can be filled with God. The truth is that God cannot fill that which is already full.

How then do we centre down? How do we empty ourselves? How do we come to an inner stillness so that we can hear God speak? There are a number of ways we can do this. Wanda Nash has written a book entitled *People need stillness* published by Darton, Longman and Todd. It is full of practical exercises we can use for centring down. Here is one I have used in a group. It can also be used on your own.

Leader: Come with me into the first level of stillness: our emotional self. For this present moment think of stilling all strong feelings, detach from them, put them on one side, to be attended to later. Focus on Psalm 4:4 “Commune with thy heart... and be still.”

Leader: We now enter the second level of stillness: our physical self. Take a good sitting posture: bottom well back into the seat of the chair, back upright, knees uncrossed, hands resting loosely open on your lap, feet flat on the floor. Think of relaxing all body muscles, quiet all movement and speech. Focus on Isaiah 30:7 “Their strength... is to sit still”.

Leader: The third level of stillness is our mental intellectual self. Still all the questioning, debating, doubting, that constantly occupies your mind. Quieten the reasoning; leave it to another time. Focus on Job 13:5 “Only be silent... and let silence be your wisdom”.

Leader: Fourth, the last level of stillness: our spiritual self. Stop, for a while, all your efforts to prove how good you are; still all your attempts to earn God’s approval — it can’t be earned. Be content to be held, to be known, just as you are. Focus on Psalm 46:10 “Be still... and know... that I am... God.”

The leader must allow adequate time between each level for the group to come to stillness. Centring down, I repeat, is an indispensable tool as we seek for deeper spirituality.

* Irvine, G. *What on Earth should the Church be Doing?: The Six Calls of the Journey to a New Land*, MCSA, Cape Town, 1997. Pp 4-5.