

The Earth is the Lord's

Bible Studies on Creation and Agriculture

Facilitator's Guide



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2018 Still in the Process of Sanctification Ministries



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Why This Curriculum

Psalm 24:1-2 says "*The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it on the seas and established it on the waters.*" This truth is repeated throughout scripture and reminds us that everything we have belongs to God. Understanding God's ownership of all creation provides a foundation for the way we live and act in this world. We chose to name this curriculum "The Earth is the Lord's" as a reminder of whom we ultimately serve in doing agriculture development.

"The Earth is the Lord's" curriculum is designed primarily for use by Christian groups involved in agriculture development and/or evangelism. It is intended to help churches and development organizations in their agricultural work. It does not seek to take the place of church, but rather should support and encourage local Christians. The curriculum is made up of inductive Bible studies on passages related to caring for God's creation, and guides farmers to consider how to apply what they learn to agriculture and livestock practices. A few key themes addressed are:

- The value of God's creation
- Practicing agriculture and keeping livestock as Christian stewardship
- God's plan to reconcile all of creation to himself
- Farming as a worthy Christian occupation

In Matthew 9:35 we find a summary statement of Jesus' ministry. Matthew writes, "*Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness.*"

A nearly identical statement is offered in Matthew 4:23. Jesus announced the good news of the kingdom using words and demonstrated the very same good news through ministry and service. When Jesus sent out the 12 (Luke 9:1-2) and the 72 (Luke 10:9) for evangelism, he instructed them to follow this same pattern. The good news is meant to be heard, seen, and experienced. Jesus' own ministry was holistic, dealing with every aspect of human life. The kingdom of God is a redemptive power which addresses all human needs.

Christians should follow Jesus' model of ministry. Followers of Christ proclaim with words the good news of the kingdom's presence on earth and of its future fullness. At the same time, service to others demonstrates the kingdom's transformative power, which will be fully realized at Jesus' return. This is evangelism. Holistic ministry seeks to address all human needs, and requires both word and deed.

We must remember life is not only about bigger harvests, food security, and clean drinking water. These things are important, but if we improve people's lives in this way while ignoring their relationship with God, we have neglected the very foundation of the lives we have improved. As Christians, every aspect of life and work should be informed by our identity in Christ -- and inseparable from it. Therefore, our work with farmers should not only address both agriculture and spirituality, but acknowledge and model a complete integration of the two. This is holistic ministry.

Faith in Christ and a desire to obey God's word serve as motivation to further improve our lives and the lives of those around us. We expect Christian farmers who study scripture together to develop a strong desire to care for creation, resulting in them becoming better stewards of the land, livestock, and resources God has given them. Obedience to Christ and the word of God, empowered by the Holy Spirit, brings lasting improvements and enduring transformation to the lives of farmers. It is crucial, then, that our agriculture development work be grounded in the Christian faith.

How to Use This Curriculum

"The Earth is the Lord's" is designed specifically to engage farmers, but will be useful to anyone desiring to care for God's creation. An ideal group size is 5-15 people. Participants who own a Bible should bring it with them to the studies and, if possible, pen and paper to take notes. [Appendix C contains all passages to be studied; these can be photocopied for members who do not have Bibles.] The lessons should be in the language most commonly spoken in the community. For this reason, we encourage translation of these materials. Please contact us if you are interested in translating the curriculum into another language.

The curriculum consists of an introductory study, ten core Bible studies, and a final review with action planning. Ideally the group will study one lesson every week, in order for group members to apply what they learn in one lesson before beginning the next. Groups can also choose to meet less often, with more time between lessons. Alternatively, the full curriculum can be covered in a single week-long seminar, though in this case we encourage creativity in order to ensure lessons are made practical in the lives of participants.

These are inductive Bible studies, in which participants discover for themselves what the Bible teaches. Not only do participants remember better, and value more, what they've come to understand for themselves, but the inductive process also eliminates the need for the initiating facilitator in the future. Participants will gain the skills to begin other Bible study groups in the context of their own homes and communities. For these reasons, this curriculum is designed to be facilitated and not taught.

The facilitator must understand that simply telling the group what they ought to learn from each module will lessen the effectiveness of this curriculum. The discovery of Biblical truth is of great importance for all participants, and the role of the facilitator is to guide others in this discovery process. See Appendix A for details on good facilitation techniques.

We suggest the "initiator" facilitate only the first 3-4 studies, and that another/others in the group facilitate from that point forward, with continued assistance and mentoring. The initiator should lead group facilitators through each module ahead of their group meetings. In this way the group facilitators are not robbed of the opportunity to themselves discover biblical truths by relying on a facilitator's guide. This also allows modeling of good facilitation techniques and ensures facilitators are familiar with the text and main points for each module. Additionally, these group facilitators are expected to in turn mentor their fellow group members as they begin sharing what they learn with neighbors and friends.

The inductive Bible study process, with further explanation of its component parts, is provided below. Each module in the curriculum contains a simplified outline of the inductive process. **We strongly urge facilitators, however, to study the section below in detail**, as the format used for study is in many ways as important as the curriculum itself. [This format is designed specifically for oral cultures.]

1. **Read the Bible text four times aloud.**

Repeated reading emphasizes the importance of scripture as God's written word, while giving participants ample opportunity to understand the passage. If possible, have four different participants read -- in multiple languages if more than one is regularly spoken in the group. [Also, read from multiple translations if more than one is present.]

2. **Together retell in our own words what we read from scripture.**

This is a summary in everyday language of the passage read aloud. Participants should not quote the scripture, attempt to explain what the text means, or express what they learned from it (this will come in the next step). Retelling scripture in everyday language ensures participants have understood the text prior to attempting to gain

knowledge from it. This exercise also prepares participants to tell others what they learned from scripture. [This is especially true in oral cultures and/or when many participants do not have access to Bibles.]

It is best if several people have the option to participate in the retelling. Individuals can mention any portion of the passage they remember. The facilitator will move to the next step when the group has together retold the entire text in easy-to-understand language and when confident most participants in the group can retell the passage to a neighbor. It is helpful to end this section by asking a few participants to summarize the full passage on behalf of the larger group.

Here is an example that will help the facilitator understand this process:

Genesis 2:8-9

⁸ Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. ⁹ The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

In everyday language: “God planted a garden and put the man in it. God made useful and beautiful trees grow in the garden, including trees which produce food. God also made the tree of life and tree of the knowledge of good and evil and put them in the middle of the garden.”

3. **What do we discover in this text: About God? About ...? (specific questions will be listed in each module)**

List these discoveries on a chalkboard, whiteboard, or large sheet of paper for all to see.

Here are some examples of truths about God and agriculture from the passage above (Genesis 2:8,9):

- *God is the first farmer.*
- *The work of agriculture is Godly work, and should not be looked down upon.*
- *God loves and provides for mankind, giving us a world with food security.*
- *God appreciates plants which are beautiful as well as those which are useful to produce food.*

It is critical in steps 2 and 3 that groups hold one another accountable to only speak what is discovered from the current passage or to mention how it relates to previous studies in the curriculum. The facilitator will need to model this in the beginning, but soon participants will begin to catch on and help one another. If the group is extremely interested in another topic or passage, the facilitator can offer the option of studying it upon completion of the curriculum or before the next meeting (findings could be discussed briefly then). It is often helpful for the facilitator to respond to such issues with, “It doesn’t seem we can answer that question from this passage; but we should be able to in a few weeks.” Or, “I can leave you with a few passages of scripture to study before we meet again.”

We have compiled some of the most important ideas presented in each module in the curriculum, especially as they pertain to agriculture and livestock. These lists can be found on the page next to each corresponding module, and are by no means intended to be exhaustive. We recommend facilitators not rely heavily on these lists, as our goal in study is for groups to discover truth for themselves. However, we do recognize they may be useful to aid facilitators in guiding groups through the discovery process.

4. **Optional questions to continue the discussion.**

Question prompts are included which may help groups who otherwise struggle to discover truth from scripture. Use these prompts only if necessary, because the more specialized or involved the facilitator's role is, the less reproducible the studies will be. If, after discussion, the group has missed important truths, the facilitator can use these questions to help guide them to those truths; this is better than just telling them.

5. **What have we learned which is applicable to everyday life? How is what we learned valuable to farmers and useful in farming?**

We have found this to be a helpful step for farmers when attempting to move from what they understand in the text to how they will apply it in their lives. These questions also assist them in determining what they have learned that will be of value to their neighbors and friends not participating in the study. We have found it helpful, as participants mention concepts, to circle or underline them in the list of what we discovered from the text.

6. **How will you/we be obedient to God concerning what we learned from scripture today? Make a specific obedience statement for what you/we will do.**

“Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it – he will be blessed in what he does.” James 1:22-25

The purpose of Bible study is not merely to expand knowledge, but rather to increase obedience to God. Sadly, many Bible studies do not result in more obedient lives, and this is partly due to the structure of the studies. Intentionality is key to changing our actions, and the expectation of obedience is built into this curriculum as a result.

Making obedience statements is difficult for people new to obedience based studies (almost everyone), but can be learned in only a few weeks if modeled well. Aim for obedience statements which are:

- *Appropriate:* Based on scripture we've studied and in line with what we understand of God's will up to this point in our studies
- *Realistic:* Within our current abilities to accomplish
- *Measurable:* Obedience or success is able to be objectively measured
- *Bound by time:* Mentions an exact period of time

In the beginning the facilitator will likely need to help participants shape their intentions into tangible actions. For example, “I will improve my relationship with my wife” should be made concrete and measurable, perhaps to “Based on what I learned about how God created husbands and wives to work together, I will help my wife by fetching water every morning this week and giving her a break from that hard work.” The second statement is better because it is realistic, measurable, and bound by time. It also is based on what the participant just learned from scripture.

The facilitator should give the group an example of a specific obedience statement (and explain how it is appropriate, realistic, measurable, and bound by time), such as the one above or the following example:

"This week, because of what I learned from Genesis 2:8-9, I will plant some flowers around the border of my house because I have seen that God created plants not only for food, but also for beauty."

How is this appropriate? God is pleased when I grow plants and enjoy their beauty, following his example from creation.

How is this realistic? I have a neighbor who is growing flowers and will likely share seeds with me.

How is this measurable? Next time we meet, I will be able to report to the group that I planted the flowers.

How is this bound by time? I said I will do this during this week.

It is important to encourage participants to formulate obedience statements like these, because it makes plans easier to follow and provides incentive to accomplish them. Serving my wife by fetching water for her this week is easier to remember and accomplish than a vague intention like "I will improve my relationship with my wife."

It is not necessary for every individual to have a separate obedience statement. In fact, in the beginning many will do better with a group statement. As the group progresses, though, expect the Holy Spirit to guide individuals to apply Biblical truths to their lives in different ways.

7. With whom, specifically, will you share what you learned?

This portion of the study is important in that it encourages participants to share valuable knowledge with others, for the benefit of all. Sadly, the tendency is often to hoard knowledge rather than to serve others by sharing what we know would be helpful to them. Additionally, this expectation to share what we've learned with others prepares Christians for evangelism, and makes the announcement of good news a habit.

8. Further reading

In some modules, we have suggested passages for participants to read or study on their own or as a group. These passages are a way to go deeper into the topic for that module.

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If you have questions or comments, feel free to contact us. We are happy to discuss this curriculum and/or its facilitation with you. We are also open to constructive criticism and improving "The Earth is the Lord's."

If you are interested in one of us facilitating a training for your organization, farming group, or church (in English or Swahili), please let us know.

Blessings,

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Introductory Study

This study may be useful to introduce the curriculum to those who will be participating or even as a means of creating interest in a community or group.

Text: **Psalm 24:1-2**

All the earth and everything in it belongs to God the creator

1. Read the Bible text for today four times aloud.
2. Together retell in our own words what we read from scripture.
3. What do we discover in this text: About God? About the earth and everything in it?
4. Optional questions to continue the discussion:
 - Who owns our land? Who owns our animals?
 - How should we treat our land and animals since they belong to God?
5. What have we learned which is applicable to everyday life? How is this valuable to farmers and useful in farming?
6. How will you/we be obedient to God concerning what we learned from scripture today?
Make a specific obedience statement for what you/we will do. [If the group is having trouble coming up with ideas, try asking the final question from above: How should we treat our land and animals since they belong to God?]
7. With whom, specifically, will you share what you learned?

Psalm 24:1-2

¹ The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; ² for he founded it on the seas and established it on the waters.

Module Main Ideas:

- All the earth and everything in it belongs to God, who created it. We have been entrusted with it for a time, but it does not belong to us.
- Nothing I have truly belongs to me, therefore I need to treat my “belongings” well, knowing they actually belong to God.
- All people are created by God and belong to him, so we should also treat other people well.

Bible Study 1

Text: **Genesis 1:11-13**

God creates vegetation and a sustainable earth

1. Read the Bible text for today four times aloud.
2. Together retell in our own words what we read from scripture.
3. What do we discover in this text: About God? About soil and plants?
4. Optional questions to continue the discussion:
 - How did God create plants and trees? What does this teach us about his power?
 - Why might God have created plants and trees to produce seeds?
 - What does God think about his creation? How does he know the creation is good?
 - How should we feel about God's creation?
 - What is something we can do today to appreciate God for his good creation?
5. What have we learned which is applicable to everyday life? How is this valuable to farmers and useful in farming?
6. How will you/we be obedient to God concerning what we learned from scripture today?
Make a specific obedience statement for what you/we will do. [If the group is having trouble coming up with ideas, try asking the final question from above: What is something we can do today to appreciate God for his good creation?]
7. With whom, specifically, will you share what you learned?

Genesis 1:11-13

¹¹ Then God said, “Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds.” And it was so. ¹² The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. ¹³ And there was evening, and there was morning—the third day.

Module Main Ideas:

- God is powerful to create and did so merely by speaking.
- God created with order and planning.
- God evaluated the work he did.
- Everything created by God is good.
- God created vegetation with the ability to reproduce by seed. The earth was created to be sustainable.
- It is the job of the soil to produce vegetation.

Bible Study 2

Text: **Genesis 1:26-31**

God creates mankind in his image to be stewards of his earth

1. Read the Bible text for today four times aloud.
2. Together retell in our own words what we read from scripture.
3. What do we discover in this text: About God? About mankind and what God wants us to do?
4. Optional questions to continue the discussion:
 - Why did God create mankind?
 - What does it mean to be created in God's image, according to this text?
 - What was God's purpose in blessing the man and woman to be fruitful and fill the earth?
 - Last week we learned God created plants and trees, and now we see those same plants and trees in this passage as food for people and animals. What does this teach us about God and his plans?
 - What does it mean to rule? If God trusted us with the task of ruling his earth, in what way should we rule for him? What does that look like?
 - What is a steward? What does it mean to be good stewards of God's earth?
5. What have we learned which is applicable to everyday life? How is this valuable to farmers and useful in farming?
6. How will you/we be obedient to God concerning what we learned from scripture today?
Make a specific obedience statement for what you/we will do.
7. With whom, specifically, will you share what you learned?

➤ Further reading: Psalm 8:3-9

Genesis 1:26-31

²⁶ Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

²⁷ So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

²⁹ 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. ³⁰ And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.” And it was so.

³¹ God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

Module Main Ideas:

- God created mankind (both men and women) in his image to rule over the world he created.
- According to this text, the image of God probably has to do with mankind’s role on the earth as ruler. God entrusted mankind with his own authority to rule, and in this way men and women are stewards of God’s earth.
- God is one God, but in this passage he speaks of himself as “us.” There is some (yet to be fully explained) relationship within God. God created mankind in his image, both man and woman. We see a relationship, meant to be one of unity, present in mankind, just as in God.
- God commanded the man and woman to produce children and fill the earth. In context it appears the goal was not simply to fill the earth, but rather to subdue it and rule over it. The command to reproduce is not the end in and of itself, but rather a means to the end -- which is to rule the earth in a Godly way.
- God loves his creation and provides for it.

Bible Study 3

Text: **Genesis 2:8-9, 15**
God plants a garden and entrusts it to mankind

Additional information about this passage:

- Note this passage tells the same creation story as Genesis 1 (from which we read in studies 1 and 2) in a different way, while going into greater detail concerning day six: the creation of mankind (Adam and Eve). The selected text describes what takes place before Eve has been created, and it is for this reason she is not mentioned.

1. Read the Bible text for today four times aloud.
2. Together retell in our own words what we read from scripture.
3. What do we discover in this text: About God? About mankind and what God wants us to do?
4. Optional questions to continue the discussion:
 - Who was the first farmer, and what does this teach us about farming?
 - Should we be ashamed to be farmers? How should we feel about being farmers?
 - What was Adam's job in the Garden of Eden? What is the difference between *working* the garden and *taking care* of it? What does it look like to be good stewards of our farms?
 - Are we guilty of working our soil without caring for it? What will be the result of this, and will it be pleasing to God?
5. What have we learned which is applicable to everyday life? How is this valuable to farmers and useful in farming?
6. How will you/we be obedient to God concerning what we learned from scripture today? Make a specific obedience statement for what you/we will do.
7. With whom, specifically, will you share what you learned?

Genesis 2:8-9, 15

⁸ Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. ⁹ The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

¹⁵ The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

Module Main Ideas:

- God is the first farmer.
- The work of agriculture is a Godly work, and should not be looked down upon.
- God loves and provides for mankind, giving us a world with food security.
- God thinks about the future and plans for it.
- God entrusted Adam with the garden he planted, and made him a steward of it.
- Adam's role in the garden was to farm it AND to take care of it. This may refer back to what we read in Genesis 1 about God's intention for the world to be sustainable.

Bible Study 4

Text: **Genesis 3:16-19**

Sin is punished and our relationship with the earth broken

1. Read the Bible text for today four times aloud.
2. Together retell in our own words what we read from scripture.
3. What do we discover in this text: About God? About the results of sin? About farming?
4. Optional questions to continue the discussion:
 - How did Adam and Eve's sin affect the soil? [Notice it is the *ground* that is cursed and not people - Adam and Eve are punished, not cursed.] What will the result of this curse be?
 - Is farm work itself a punishment for sin, or was there farm work before sin? Was there a difference between farming before and after Adam and Eve sinned, and if so, what was it?
 - What else came as a punishment for sin?
5. What have we learned which is applicable to everyday life? How is this valuable to farmers and useful in farming?
6. How will you/we be obedient to God concerning what we learned from scripture today?
Make a specific obedience statement for what you/we will do.
7. With whom, specifically, will you share what you learned?

➤ Further reading: Genesis 4:10-12
Hosea 4:1-3

Genesis 3:16-19

¹⁶ To the woman he said,

“I will make your pregnancy very painful;
in pain you will bear children.
You will desire your husband,
but he will rule over you.”

¹⁷ To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat from it,’

“Cursed is the ground because of you;
through painful toil you will eat food from it
all the days of your life.

¹⁸ It will produce thorns and thistles for you,
and you will eat the plants of the field.

¹⁹ 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.”

Module Main Ideas:

- Sin results in punishment.
- The ground is cursed because of human sin. Sin broke our relationship with the earth.
- Agricultural work itself was not a punishment for humans, but existed prior to the fall of man. Sin brought a curse on the ground, making the work more difficult.
- Humans will die.

Bible Study 5

Text: **Psalm 104:10-32**

God created the earth with wisdom and provides for his creation

1. Read the entire Bible text one time aloud.
2. Together retell in our own words what we remember from the passage.
3. Read verse 13-15 aloud two more times. What do we discover about God and how he cares for his creation?
4. Read verse 24 aloud two more times. What do we discover about God and how he created the world?
5. Read verses 27-32 aloud two more times. What do we discover about God and how creation depends on him?
6. Optional questions to continue the discussion:
 - God told men and women to rule over the world, but this passage shows that creation depends on God for everything it needs. What does this teach us?
 - If God created with great wisdom and provides what we need, how should we respond?
 - Does God care about how we treat his creation?
7. What have we learned which is applicable to everyday life? How is this valuable to farmers and useful in farming?
8. How will you/we be obedient to God concerning what we learned from scripture today? Make a specific obedience statement for what you/we will do.
9. With whom, specifically, will you share what you learned?

➤ Further reading: Psalm 50:7-15

Psalms 104:10-32

- ¹⁰ He makes springs pour water into the ravines;
it flows between the mountains.
- ¹¹ They give water to all the beasts of the field;
the wild donkeys quench their thirst.
- ¹² The birds of the sky nest by the waters;
they sing among the branches.
- ¹³ *He waters the mountains from his upper chambers;
the land is satisfied by the fruit of his work.*
- ¹⁴ *He makes grass grow for the cattle,
and plants for people to cultivate—
bringing forth food from the earth:*
- ¹⁵ *wine that gladdens human hearts,
oil to make their faces shine,
and bread that sustains their hearts.*
- ¹⁶ The trees of the Lord are well watered,
the cedars of Lebanon that he planted.
- ¹⁷ There the birds make their nests;
the stork has its home in the junipers.
- ¹⁸ The high mountains belong to the wild goats;
the crags are a refuge for the hyrax.
- ¹⁹ He made the moon to mark the seasons,
and the sun knows when to go down.
- ²⁰ You bring darkness, it becomes night,
and all the beasts of the forest prowl.
- ²¹ The lions roar for their prey
and seek their food from God.
- ²² The sun rises, and they steal away;
they return and lie down in their dens.
- ²³ Then people go out to their work,
to their labor until evening.
- ²⁴ *How many are your works, Lord!
In wisdom you made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures.*
- ²⁵ There is the sea, vast and spacious,
teeming with creatures beyond number—
living things both large and small.
- ²⁶ There the ships go to and fro,
and Leviathan, which you formed to frolic there.
- ²⁷ *All creatures look to you
to give them their food at the proper time.*
- ²⁸ *When you give it to them,
they gather it up;
when you open your hand,
they are satisfied with good things.*
- ²⁹ *When you hide your face,
they are terrified;
when you take away their breath,
they die and return to the dust.*
- ³⁰ *When you send your Spirit,
they are created,
and you renew the face of the ground.*
- ³¹ *May the glory of the Lord endure forever;
may the Lord rejoice in his works—*
- ³² *he who looks at the earth, and it trembles,
who touches the mountains, and they smoke.*

Module Main Ideas:

- God created the world with great wisdom.
- God cares greatly about, and provides for, his creation.
- All creation is only sustained by God's hand. He is the source of all food and life.
- God is in control of all creation, even as he allows humans freedom in our task of ruling over the earth.
- Even the food we grow and prepare for ourselves is provided by God.

Bible Study 6

Texts: **Proverbs 12:10-11**

Proverbs 24:30-34

Proverbs 27:23-27

The Godly farmer and pastoralist receive blessing and security

If you wish to divide into three groups:

1. Divide into three groups. Have each group read one of the texts three times aloud.
2. Have each group retell in their own words what they read from scripture.
3. Have each group discuss together what they discover in their passage: About God? About agriculture? About livestock?
4. Return to the large group and have each small group read their text aloud once for all who are participating (the other groups will not have read these verses) and then explain what they learned from the passage.

If you wish to divide into two groups:

1. Before dividing into smaller groups, read Proverbs 12:10-11 twice aloud. Retell it in our own words. What do we learn about agriculture and livestock?
 - How can we be righteous in the way we treat our animals?
2. Divide into two groups. Have one group read Proverbs 24:30-34 three times aloud, and the other group read Proverbs 27:23-27.
3. Have each group discuss together what they discover in their passage: About God? About agriculture? About livestock?
4. Return to the large group and have each small group read their text aloud once for all who are participating (the other groups will not have read these verses) and then explain what they learned from the passage.

Whether there were one or more groups, continue as below:

5. Optional questions for the entire group to continue the discussion:
 - What do we learn is at least one source of poverty and hunger? Are we ever guilty of this ourselves? Could food insecurity come from our own practices?
 - What are a few reasons we should pay close attention to, and care for, our livestock? What does it look like to be good stewards of our animals, and what benefits do we receive for doing so?
6. What have we learned which is applicable to everyday life? How is this valuable to farmers and useful in farming?
7. How will you/we be obedient to God concerning what we learned from scripture today? Make a specific obedience statement for what you/we will do.
8. With whom, specifically, will you share what you learned?

➤ Further reading: Ezekiel 34:1-16

Proverbs 12:10-11; Proverbs 24:30-34; Proverbs 27:23-27

Proverbs 12

- ¹⁰ The righteous care for the needs of their animals,
but the kindest acts of the wicked are cruel.
¹¹ Those who work their land will have abundant food,
but those who chase fantasies have no sense.

Proverbs 24

- ³⁰ I went past the field of a sluggard,
past the vineyard of someone who has no sense;
³¹ thorns had come up everywhere,
the ground was covered with weeds,
and the stone wall was in ruins.
³² I applied my heart to what I observed
and learned a lesson from what I saw:
³³ A little sleep, a little slumber,
a little folding of the hands to rest—
³⁴ and poverty will come on you like a thief
and scarcity like an armed man.

Proverbs 27

- ²³ Be sure you know the condition of your flocks,
give careful attention to your herds;
²⁴ for riches do not endure forever,
and a crown is not secure for all generations.
²⁵ When the hay is removed and new growth appears
and the grass from the hills is gathered in,
²⁶ the lambs will provide you with clothing,
and the goats with the price of a field.
²⁷ You will have plenty of goats' milk to feed your family
and to nourish your female servants.

Module Main Ideas:

- Righteous farmers provide for their animals. This is similar to God providing for his creation.
- We should pay attention to our livestock and take good care of them, because they will in turn provide for us.
- The farmer who doesn't put her mind to her work will not have enough food.
- The lazy farmer will find many weeds and thorns in his fields. This is similar to the punishment for sin we saw in the Garden of Eden (perhaps laziness is still a sin that comes with a penalty).
- The lazy farmer will also be poor and will not have enough food.

Bible Study 7

Text: **Deuteronomy 8:10-14, 17-18**

God is responsible for human productivity and blessings

1. Read the Bible text for today four times aloud.
2. Together retell in our own words what we read from scripture.
3. What do we discover in this text: About God? About our own success?
4. Optional questions to continue the discussion:
 - Do we ever forget about God's provision when life is going well for us? What are the dangers of this?
 - The proud take credit for the blessings God gives them, and steal his glory. What can we do to remember all good gifts -- and even our abilities -- come from God? How will this help us to continue following God's commands?
5. What have we learned which is applicable to everyday life? How is this valuable to farmers and useful in farming?
6. How will you/we be obedient to God concerning what we learned from scripture today?
Make a specific obedience statement for what you/we will do.
7. With whom, specifically, will you share what you learned?

Deuteronomy 8:10-14, 17-18

¹⁰ When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you. ¹¹ Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. ¹² Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, ¹³ and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, ¹⁴ then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

¹⁷ You may say to yourself, “My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.” ¹⁸ But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your ancestors, as it is today.

Module Main Ideas:

- We should remember all blessings come from God; we should be thankful to him for this, and rejoice in him.
- We are unable to produce blessings and wealth for ourselves, without God.
- Our pride might tempt us to stop being obedient to God, and to forget the promise of blessing is tied to obedience and life in him.

Bible Study 8

Texts: **Leviticus 26:3-5, 9-13**

Habakkuk 3:17-19

God's covenant people can expect both blessing and suffering

Additional information about the context of these passages:

- The Leviticus passage describes the covenant relationship God promised to the Israelites. Under this covenant, a life lived in obedience to God is a blessed life.
- Habakkuk was an Old Testament prophet who questioned how God could allow evil people to be blessed while righteous people suffer. Habakkuk's faith remained strong, though, and he was able to rejoice in God even in the midst of trials and suffering he did not understand.

1. Read the Leviticus passage three times aloud.

2. Together retell in our own words what we read from scripture.

3. What do we discover in this text: About God? About his covenant with his people?

4. Optional questions to continue the discussion:

- What are the promises God makes to the Israelite nation?
- What is Israel's responsibility; what is expected of them in the covenant?
- How is verse 12 similar to the creation story, and what does it teach us about what God wants for his people?

5. Read the Habakkuk passage three times aloud.

6. Together retell in our own words what we read from scripture.

7. What do we discover in this text: About God? About true faith in God?

8. Optional question to continue the discussion:

- If Habakkuk was faithful to God, why did he (and God's people) experience suffering and hardship? Can we as Christians be certain we'll never face pain, sorrow, sickness, or hunger?
- What is the proper response to suffering?

9. What have we learned which is applicable to everyday life? How is this valuable to farmers and useful in farming?

10. How will you/we be obedient to God concerning what we learned from scripture today?
Make a specific obedience statement for what you/we will do.

11. With whom, specifically, will you share what you learned?

➤ Further reading: 1 Peter 4:12-19

Leviticus 26:3-5, 9-13; Habakkuk 3:17-19

Leviticus 26

³ “If you follow my decrees and are careful to obey my commands, ⁴ I will send you rain in its season, and the ground will yield its crops and the trees their fruit. ⁵ Your threshing will continue until grape harvest and the grape harvest will continue until planting, and you will eat all the food you want and live in safety in your land.

⁹ “I will look on you with favor and make you fruitful and increase your numbers, and I will keep my covenant with you. ¹⁰ You will still be eating last year’s harvest when you will have to move it out to make room for the new. ¹¹ I will put my dwelling place among you, and I will not abhor you. ¹² I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people. ¹³ I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt so that you would no longer be slaves to the Egyptians; I broke the bars of your yoke and enabled you to walk with heads held high.

Habakkuk 3

¹⁷ Though the fig tree does not bud
and there are no grapes on the vines,
though the olive crop fails
and the fields produce no food,
though there are no sheep in the pen
and no cattle in the stalls,
¹⁸ yet I will rejoice in the Lord,
I will be joyful in God my Savior.
¹⁹ The Sovereign Lord is my strength;
he makes my feet like the feet of a deer,
he enables me to tread on the heights.

Module Main Ideas:

- God created a covenant with the people of Israel in which obedience and blessing were linked.
- Rain, food security, and safety were provided to God’s people when they honored their covenant with him by being obedient to him.
- God agreed to live among them and walk with them if they lived according to his decrees. This sounds a lot like the Garden of Eden.

- We also understand, though, that being God’s people doesn’t necessarily mean there will never be any hardships or suffering.
- Habakkuk demonstrated for us the proper response to failed crops, dead livestock, injustice, and violence in our lives – we should remain faithful to God, rejoice in him, and be patient that he will do what is good and right.

Bible Study 9

Text: **Romans 8:18-21**

All creation waits for God's people to be revealed and freedom realized

1. Read the Bible text for today four times aloud.
2. Together retell in our own words what we read from scripture.
3. What do we discover in this text: About God? About God's creation? About the "children of God?"
4. Optional questions to continue the discussion:
 - Who is described as suffering in this passage: Christians or non-Christians? What are some ways we suffer today? How should we view our present sufferings? [How does this passage relate to the Habakkuk 3:17-19 passage?]
 - What does it mean for creation to be in "bondage to decay?" How is our farmland in bondage to decay? How might our farming methods contribute to the earth's bondage to decay?
 - What do we learn from this passage about God's plans for all of creation? How does this impact the people of God?
5. What have we learned which is applicable to everyday life? How is this valuable to farmers and useful in farming?
6. How will you/we be obedient to God concerning what we learned from scripture today?
Make a specific obedience statement for what you/we will do.
7. With whom, specifically, will you share what you learned?

Romans 8:18-21

¹⁸ I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. ¹⁹ For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

Module Main Ideas:

- ALL of creation is waiting to be liberated from its “bondage to decay.” We might see the earth’s tendency to deteriorate as the opposite of sustainability.
- Creation is waiting for the children of God to be revealed.
- While Christians have the Holy Spirit and are involved in the redemption of the world, they still experience sufferings and hard times – but should keep in mind future glory will far outweigh any pain currently experienced.
- It is not only the children of God who will be redeemed, but creation as a whole. This might influence us to act differently towards creation in the present.

Bible Study 10

Text: **Colossians 1:15-20**

God reconciles all creation to himself through the blood of Jesus Christ

1. Read the Bible text for today four times aloud.
2. Together retell in our own words what we read from scripture.
3. What do we discover in this text: About God? About Jesus Christ? About reconciliation?
4. Optional questions to continue the discussion:
 - What is reconciliation? [Some people might not know what this word means - reconciliation is about restoring relationships.]
 - We now learn that Jesus Christ was not only present at creation, but was involved in the work of creating. What is Christ's relationship to creation?
 - Who is Jesus, according to this passage?
 - What was the purpose of Christ's blood and death, according to this passage?
 - Does the reconciliation Christ brings apply only to mankind? What does it mean for all creation to be reconciled to God? What might that look like?
 - Since Jesus came to earth to reconcile all creation to God, how should we live as followers of Jesus?
5. What have we learned which is applicable to everyday life? How is this valuable to farmers and useful in farming?
6. How will you/we be obedient to God concerning what we learned from scripture today? Make a specific obedience statement for what you/we will do.
7. With whom, specifically, will you share what you learned?

➤ Further reading: 2 Corinthians 5:17-21

Colossians 1:15-20

¹⁵ The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶ For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. ¹⁹ For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

Module Main Ideas:

- Jesus Christ is the image of God. Remember mankind was created in God's image, but Jesus is the actual image of God.
- All things were created by Jesus and for his purposes. [We understand better now the previously unexplained relationship within God in Genesis 1:26-31.]
- We have already learned how God created the world to be sustainable, but now we understand all things continue to exist and hold together only by Christ's power. So men and women were given the task of ruling the earth in a sustainable way – but can only do that by the power of Christ.
- As Jesus is the head of his body (the church), so we as Christians are members of his body. Although we are many different people, all Christians are united in Christ. We again see the theme of many in one.
- Jesus is the embodiment of the fullness of God.
- If Jesus is the head of the church, the church must be about HIS work.
- God reconciles ALL things to himself through Christ's blood and death on the cross. In reconciliation God makes peace on earth and restores relationships.
- Remember mankind's relationship with the earth was just one of many relationships broken by sin. All of these relationships are redeemed through Christ's blood – to be experienced today in part, and later fully.

Study 11: Review and Planning

Note to facilitator: there is an optional handout for group members in Appendix B.

Full Group discussion:

1. What are some of the results of your weekly obedience statements?
2. How has God worked in your life during the time we have been meeting together?
3. How can we continue to be obedient to God in our lives and our farming, based on what we have learned together from God's word? Make a specific plan for what you/we will do.
 - What will you/we do this week?
 - What will you/we do this month?
 - What will you/we do this year?
4. How can we pray for and encourage one another as we put our plans into practice?
5. Should we continue studying scripture together in this group, in other groups, and/or with our families? Is this a useful method for Bible study? Are we capable of facilitating these studies with others? What is our plan for that?

➤ *See the next page for optional Bible study.*

Study 11 Continued: Optional Bible Study Accompaniment

This Bible study is optional, but is available for use during the final review and planning exercise should the facilitator find it beneficial.

Text: **2 Timothy 2:1-7**

God expects us to share knowledge with others who will be generous with it

1. Read the Bible text for today four times aloud.
2. Together retell in our own words what we read from scripture.
3. What do we discover in this text: About God? About our responsibility?
4. To continue the discussion:
 - What does God want us to do with what we have learned?
 - How can we practice what we learned in our everyday lives to be good examples to our families, friends, and neighbors? Why should we bless other people with our knowledge?
5. What have we learned which is applicable to everyday life? How is what we learned valuable to farmers and useful in farming?
6. How will you/we be obedient to God concerning what we learned from scripture today?
Make a specific obedience statement for what you/we will do.
7. With whom, specifically, will you share what you learned?

2 Timothy 2:1-7

¹ You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. ² And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others. ³ Join with me in suffering, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. ⁴ No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs, but rather tries to please his commanding officer. ⁵ Similarly, anyone who competes as an athlete does not receive the victor's crown except by competing according to the rules. ⁶ The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops. ⁷ Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this.

Module Main Ideas:

- God has given faithful people the task of teaching others.
- Like a soldier, we need to be strong and patient as we go through suffering.
- We should try to please Jesus like a soldier tries to please the officer over him.
- God will give us understanding of his word as we meditate on it.
- Farmers should benefit from their hard work of farming.

Appendix A – Facilitation Techniques

“The Earth is the Lord’s” curriculum is designed to be facilitated and not taught. It will be less effective if the facilitator acts as a lecturer and simply tells participants the important information from each module. Good facilitation promotes the sharing of ideas and the discovery of truth. The role of the facilitator in this curriculum is to guide the group through a process of discovering Biblical truths from scripture.

There are many benefits to facilitating groups using a discovery process:

- A participatory approach to learning engages participants and holds interest.
- The same knowledge will be valued more if discovered by people themselves than if told to them.
- People remember what they discover for themselves better than what they receive in lecture.
- We build the group’s capacity for self-learning and problem-solving, and their confidence in their own abilities. We also demonstrate that we value the group’s ability to learn from and understand scripture.
- We model a process which can be used for learning when an expert is not present.
- Collectively, a group has more knowledge than an individual.
- As a group, people can learn more quickly and remember what they learned better than an individual can alone.
- A group of people is able to study scripture together in order to see for themselves what it says instead of blindly following a leader.

In summary, the way people learn can be as important as what they learn. A facilitated discovery method is an appropriate way for adults to learn and to remember what they have learned. It also empowers the group to take responsibility for their own learning and problem-solving. The facilitator's role is to provide a structure for doing this.

This is a difficult concept for many who have become accustomed to more traditional learning processes involving rote memorization and one-directional information sharing from expert to student. This is partly due to groups underestimating their own abilities to learn and reason, therefore much can be accomplished by encouraging them to practice these skills.

Additionally, the discovery process requires patience on everyone’s part. The group must be willing to exert effort for learning and forego the instant gratification of immediately receiving an answer or being told what to do. And the facilitator must be patient with the group as they will likely struggle at first with learning how to read and understand the Bible for themselves. The discovery process can be messy.

Too often it is teachers themselves who are opposed to group discovery methods. The process of facilitation requires humility; a leader must be willing to give up the role of expert with all the honor attached to it. In this way, a facilitator must value the group’s learning over his/her own ego. When John the Baptist was questioned by his disciples about Jesus’ crowds growing while his own diminished, he answered that he was sent to prepare the way for Jesus. He then further explained, “He must become greater; I must become less.” (John 3:25-30) The facilitator of this Bible study curriculum has been given the task of preparing the way for God’s truth. The facilitator, then, must become less important in order for God to become greater.

Characteristics of a good Bible study facilitator:

- Humble
- Prays for guidance to facilitate the process
- Models a life of obedience to Christ
- Good listener
- Patient
- Flexible - adapts to meet the needs of the group
- Understands the group's issues and concerns

Group logistics:

- Facilitation can begin with the participants (and facilitator) making ground rules for the group. Here are some ideas for what could be included:
 - Respect others.
 - One person speaks at a time.
 - No one dominates the conversation.
 - Do not mock what others say even if you disagree.
 - Listen to others.
 - Raise your hand to speak.
- If possible, sit in a circle, to promote unity and equality in the group.
- At the beginning of each new training, it is a good idea to spend a few minutes reviewing the main truths learned in the previous module.
- Write the main ideas in short form on the board/large sheet of paper for all to see. Ask the group for help in wording the thoughts following a point being made.
- Repeat what has been said to make sure everyone heard and understood, and to ensure you heard properly what was said.
- Make sure you behave in the way you want all group members to behave. For example, if you want them to show respect for one another, treat them with respect yourself.
- If people have been sitting too long and look like they're falling asleep, have everyone stand up and perform some exercise to get the blood flowing again and to keep awake.

Use questions well:

- Ask open-ended questions because they encourage reflection and thought (these are questions which cannot be answered with "yes" or "no").
 - In this curriculum we always begin with "What do we learn about God from this passage?" Ideally, we will reach the point where we can guide the group to discover the important truths from a passage simply by asking questions like this one. Other examples of open-ended questions: "How does this passage make you feel?" "What stood out to you in this reading?" or "Why do you think this story was recorded and given to us?"
 - A group who arrives at truth through open-ended questions will soon be able to facilitate their own learning and problem-solving through similar Bible studies.
 - Guide the group to truth, do not tell it to them.

- Follow-up questions promote further thought on a certain topic, guide someone who answered a question to give more information, or push the group towards articulating a concept understood but not yet stated.
 - If people respond to questions with an overly simple answer, ask them to explain their answer.
 - Use questions like: “Could you elaborate on that?” “What do you mean by that?” and “Can you please explain further?”
- Closed questions are for observations; they are questions that can be answered with very simple, short answers, or even yes or no.
 - Closed questions are useful for beginning discussion or reminding people of what was read, but are not especially useful for promoting new learning.
 - When a group is struggling to answer an open-ended question, ask a simple closed question to help them begin thinking about how to answer the more difficult open-ended question.
 - Use questions like: “What did Paul say about...?” or “Who is Jesus speaking to?”
 - Leading / guiding questions are a form of closed question for use when the group can’t arrive at a truth on their own. They can be helpful, but should be used with caution.

Facilitation techniques for group participation:

- Encourage and balance participation among all members of the group.
 - Some people will dominate the discussion if allowed. Here are ways to deal with that:
 - As much as possible, don't call on the same person twice in a row.
 - Pay attention to when a person has been speaking for too long. When the talkative person slows down or takes a breath, look them in the eye, hold up your hand and say something like “that's a good point” or “let's see if someone else has something to add,” then turn to look at someone else in the group and ask what they think.
 - Say, “just one more comment before we move on.”
 - Speak kindly with the person in private - say something about how you appreciate their good ideas and comments, but that it's important to get everyone involved in discussion. You can ask them to please help you get other people talking by, for example, allowing three other people to speak before they do in order to encourage others to share.
 - Some people will not participate without being encouraged to. Here are ways to help:
 - Gently call on people to get their opinion if they have been quiet, even if they did not raise their hand. But give them the option of not speaking if they do not have anything to say. For example, “Betty, we haven’t heard anything from you yet, would you like to comment on this?”
 - Encourage the quiet people whenever they do speak up, by appreciating them and their comments.
 - Limit the group size - if the group is larger than 20, it will be more difficult for everyone to participate.

- Keep the group moving. Don't get stuck on one topic, especially if the group is distracted by ideas outside the text being studied.

Dealing with common challenges:

- Don't be afraid of silence. If people don't respond to a question immediately, give them ample time to consider before you speak again. Sometimes it can also be helpful to read the scripture aloud again. Ask a closed or leading question if necessary to begin discussion
- If a passage is proving difficult for the class to work through, it might be useful to read it again aloud. If it is a longer passage, try reading through it thought by thought rather than verse by verse. Verse divisions are often in the middle of thoughts, so reading only one verse at a time can contribute to problems of understanding.
- If you don't know the answer, don't make something up. Be willing to say "I don't know." Or you can tell the group you will discuss this issue the next time you meet together, giving you time to look for the answer. Point out to the group if the answer cannot be learned from this passage, but perhaps will be apparent in a later study.
- If someone gives an answer which is obviously not true from that text, respond appropriately, but carefully.
 - For example, you could say, "What do others think? Do you find this idea in the passage we are studying?"
- When studying the Bible together, we will always discover areas of disagreement in interpretation, especially when members of a group come from different denominations or church backgrounds. After discussing different viewpoints, it is important for the facilitator to bring the group to the foundational theological point upon which we can all agree. For example, although we may have different ideas about how exactly God created the earth and whether the days of creation were literal days or not, we can all agree it is God who created everything through his power.

Appendix B - Handouts

The following are optional handouts which the facilitator may print and photocopy for group members, if desired.

The Bible study outline can be used for all passages. Participants can use it as a guide for taking notes and making obedience statements.

The handout for Study 11 is also an outline to guide participants in taking notes and making plans for continuing to implement what they have learned, after the study has come to its completion.

Bible Study Outline

Text: _____

1. Read the Bible text for today four times aloud.

2. Together retell in our own words what we read from scripture.

3. What do we discover in this text?

4. What have we learned which is applicable to everyday life? How is what we learned valuable to farmers and useful in farming?

5. How will you/we be obedient to God concerning what we learned from scripture today?
Make a specific obedience statement for what you will do.

Aim for obedience statements which are:

- *Appropriate: Based on scripture we've studied and in line with what we understand of God's will up to this point*
- *Realistic: Within my current ability to accomplish*
- *Measurable: Obedience or success is able to be objectively measured*
- *Bound by time: Mentions an exact period of time*

I/we will _____

How will I/we accomplish this? _____

When will I/we do this? _____

6. With whom, specifically, will you share what you learned?

I will share _____

With (mention the name/names) _____

7. Further reading: _____

Study 11: Review and Planning

1. What are some of the results of your weekly obedience statements?

2. How has God worked in your life during the time we have been meeting together?

3. How can we continue to be obedient to God in our lives and our farming, based on what we have learned together from God's word? Make a specific plan for what you/we will do.

This week, I/we will _____

This month I/we will _____

This year I/we will _____

4. How can we pray for and encourage one another as we put our plans into practice?

5. Should we continue studying scripture together in this group, in other groups, and/or with our families? Is this a useful method for Bible study? Are we capable of facilitating these studies with others? What is our plan for that?

Appendix C – Bible Passages by Module

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Making photocopies of the passages below is permitted.

Introductory Study: Psalm 24:1-2

¹The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; ²for he founded it on the seas and established it on the waters.

1. Genesis 1:11-13

¹¹ Then God said, “Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds.” And it was so. ¹² The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. ¹³ And there was evening, and there was morning—the third day.

2. Genesis 1:26-31

²⁶ Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

²⁷ So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

²⁹ 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. ³⁰ And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.” And it was so.

³¹ God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

3. Genesis 2:8-9, 15

⁸ Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. ⁹ The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

¹⁵ The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

4. Genesis 3:16-19

¹⁶ To the woman he said,

“I will make your pregnancy very painful;
in pain you will bear children.
You will desire your husband,
but he will rule over you.”

¹⁷ To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat from it,’

“Cursed is the ground because of you;
through painful toil you will eat food from it
all the days of your life.

¹⁸ It will produce thorns and thistles for you,
and you will eat the plants of the field.

¹⁹ 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.”

5. Psalms 104:10-32

¹⁰ He makes springs pour water into the
ravines;
it flows between the mountains.
¹¹ They give water to all the beasts of the field;
the wild donkeys quench their thirst.
¹² The birds of the sky nest by the waters;
they sing among the branches.
¹³ He waters the mountains from his upper
chambers;
the land is satisfied by the fruit of his work.
¹⁴ He makes grass grow for the cattle,
and plants for people to cultivate—
bringing forth food from the earth:
¹⁵ wine that gladdens human hearts,
oil to make their faces shine,
and bread that sustains their hearts.
¹⁶ The trees of the Lord are well watered,
the cedars of Lebanon that he planted.
¹⁷ There the birds make their nests;
the stork has its home in the junipers.
¹⁸ The high mountains belong to the wild
goats;
the crags are a refuge for the hyrax.
¹⁹ He made the moon to mark the seasons,
and the sun knows when to go down.
²⁰ You bring darkness, it becomes night,
and all the beasts of the forest prowl.
²¹ The lions roar for their prey
and seek their food from God.
²² The sun rises, and they steal away;

they return and lie down in their dens.
²³ Then people go out to their work,
to their labor until evening.
²⁴ How many are your works, Lord!
In wisdom you made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures.
²⁵ There is the sea, vast and spacious,
teeming with creatures beyond number—
living things both large and small.
²⁶ There the ships go to and fro,
and Leviathan, which you formed to
frolic there.
²⁷ All creatures look to you
to give them their food at the proper time.
²⁸ When you give it to them,
they gather it up;
when you open your hand,
they are satisfied with good things.
²⁹ When you hide your face,
they are terrified;
when you take away their breath,
they die and return to the dust.
³⁰ When you send your Spirit,
they are created,
and you renew the face of the ground.
³¹ May the glory of the Lord endure forever;
may the Lord rejoice in his works—
³² he who looks at the earth, and it trembles,
who touches the mountains, and they
smoke.

6. Proverbs 12:10-11; Proverbs 24:30-34; Proverbs 27:23-27

Proverbs 12

- ¹⁰ The righteous care for the needs of their animals,
but the kindest acts of the wicked are cruel.
¹¹ Those who work their land will have abundant food,
but those who chase fantasies have no sense.

Proverbs 24

- ³⁰ I went past the field of a sluggard,
past the vineyard of someone who has no sense;
³¹ thorns had come up everywhere,
the ground was covered with weeds,
and the stone wall was in ruins.
³² I applied my heart to what I observed
and learned a lesson from what I saw:
³³ A little sleep, a little slumber,
a little folding of the hands to rest—
³⁴ and poverty will come on you like a thief
and scarcity like an armed man.

Proverbs 27

- ²³ Be sure you know the condition of your flocks,
give careful attention to your herds;
²⁴ for riches do not endure forever,
and a crown is not secure for all generations.
²⁵ When the hay is removed and new growth appears
and the grass from the hills is gathered in,
²⁶ the lambs will provide you with clothing,
and the goats with the price of a field.
²⁷ You will have plenty of goats' milk to feed your family
and to nourish your female servants.

7. Deuteronomy 8:10-14, 17-18

¹⁰ When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you. ¹¹ Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. ¹² Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, ¹³ and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, ¹⁴ then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

¹⁷ You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me." ¹⁸ But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your ancestors, as it is today.

8. Leviticus 26:3-5, 9-13; Habakkuk 3:17-19

Leviticus 26

³ “If you follow my decrees and are careful to obey my commands, ⁴ I will send you rain in its season, and the ground will yield its crops and the trees their fruit. ⁵ Your threshing will continue until grape harvest and the grape harvest will continue until planting, and you will eat all the food you want and live in safety in your land.

⁹ “I will look on you with favor and make you fruitful and increase your numbers, and I will keep my covenant with you. ¹⁰ You will still be eating last year’s harvest when you will have to move it out to make room for the new. ¹¹ I will put my dwelling place among you, and I will not abhor you. ¹² I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people. ¹³ I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt so that you would no longer be slaves to the Egyptians; I broke the bars of your yoke and enabled you to walk with heads held high.

Habakkuk 3

¹⁷ Though the fig tree does not bud
and there are no grapes on the vines,
though the olive crop fails
and the fields produce no food,
though there are no sheep in the pen
and no cattle in the stalls,
¹⁸ yet I will rejoice in the Lord,
I will be joyful in God my Savior.
¹⁹ The Sovereign Lord is my strength;
he makes my feet like the feet of a deer,
he enables me to tread on the heights.

9. Romans 8:18-21

¹⁸ I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. ¹⁹ For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

10. Colossians 1:15-20

¹⁵ The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶ For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. ¹⁹ For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

11. 2 Timothy 2:1-7 (optional)

¹You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. ²And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others. ³Join with me in suffering, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. ⁴No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs, but rather tries to please his commanding officer. ⁵Similarly, anyone who competes as an athlete does not receive the victor's crown except by competing according to the rules. ⁶The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops. ⁷Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this.

Appendix D – Format for Broader Agriculture Curriculum Use

The modules in this curriculum have been provided as simple inductive Bible studies and can certainly stand alone in this form.

Another option for use is to place “The Earth is the Lord’s” curriculum inside a broader agriculture development curriculum. Our personal preference is for scripture studies to be done right alongside the agriculture trainings. We would like to see the two integrated as much as possible (but not as proof-texts for specific agricultural practices).

[For groups working in evangelism, note the following format also contains all the core values of church, from prayer and thanksgiving to evangelism and accountability. For this reason, this format might prove useful in areas of initial disciple making and church planting.]

1. How have you been blessed by God in the last week?
2. What difficulties have you had during the week? Is there anything our group can do to help?
3. Pray over the blessings and the struggles, and for all of our studies for the day.
4. What did we learn last week about God? What did we learn about agriculture?
5. How were you obedient to God based on what we learned from scripture last week? What were the results and/or how was this received by others? Did you apply what you learned about agriculture into your farming, and what are your thoughts on that so far?

Don't criticize participants if they didn't follow through with what they'd intended. Rather, work to help one another become more obedient to God and to encourage everyone in this process. A response to someone who failed to accomplish what they mentioned in the previous week might be, "We understand you weren't able to accomplish that last week; tell us how we can help you be successful this week. Could we share in that work with you, or would it be helpful if I called to remind you on Thursday?"

6. Whom did you teach what you learned last week? How did they receive it?
7. **SCRIPTURE STUDY** using inductive Bible study process
 - a. Read the Bible text four times aloud.
 - b. Together retell in our own words what we read from scripture.
 - c. What do we discover in this text: About God? About _____?
 - d. Optional questions to continue the discussion.
 - e. What have we learned which is applicable to everyday life? How is what we learned valuable to farmers and useful in farming?
 - f. How will you/we be obedient to God concerning what we learned from scripture today?
 - g. With whom, specifically, will you share what you learned from scripture?
8. Break, practical demonstration, field work, etc.
9. **Insert AGRICULTURE LESSON**
10. How will you apply what you learned about agriculture into your farming practices?
11. With whom, specifically, will you share what you learned about agriculture?

About the Authors

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Sara Sytsma and her husband Anthony began working for World Renew in Soroti, Uganda in 2014. Before that, they both taught for a year at a Ugandan Bible College, through Resonate Global Mission. Currently, Sara works with local churches and development organizations in the areas of agriculture and livelihood skills (fun topics like baking cakes, building clay ovens, and making soap). She has a BS in Environmental Science from Calvin College and MA in Missions from Calvin Theological Seminary. Goats are her favorite animal to raise, with rabbits coming in second (though butchering them is less than fun).