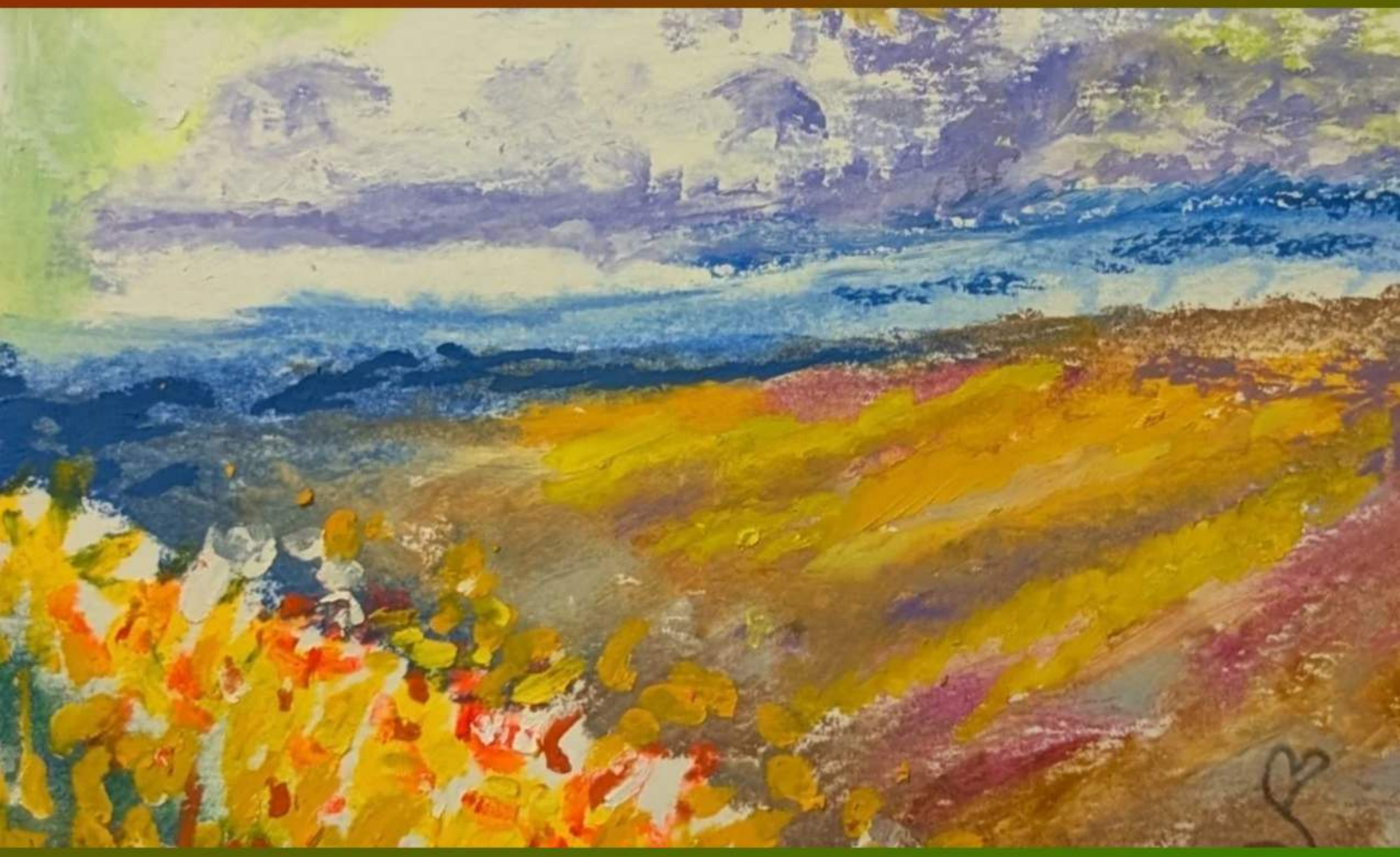
THE BELEAGUERED BELIEVER'S GUIDES

WHEN CREATION GROANS

FAITH AND A CHANGING EARTH



Faith OVER FACTIONS

November 2026

faithoverfactions.com

Faith OVER FACTIONS

For everyone who wanders and feels far from home.

For the ones who left when the noise got too loud, and the ones still sitting in the back row wondering if they belong.

For the solo believer, the doubter, the tired, and the ones who feel alone in a crowded church.

You are not lost. You are on your way home.
You are not the only one. This is for you.

About Faith Over Factions

Faith Over Factions is a place for the spiritually homeless: people who still love Jesus but can't find Him in the noise of institutional religion or partisan faith. Everything here is free. No email address, no paywall, no algorithm deciding what you see.

You'll find reflections, portraits of Christians who resisted when it cost them something, devotionals for unsteady days, and a private Faith Journal for the questions you're not ready to say out loud. We don't take sides in the culture war. We take Jesus at His word and try to follow Him with honesty, humility, and a lot of grace for the stumbling.

Pull up a chair. You're welcome here.

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Sources for the quotations and studies in this guide are listed in the Notes at the back.

Contents

Part One: Honest Ground 5

1. For the One Who Was Told It's All Going to Burn 5

2. The Ground Is Cursed 10

Part Two: Reading the Sky 14

3. Cold and Heat, Summer and Winter 14

4. All Who Delight in Him 18

Part Three: The Earth Is the LORD's 21

5. Tend and Watch Over It 21

6. Who Gives the Wild Donkey Its Freedom? 25

Part Four: The Land Mourns 29

7. Field After Field 29

8. Muddying the Water 33

9. Groaning Toward Glory 36

Part Five: Practice 40

10. Practices From the Whole Church 40

A Benediction 44

Notes 45

Check-In Questions and Prayer Prompts 48

A Blessing for the Road 50

You're Always Welcome Here 50

Take Something for the Road 51

THE BELEAGUERED BELIEVER'S GUIDES

When Creation Groans: Faith and a Changing Earth

Scripture quotations are from the New Living Translation unless noted.

Part One: Honest Ground

1. For the One Who Was Told It's All Going to Burn

Maybe it came up in a small group. Someone mentioned the creek behind the elementary school, the one that used to have crawdads and now has a shopping cart and a rainbow sheen of oil, and you said it was a shame. A man across the circle smiled kindly and told you not to worry about it. It's all going to burn anyway.

Or maybe you heard the version with an edge on it, where caring about the environment was something other people did, people with the wrong bumper stickers. A Christian who took recycling too seriously might be drifting. So you learned to keep your love for the woods to yourself.

Some of you live on the far side of this. The news about the planet arrives every morning like a diagnosis. A flood in a town you visited once. Smoke from fires a thousand miles away turning your afternoon sky orange. Your kids asking whether there will still be snow when they are your age. You care so much that it keeps you up at night, and nobody at church wants to talk about it.

Either way, you've been left alone with it.

Two ways to get it wrong

Christians tend to fall off this road on one side or the other.

On one side is **dismissal**. The earth is temporary, the argument goes, so what happens to it doesn't matter much. Souls matter. Soil doesn't. Sometimes this comes dressed in Bible verses, and sometimes it's plain political suspicion: if the other side cares about

something, we shouldn't.

On the other side is **despair**. The damage is too big and it's too late anyway. People who land here often care deeply, and the caring has curdled into dread. Despair can feel like the only honest response.

The two look like opposites, but they end up in the same place. Dismissal says God doesn't care what happens to the world he made. Despair says he can't do anything about it. Either way, nobody tends the garden.

Scripture disagrees with both.

What Peter actually wrote

"It's all going to burn" usually comes from one passage, near the end of Peter's second letter:

> *But the day of the Lord will come as unexpectedly as a thief. Then the heavens will pass away with a terrible noise, and the very elements themselves will disappear in fire, and the earth and everything on it will be found to deserve judgment.*
>
> 2 Peter 3:10

Read the last line slowly. The NLT carries a footnote on it: "Other manuscripts read *will be burned up*; one early manuscript reads *will be found destroyed*." The Greek copies disagree, and the NLT follows the ones that say the earth will be *found*. Scholars still argue over which reading Peter wrote and what he meant by it. Many hear in "found" the picture of a refiner's fire, where the earth is laid bare before God and everything on it is exposed for what it is.

Whatever the fire is, Peter doesn't stop there. Three verses later he says what comes after it:

> *But we are looking forward to the new heavens and new earth he has promised, a world filled with God's righteousness.*
>
> 2 Peter 3:13

A new earth. Peter's hope has ground under it. The fire, whatever it means, clears the way for a world where things are finally set right. It gives nobody permission to trash this one in the meantime.

The earth is the LORD's

The psalmist put the ownership question plainly:

> *The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it. The world and all its people belong to him.*
>
> Psalm 24:1

If the earth belongs to God, then how we treat it is a question about how we treat his things. Paul goes further. Speaking of Christ, he writes, "Everything was created through him and for him," and "he holds all creation together" (Colossians 1:16-17). The same Jesus Christians worship is the one keeping the rivers in their beds and the planets in their orbits. Creation is his work, held in his hands.

That makes caring for it an ordinary part of following him. It belongs with telling the truth and feeding the hungry, in the plain middle of the Christian life, far from the fringe.

Science is welcome here

This guide also takes the science seriously. The people who measure the air, the oceans and the ice have learned a great deal in the last fifty years, and much of it is sobering. Their findings are laid out in Part Two, with the numbers, where they come from, and where the evidence stops.

You won't be asked to pick between your Bible and their data. The God who made the earth also made the minds that study it.

You also won't find a political program in these pages. No party gets endorsed and no policy gets prescribed. The guide names greed and carelessness as faith problems wherever they show up, including places your own side might not want to look.

Who this is for

This is for the beleaguered. For people who still love Jesus and have been told that caring about creation makes them suspect. For anyone who loves a particular river and has watched it change. For people who read the climate news and can't sleep, and for people who stopped reading it because it hurt too much. For farmers and hunters, gardeners and hikers, and anyone who just likes to be outside.

You don't need to know anything about carbon to read it.

What lies ahead

The guide moves in five parts.

Honest Ground starts with grief: the ground cursed in Genesis, and creation groaning in Paul's letter to Rome. Before anything else, there is room to mourn a place you loved.

Reading the Sky lays out what scientists have measured: the remarkably steady climate that every human civilization grew up inside, and how fast that is now changing. Then it shows why faith and science have long been friends.

The Earth Is the LORD's goes back to the beginning. God told the first humans to tend and watch over the garden, gave the land its own Sabbath, and filled the wilderness with creatures that are no use to anyone and a delight to him.

The Land Mourns follows the money. It looks at greed that grabs land and fouls water, whoever profits from it, and the neighbors downstream who pay. Then it turns to the promise that God will make everything new.

Practice gathers habits from across the whole Church, Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant, for loving the patch of earth where you live. None of them will fix the planet. They may change how you walk on it.

Each chapter ends with a few questions. Answer them in a journal, out loud on a walk, or not at all. They're offered, not assigned.

FOR REFLECTION

1. What have you been told in church about the earth and its future? Write down one sentence you heard, and who said it.
2. Which pulls at you more right now: dismissal or despair? What does it sound like in your head?
3. Name one outdoor place you love: a creek, a field, a park, a tree. When were you last there?

2. The Ground Is Cursed

Think of a place you loved as a child. The pond you skated on every January. The field at the end of the road where you caught grasshoppers. The beach where your family went every summer, or the woods behind your grandparents' house.

Now picture it today. For some of you it hasn't changed much, and that's a gift. For others the pond doesn't freeze hard anymore. The field is a subdivision with street names like Meadow Lane, named after what it replaced. The beach is half the width it was.

There's a particular ache in that. It's worth naming before going any further.

Thorns and thistles

The Bible names it very early. After the first man and woman broke trust with God, the consequences spread outward, and one of the first things to suffer was the ground itself:

> *And to the man he said, "Since you listened to your wife and ate from the tree whose fruit I commanded you not to eat, the ground is cursed because of you. All your life you will struggle to scratch a living from it. It will grow thorns and thistles for you, though you will eat of its grains."*
>
> Genesis 3:17-18

Notice the small words: *because of you*. The ground did nothing wrong, and it suffers anyway, for what people did. From the third chapter of the Bible, the health of the land is tied to the faithfulness of the people living on it.

That doesn't mean every drought is a punishment for somebody's sin. Jesus himself refused that kind of arithmetic. But Genesis sets out a pattern that runs through the rest of Scripture: when people break faith with God and each other, the earth feels it.

The land is in mourning

Centuries later, the prophet Hosea brought charges against Israel, and listen to how the indictment ends:

> *Hear the word of the LORD, O people of Israel! The LORD has brought charges against you, saying: "There is no faithfulness, no kindness, no knowledge of God in your land. You make vows and break them; you kill and steal and commit adultery. There is violence everywhere—one murder after another. That is why your land is in mourning, and everyone is wasting away. Even the wild animals, the birds of the sky, and the fish of the sea are disappearing."*
>
> Hosea 4:1-3

Hosea moves in one breath from broken vows to vanishing fish. In his mind they belong in the same sentence. A people who have stopped keeping faith with God will not keep faith with the land either, and the land shows it.

Jeremiah, writing about a century later, heard the same grief. "How long must this land mourn?" he asked. "Even the grass in the fields has withered. The wild animals and birds have disappeared because of the evil in the land" (Jeremiah 12:4). A few verses on, God himself speaks of his vineyard turned to wasteland: "I hear its mournful cry. The whole land is desolate, and no one even cares" (Jeremiah 12:11).

God hears the land cry. Nobody else seems to.

Groaning as in childbirth

Paul takes the old curse and gives it a direction. Writing to the Christians in Rome, he describes the whole created world as waiting:

> *Against its will, all creation was subjected to God's curse. But with eager hope, the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay. For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.*
>
> Romans 8:20-22

Against its will. Creation didn't choose this. It was dragged into the consequences of human rebellion. And *groaning as in the pains of childbirth* is a precise image. Labor pain is real pain, and anyone who has been in a delivery room knows it is no metaphor for something mild. It is also pain that is going somewhere.

That is the shape of the whole guide. The groaning is real, and it is heading toward a birth. Part Four comes back to the promise. For now, it's enough to know that Paul heard the earth groaning and didn't tell anyone to cheer up.

A word for the ache

In 2005 an Australian philosopher named Glenn Albrecht coined a word for what people feel when the place they live changes around them: *solastalgia*. He described it as a kind of homesickness you feel while still at home. He first noticed it among people in New South Wales whose valley was being torn up by open-cut coal mining, and later among people living through long drought.

You don't need the word to know the feeling. But it may help to know that the feeling is common, and that it isn't foolish. Grieving a changed place is love.

Scripture makes plenty of room for that kind of grief, more than many churches do. Roughly a third of the Psalms are laments. Nehemiah wept over Jerusalem's broken walls. Jesus wept over a city that wouldn't listen. Lament comes before repair, because people seldom work to heal what they haven't first let themselves mourn.

When the grief gets heavy

For some people, worry about the planet sinks into something heavier. Sleep goes, and then hope. The future looks like a wall. If that's where you are, please talk to someone: a counselor, a doctor or a pastor you trust. Getting that help is one of the ways God cares for his people, and no failure of faith.

If the darkness has you thinking about ending your life, please call or text 988 in the United States, or reach the crisis line where you live, today.

FOR REFLECTION

1. What place from your past has changed the most? Write its name and one detail you remember about it.
2. Hosea ties broken faith to a mourning land. Where do you see that connection in your own town or region?
3. Paul says creation groans “against its will.” What would it look like to grieve with creation this week instead of looking away? Name one small way.

Part Two: Reading the Sky

3. Cold and Heat, Summer and Winter

When the floodwaters finally went down, Noah stepped onto dry ground and built an altar. Genesis says God was pleased with the offering and made a promise in response:

> *I will never again curse the ground because of the human race, even though everything they think or imagine is bent toward evil from childhood. I will never again destroy all living things. As long as the earth remains, there will be planting and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night.*
>
> Genesis 8:21-22

The first people to hear that story were farmers and herders. Their lives depended on the rains coming when they should and the frost holding off until the harvest was in. For them, the turning of the seasons was a matter of eating or going hungry, and this promise was good news.

Scientists have found something in the ice that makes the promise even more striking.

The long, steady season

Deep in the Greenland ice sheet, snow has piled up for more than a hundred thousand years, each year's layer pressed under the next. When scientists drill out cores of that ice, they can read the climate of the past year by year, almost like tree rings, from the chemistry of the ice and the tiny bubbles of ancient air trapped inside.

What the ice shows is a world that spent most of its recent history lurching. During the last glaciation, the climate swung hard and fast, with sharp warm spells and cold snaps. At its coldest, about twenty thousand years ago, ice sheets covered most of Canada and reached south past where Chicago stands today. A team led by Jessica Tierney at the University of Arizona estimated in 2020 that the world then averaged about six degrees Celsius colder than the climate of the last few thousand years.

Then, about 11,700 years ago, the climate settled down. Geologists use that turn to mark the start of the period they call the Holocene, the age we live in. Strictly speaking, we are still inside a long ice age that began more than two and a half million years ago, which is why Greenland and Antarctica still carry their ice sheets. The Holocene is one of its warm intervals, what geologists call an interglacial. Compared with the swings before it, the Holocene has been remarkably steady. It has had its droughts and cold spells, some of them hard on the people who lived through them. Still, the basic pattern held.

And here is the part that is easy to miss. Farming began within a few thousand years of that turn. So did villages, then cities, writing, the pyramids, Jerusalem and Rome, every cathedral, and every farm your grandparents ever worked. The whole of human civilization grew up inside one unusually steady season.

We take that steadiness for granted because it is all any human being has ever known. Seen from the ice, it looks more like a gift.

What is changing

Scientists now measure the air, land and oceans with thermometers, weather balloons, ocean floats and satellites, run by researchers in dozens of countries. Their findings are summarized every several years by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which reviews thousands of studies. Here is some of what they report, with the limits included.

Carbon dioxide. Before the industrial era, the air held about 280 parts per million of carbon dioxide. In May 2026, the monthly average at the Mauna Loa observatory in Hawaii was about 432. The IPCC's 2021 report concluded that by 2019, carbon dioxide levels were higher than at any time in at least two million years.

Temperature. The IPCC found that the decade from 2011 to 2020 averaged about 1.1 degrees Celsius warmer than 1850 to 1900. Warming has continued since. The World Meteorological Organization found that 2024 was the warmest year on record, about 1.55 degrees above the pre-industrial average, give or take 0.13. Europe's Copernicus service ranked 2025 third, and put long-term warming at about 1.4 degrees. One hot year doesn't make a trend. The trend is measured over decades, and the decades keep climbing.

Speed. Global surface temperature has risen faster since 1970 than in any other fifty-year period in at least the last two thousand years, according to the IPCC.

Cause. In the IPCC's words: "It is unequivocal that human influence has warmed the atmosphere, ocean and land." Most of that influence comes from burning coal, oil and gas, with land clearing adding more.

A degree and a half may not sound like much. It is an average over the whole planet, day and night, land and sea. Remember that the difference between today's world and a world with a mile of ice over Canada was about six degrees.

Weather we can see

Most of us don't experience global averages. We experience weather. Here the science is careful, and it is worth being careful with it.

The IPCC states that "human-induced climate change is already affecting many weather and climate extremes in every region across the globe." The evidence is strongest for heat. It is "virtually certain," in the report's language, that heat waves have become more frequent and more intense across most land regions since the 1950s. Heavy rainfall is up too. It has increased over most land areas where there are good records, and human-caused warming is likely the main driver. The share of hurricanes and typhoons that reach the most intense categories has likely grown over the last four decades.

That is also where the evidence starts to thin. Scientists have low confidence in long-term trends in how many tropical storms form overall. Drought trends vary by region. For tornadoes and hail, the records are too short and patchy to say much. And no single storm can be blamed entirely on climate change, though researchers can now estimate how much more likely some heat waves and floods have become.

Saying where the evidence stops is part of telling the truth. It makes what the evidence does show harder to wave away.

What the promise means

Some Christians quote Genesis 8:22 to dismiss all of this. God promised the seasons would continue, they say, so we can't really change the climate.

Read the promise again. God says he will never again curse the ground or destroy all living things. He promises that planting and harvest, cold and heat, will go on as long as the earth remains. That is a promise about God's faithfulness. It tells us God won't abandon the world.

It never promised that no town would flood or no crop would fail. The same Bible that records the promise to Noah records seven years of famine in Joseph's day, three and a half years of drought in Elijah's, and swarms of locusts in Joel's. The seasons kept turning through all of it, and people still went hungry.

God keeps the great rhythms going. What we do inside them still matters. A farmer who trusts God for rain still has to keep the topsoil from blowing away. The steady season that held for twelve thousand years is God's gift. Spending it carelessly is our choice.

FOR REFLECTION

1. What did you assume about the climate before reading this chapter? Was anything here new to you?
2. Ask an older relative or neighbor how the weather where they grew up has changed in their lifetime. Write down one thing they say.
3. Genesis 8:22 promises that God won't abandon the world. How does that promise sit with you when you read the numbers?

4. All Who Delight in Him

In 1874 the University of Cambridge opened a new physics laboratory, the Cavendish. Its first director was James Clerk Maxwell, the Scottish physicist whose equations describe light, electricity and magnetism. Maxwell was a devout Christian. Carved into the great oak doors of the building, almost certainly at his suggestion, was a verse in Latin from Psalm 111. In the NLT it reads:

> *How amazing are the deeds of the LORD! All who delight in him should ponder them.*
>
> Psalm 111:2

When the laboratory moved to new buildings a century later, the same verse went over the entrance again, this time in English.

Some of the most important discoveries of modern physics were made behind those doors. The people who walked through them were reminded every morning that studying creation is a way of honoring the One who made it.

An old Christian habit

Plenty of Christians today have been taught to treat science as a threat. Historically, that's strange. Much of modern science grew up inside the Church.

Gregor Mendel, an Augustinian friar, worked out the basic rules of heredity by breeding pea plants in his monastery garden in the 1850s and 1860s. Georges Lemaître, a Belgian Catholic priest, proposed in 1927 that the universe is expanding, the idea that grew into what we now call the Big Bang. Maxwell served as an elder in his church in Scotland while he was rewriting physics.

They didn't see a contest between their faith and their work. If God made the world, then learning how the world works is learning something about God's handiwork. Paul says as much. Ever since the world was created, he writes, "people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature" (Romans 1:20).

Reading the sky

Jesus expected ordinary people to read evidence. One day he turned to a crowd and said:

> *When you see clouds beginning to form in the west, you say, 'Here comes a shower.' And you are right. When the south wind blows, you say, 'Today will be a scorcher.' And it is. You fools! You know how to interpret the weather signs of the earth and sky, but you don't know how to interpret the present times.*
>
> Luke 12:54-56

His main point was about recognizing who was standing in front of them. But notice what he assumed along the way. Farmers in Galilee watched the clouds and the wind and drew conclusions, and they were right. Jesus didn't scold them for that. He scolded them for being honest about the weather and evasive about everything else.

The posture he commends is the same one good science asks for. Look at what's in front of you. Let it tell you something, even when you'd rather it didn't.

Honest about what we don't know

One reason the climate findings can be trusted is that they come with their uncertainty attached. The IPCC uses a careful vocabulary. "Virtually certain" means 99 to 100 percent likely, and "likely" means at least two chances in three. "Low confidence" means the evidence is thin or the experts disagree. Chapter 3 used that language on purpose, including the places where it says the evidence runs out.

That is a Christian virtue in lab coats. Scripture forbids false witness, and it warns again and again against claiming more than you know. An honest scientist and an honest believer share a habit: they say what they see and stop where their sight stops.

Whom to trust

Many readers have good reason to be wary. They have watched scientific findings get used as weapons in culture-war fights, waved around by people who seemed more interested in winning than in telling the truth. Experts make mistakes. Institutions can be proud.

The answer to that is more evidence from more directions, and the climate evidence comes from many independent sources: ice cores and tree rings, satellite measurements and ocean floats, thermometer records kept by farmers and sailors for a century and a half, research teams in rival countries checking each other's work. Even scientists working for one of the world's largest oil companies reached the same basic conclusions in the late 1970s and 1980s. Chapter 7 comes back to that story.

Talk about it

Katharine Hayhoe is an atmospheric scientist and an evangelical Christian. She often speaks to church groups, some of them skeptical of her field. In a 2018 TED talk titled "The most important thing you can do to fight climate change: talk about it," she argued that facts alone rarely change minds. What helps is starting from what people already love, such as their families, their communities, their faith and the places they live, and showing how a changing climate touches those things.

That fits the shape of this guide. Nobody needs to become a climate expert. Start with the creek you love, the farm you grew up on, the grandkids you worry about. Then look honestly at what the people who measure things have found.

All who delight in him should ponder them. That includes the rain gauge and the thermometer.

FOR REFLECTION

1. Were you taught to see science as a friend or a threat to faith? Who taught you that?
2. Jesus praised people for reading the clouds honestly. Is there something in your own life you've been avoiding looking at squarely?
3. Hayhoe suggests starting with what people already love. Write down one person you could talk with about creation care, and what they love that it touches.

Part Three: The Earth Is the LORD's

5. Tend and Watch Over It

The first chapter of the Bible gives humanity a job description, and some of its words have caused trouble:

> *Then God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground."*
>
> Genesis 1:28

Govern and *reign*. Older translations say "subdue" and "have dominion." For centuries some readers took those words as a license: the earth is ours to use however we like. Strip the hillside, drain the marsh, take what can be taken.

But a king in Scripture is supposed to rule the way God rules, and the next chapter shows what that looks like.

To tend and watch over

> *The LORD God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to tend and watch over it.*
>
> Genesis 2:15

Two verbs. The Hebrew words behind them, *avad* and *shamar*, can also be translated "serve" and "keep." Many scholars point out that the same pair shows up later describing the work of the priests and Levites caring for the tabernacle (Numbers 3:7-8). If that connection holds, the garden was the first sanctuary, and the first human was its first caretaker.

Whatever you make of that, the plain meaning is clear enough. Adam was put in the garden to work it and protect it, the way a good gardener does. He got the job of keeping the place, which is a long way from strip-mining it.

Read together, the two chapters fit. Humans are given real authority over the earth, and that authority is supposed to look like care. Jesus said the greatest among his followers would be the one who serves. Dominion in his kingdom looks like a gardener on her knees in the dirt.

As good or better

John Calvin, the sixteenth-century Reformer, wrote a commentary on Genesis. When he reached this verse, he drew a practical lesson that sounds surprisingly modern. The earth, he said, was given to humans "with this condition, that he should occupy himself in its cultivation." Then he spelled out what that means for anyone who owns land:

> *Let him who possesses a field, so partake of its yearly fruits, that he may not suffer the ground to be injured by his negligence; but let him endeavor to hand it down to posterity as he received it, or even better cultivated.*
>
> John Calvin, Commentary on Genesis

As he received it, or even better. That is a high bar, and Calvin set it nearly five hundred years ago, long before anyone talked about sustainability. He wanted each generation to leave the soil richer than it found it.

Some farmers today call that regenerative agriculture. Calvin would have called it obedience.

A Sabbath for the land

Most people know that God gave Israel a weekly day of rest. Fewer know that he gave the land one too.

> *When you have entered the land I am giving you, the land itself must observe a Sabbath rest before the LORD every seventh year. For six years you may plant your fields and prune your vineyards and harvest your crops, but during the seventh year the land must have a Sabbath year of complete rest. It is the LORD's Sabbath. Do not plant your fields or prune your vineyards during that year.*
>
> Leviticus 25:2-4

Every seventh year, the fields lay fallow. Exodus adds a detail about who got to eat from them: “let the land be renewed and lie uncultivated during the seventh year. Then let the poor among you harvest whatever grows on its own. Leave the rest for wild animals to eat” (Exodus 23:11).

Look at who is included in that rest. The soil is renewed and the poor are fed, and the wild animals get whatever is left. The law made room for creatures that would never pay Israel a cent.

Israel didn’t keep this command well. When the Chronicler looked back on the Babylonian exile, he described the empty land as resting at last: “The land finally enjoyed its Sabbath rest, lying desolate until the seventy years were fulfilled” (2 Chronicles 36:21). The people were carried off, and the land got the Sabbaths it had been owed.

The ox, the donkey and the fruit tree

The law of Moses is full of small instructions that show God’s care for creatures most people would overlook.

The weekly Sabbath was for animals too: “on the seventh day you must stop working. This gives your ox and your donkey a chance to rest” (Exodus 23:12).

Even in war there were limits. An army besieging a town was told not to cut down the fruit trees for siege works. “You may eat the fruit, but do not cut down the trees. Are the trees your enemies, that you should attack them?” (Deuteronomy 20:19). There is a dry humor in that question. The trees aren’t the ones you’re fighting.

And Proverbs puts it in one line: “The godly care for their animals, but the wicked are always cruel” (Proverbs 12:10). How you treat a creature that can’t talk back says something about your heart.

Healing ground

All of this adds up to a way of living on the land that heals it instead of wearing it out. Rest the soil. Leave margins for the poor and the wild. Don’t destroy what feeds you to win a fight. Hand the field on in better shape than you got it.

That way of thinking runs through the rest of this guide. Call it regeneration. Its opposite is extraction, which takes what can be taken and moves on. Every practice, every business and every technology can be held up to the same question: does this heal the place it touches, or strip it?

It is a simple question. It can be a hard one to answer honestly.

FOR REFLECTION

1. When you hear “dominion,” what comes to mind? How does Genesis 2:15 change the picture?
2. Calvin asks each owner to hand the land on “as he received it, or even better.” What have you been handed, whether land, a home or a yard, and what shape will it be in when you pass it on?
3. The land’s Sabbath included the poor and the wild animals. Name one way you could leave room for both where you live.

6. Who Gives the Wild Donkey Its Freedom?

The book of Job spends thirty-seven chapters on suffering and argument. Job has lost his children, his wealth and his health, and his friends insist he must have done something to deserve it. Job insists he didn't, and demands that God show up and explain himself.

Then God shows up. He doesn't explain anything Job asked about. Instead he takes Job on a tour of creation:

> *Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell me, if you know so much.*
>
> Job 38:4

What follows is some of the most beautiful nature writing in any language. God talks about the sea and the snow, the stars and the lightning, the lion and the raven. And he keeps returning to places and creatures that have nothing to do with people at all.

Rain where no one lives

> *Who created a channel for the torrents of rain? Who laid out the path for the lightning? Who makes the rain fall on barren land, in a desert where no one lives? Who sends rain to satisfy the parched ground and make the tender grass spring up?*
>
> Job 38:25-27

Rain on a desert where no one lives. From a human point of view, that rain is wasted. No crop grows from it. Nobody drinks it. God sends it anyway, for the sake of the parched ground and the tender grass.

Then he turns to an animal that is no use to anyone:

> *Who gives the wild donkey its freedom? Who untied its ropes? I have placed it in the wilderness; its home is the wasteland. It hates the noise of the city and has no driver to shout at it. The mountains are its pastureland, where it searches for every blade of grass.*
>
> Job 39:5-8

A domestic donkey carried loads and pulled plows. The wild donkey does neither. It runs loose in the mountains, and God says he is the one who set it free. He seems to enjoy that it has no driver.

Job never gets an answer to his question. What he gets is a God who delights in a world far larger than human usefulness. There is something humbling in that, and something freeing too.

The earth is full of your creatures

Psalm 104 sings the same song. It walks through creation like a man walking his land at dawn, noticing everything:

> *You make springs pour water into the ravines, so streams gush down from the mountains. They provide water for all the animals, and the wild donkeys quench their thirst. The birds nest beside the streams and sing among the branches of the trees.*
>
> Psalm 104:10-12

A few lines later, the psalm makes room for things people use, "plants for people to use," and then goes right back to the wild: "High in the mountains live the wild goats, and the rocks form a refuge for the hyraxes" (Psalm 104:14, 18). A hyrax is a small furry animal about the size of a rabbit that lives among the rocks. It turns up only a handful of times in Scripture, and here God makes a point of giving it a home.

Then the psalmist steps back and takes in all of it: "O LORD, what a variety of things you have made! In wisdom you have made them all. The earth is full of your creatures" (Psalm 104:24). And near the end: "The LORD takes pleasure in all he has made!" (Psalm 104:31).

God takes pleasure in it. In the first chapter of Genesis he looked over everything he had made and "saw that it was very good" (Genesis 1:31), before a single human being had done anything useful with any of it.

Every living creature

When God made his promise after the flood, he didn't make it only with Noah's family:

> *I hereby confirm my covenant with you and your descendants, and with all the animals that were on the boat with you—the birds, the livestock, and all the wild animals—every living creature on earth.*
>
> Genesis 9:9-10

The rainbow, God says, is "the sign of my covenant with you and with all the earth" (Genesis 9:13). The animals are partners in the covenant. The earth itself is named.

The book of Jonah ends on a similar note. Jonah is sulking because God spared the city of Nineveh, and God asks him a final question: "But Nineveh has more than 120,000 people living in spiritual darkness, not to mention all the animals. Shouldn't I feel sorry for such a great city?" (Jonah 4:11).

Not to mention all the animals. God's mercy extended to the cattle in Nineveh's fields. The book ends right there, with God's question hanging in the air.

A heart on fire

Christians across the centuries have picked up this thread.

In 1225, according to tradition, Francis of Assisi composed his *Canticle of the Creatures* while ill and nearly blind. It is a song of praise that calls the sun and the moon, wind and water, fire and earth, his brothers and sisters. One line praises God "through our Sister Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us." Francis praised God through creation without confusing the two, and he treated every creature as kin.

Centuries earlier, in the seventh century, a monk and bishop known as Isaac the Syrian wrote words that the Orthodox Church still treasures. Asked what a merciful heart is, he answered that "it is a heart on fire for the whole of creation, for humanity, for the

birds, for the animals." He went on to say that such a heart weeps and prays even for creatures that do it harm.

Isaac spent years as a hermit. Francis begged his bread on the roads of Italy. Neither of them ran anything. They simply loved what God loves, and the Church has remembered them for it.

Learning the names

In Eden, God brought the animals to the man "to see what he would call them, and the man chose a name for each one" (Genesis 2:19). Naming takes attention. You can't name what you haven't looked at.

Most of us have lost that habit. In 2002, a team of British researchers led by Andrew Balmford showed a group of 109 schoolchildren cards picturing common wildlife and cards picturing Pokémon characters. By around age eight, the children could identify far more of the cartoon creatures than of the plants and animals living around them. It was a small study, but it found something many of us would recognize in ourselves.

Knowing the names of the trees on your street, the birds at your feeder, the weeds in your yard, is a small way of paying attention to what God takes pleasure in. Chapter 10 makes it a practice.

FOR REFLECTION

1. God sends rain on a desert where no one lives. How does it feel to know God cares about parts of creation that have nothing to do with you?
2. Read Psalm 104 slowly, out loud, outdoors if you can. Which line stays with you?
3. How many living things around your home can you name? Write down five. Then write down one you see often but can't name.

Part Four: The Land Mourns

7. Field After Field

King Ahab had a palace in Jezreel, and next door to it was a vineyard. The vineyard belonged to a man named Naboth, and Ahab wanted it.

> *One day Ahab said to Naboth, "Since your vineyard is so convenient to my palace, I would like to buy it to use as a vegetable garden. I will give you a better vineyard in exchange, or if you prefer, I will pay you for it." But Naboth replied, "The LORD forbid that I should give you the inheritance that was passed down by my ancestors."*
>
> 1 Kings 21:2-3

Ahab made a fair offer by the standards of the market. Naboth turned it down. To him the vineyard was no commodity to be swapped for a better one. It was an inheritance, held in trust from his ancestors and, behind them, from God, who had told Israel that the land was his.

Ahab went home and sulked. His wife, Jezebel, had no such scruples. She arranged for two scoundrels to accuse Naboth falsely of cursing God and the king, and the town elders had him stoned to death. Then Ahab walked over and took possession of the vineyard. The prophet Elijah met him there with a word from God (1 Kings 21:8-19).

The story is about a murder. Underneath the murder is something older: the conviction that land is just property, and that anyone with enough power can turn somebody else's inheritance into his vegetable garden.

House after house

Isaiah saw the same thing on a larger scale:

> *What sorrow for you who buy up house after house and field after field, until everyone is evicted and you live alone in the land. But I have heard the LORD of Heaven's Armies swear a solemn oath: "Many houses will stand deserted; even beautiful mansions will be empty."*
>
> Isaiah 5:8-9

What the prophets condemned was greed that swallows a neighbor's livelihood and leaves the land empty of people. In Isaiah's picture the wealthy man finally owns everything in sight, and he is alone.

Greed is the oldest sin in this story. What has changed is the machinery.

What one company knew

In 2023 the journal *Science* published a study by Geoffrey Supran, Stefan Rahmstorf and Naomi Oreskes. They gathered the global warming projections that ExxonMobil's own scientists produced between 1977 and 2003, in internal documents and in research papers, and checked them against what actually happened.

The company's scientists were good at their jobs. Their projections pointed to warming of about 0.2 degrees Celsius per decade, give or take 0.04, and depending on how you measure it, between 63 and 83 percent of their projections matched the warming that followed.

Meanwhile, the researchers found, the company's public messaging cast doubt on the science its own staff had confirmed. An earlier study by Supran and Oreskes, published in 2017, compared Exxon's internal documents and peer-reviewed papers with its paid advertisements in newspapers, and found the public ads far more likely to express doubt.

Scripture has a name for knowing the truth and selling doubt about it. The ninth commandment covers it. So does Isaiah's warning to those "who say that evil is good and good is evil" (Isaiah 5:20).

Greed in green, too

It would be easy to stop there and make this a story about one industry. Greed is more democratic than that. It goes wherever there is money to be made, including into the industries sold to us as the solution.

More than half of the world's cobalt, a key metal in the rechargeable batteries that run phones and electric cars, comes from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In 2016 Amnesty International documented children as young as seven working in cobalt mines there, often in dangerous conditions, for very little pay. UNICEF had estimated that about 40,000 children were working in mines across southern Congo in 2014.

In California's Mojave Desert, the Ivanpah solar plant was built on about 3,500 acres of public land that is home to the desert tortoise, a threatened species. Early surveys expected fewer than twenty tortoises on the site. More than 150 turned up, and biologists had to relocate them.

Wind turbines are mostly steel, copper and other metals that recycle easily. Their blades are a different story. Made of fiberglass or carbon fiber bonded with resin, they are hard to recycle, and according to the U.S. Department of Energy most retired blades currently go to landfills. Turbines also kill birds. A 2013 study by Scott Loss and colleagues estimated between 140,000 and 328,000 bird deaths a year at wind turbines in the lower forty-eight states.

Every one of those harms deserves to be named. So does the scale. That same research team estimated that free-roaming house cats kill well over a billion birds in the United States each year. Blades are a small problem by volume, too. The Department of Energy puts retired blades at less than two hundredths of one percent of the country's municipal and construction waste. And measured over their whole life, including mining and manufacturing, wind and solar release a small fraction of the carbon of coal or gas. The IPCC's 2014 review put typical lifetime emissions at about 820 grams of carbon dioxide per kilowatt-hour for coal, 490 for natural gas, 48 for large solar farms and 11 for onshore wind.

No source of energy leaves the earth untouched. Every one of them has to be mined, built, sited and someday taken apart. The question Scripture teaches us to ask is who pays for it, and whether the land can heal.

Heal or strip

Chapter 5 offered a test: does this heal the place it touches, or strip it? Here is where it earns its keep.

An oil company that hides its own research fails it. A solar developer that bulldozes desert habitat when a rooftop or a parking lot would do fails it. A battery supply chain that runs on children fails it, whatever sticker is on the car. A coal town abandoned when the seam runs out, its creeks still orange with mine runoff, fails it too.

The same test applies closer to home. The garage full of things bought and barely used. The lawn soaked in chemicals that wash into the creek every time it rains, a few blocks from where the kids play. Greed is the sin, wherever it banks, and none of us are entirely clear of it.

This guide won't tell you which technologies to back or how to vote. It will ask you to keep your eyes open in every direction, and to refuse the comfortable story where the greedy people are always on the other team.

FOR REFLECTION

1. Naboth saw his vineyard as an inheritance, not a commodity. Is there anything in your life you hold that way?
2. Which part of this chapter was harder for you to read: the section on fossil fuel companies or the section on clean energy? Why do you think that is?
3. Pick one thing you bought this month. Where did it come from, and who might have paid a price for it?

8. Muddying the Water

The prophet Ezekiel spent much of his ministry in exile in Babylon, and some of his sharpest words are aimed at Israel's leaders, whom he calls shepherds who fed themselves and let the flock scatter. Then, in chapter 34, God turns from the shepherds to the sheep:

> *And as for you, my flock, this is what the Sovereign LORD says to his people: I will judge between one animal of the flock and another, separating the sheep from the goats. Isn't it enough for you to keep the best of the pastures for yourselves? Must you also trample down the rest? Isn't it enough for you to drink clear water for yourselves? Must you also muddy the rest with your feet? Why must my flock eat what you have trampled down and drink water you have fouled?*
>
> Ezekiel 34:17-19

Anyone who has kept animals knows the scene. The strongest sheep get to the stream first, drink their fill, and wade around in it until the water is brown. The ones that come after have to drink what's left.

God notices, and he takes it personally. *My* flock is eating what you trampled.

Who lives downstream

Every creek runs downhill to someone.

The family that lives next to the refinery breathes what comes out of its stacks. The village downriver from a mine drinks what washes out of the tailings. The farmer whose well goes dry when a bottling plant moves in upstream pays for water someone else is selling. In most cases the people downstream had little say in the decision and get little of the profit.

The World Health Organization estimates that air pollution, outdoors and inside homes, is linked to about 6.7 million premature deaths every year. For outdoor air pollution, 89 percent of those deaths happen in low- and middle-income countries. Those figures are estimates, built from models, and they cover many sources, from car exhaust and power plants to cooking fires in homes without chimneys. But the pattern is clear and old. The people with the least power usually live closest to the dirt.

Ezekiel would recognize it.

The earth suffers

Isaiah described a whole land worn down by its people's unfaithfulness:

> *The earth mourns and dries up, and the land wastes away and withers. Even the greatest people on earth waste away. The earth suffers for the sins of its people, for they have twisted God's instructions, violated his laws, and broken his everlasting covenant.*
>
> Isaiah 24:4-5

Isaiah wrote these lines as prophecy about judgment on the whole earth, and readers have always found them hard. They don't give a modern diagnosis. They do say something the Bible says again and again: the earth suffers for the sins of its people. The suffering spreads. It reaches those who did the least to cause it, and the ground itself.

Who is my neighbor?

A religious lawyer once agreed with Jesus that the law comes down to loving God and loving your neighbor. Then he asked the question people still ask: who exactly counts as my neighbor? Jesus answered with a story about a Samaritan who stopped for a stranger lying beaten on the road (Luke 10:25-37). The neighbor turned out to be whoever was in the ditch.

The people downstream are in the ditch. Many of them live far away, and some haven't been born yet. Loving them can feel abstract, because we will never see their faces. But the creek connects us whether we see them or not, and so does the air.

A sin against creation

In November 1997, at a gathering in Santa Barbara, California, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, who holds the first place of honor among Orthodox bishops, said something that drew headlines: "To commit a crime against the natural world is a sin." He went on to list examples, beginning with this: "For human beings to cause species

to become extinct and to destroy the biological diversity of God's creation." He named the stripping of forests, the destruction of wetlands and the poisoning of the earth's water, land and air, and he concluded that all of these are sins.

Bartholomew has spent decades pressing this point, enough that he is often called the Green Patriarch. His language comes straight out of the Orthodox habit of seeing the whole creation as a gift offered back to God in worship. Fouling it spoils the offering.

Catholic and Protestant leaders have said similar things in their own ways. The thread runs through every branch of the family: harming creation, and the neighbors who depend on it, is a matter for confession.

Starting at home

Confession works best close to home, and that includes the church's own house.

Many congregations have already started. Some have planted gardens on their lawns and given the produce to food pantries. Some have turned old parking lots back into green space, installed better insulation, or adopted a stretch of a local creek and cleaned it up twice a year. None of that fixes the world. All of it is the kind of faithfulness the prophets asked for: keeping your own feet out of the water so the next sheep can drink.

FOR REFLECTION

1. Where does the water from your sink and your storm drain end up? If you don't know, find out this week.
2. Who lives downstream from you, literally or otherwise? Write down one specific place or group of people.
3. Bartholomew called harm to creation a sin. Does that language feel right to you, too strong, or not strong enough? Why?

9. Groaning Toward Glory

After seven chapters of grief and greed and hard numbers, you may be tired. That's fair. The facts are heavy, and they don't get lighter by being looked at.

But the Bible doesn't end in the ditch, and neither does this guide.

Waiting with eager hope

Chapter 2 stopped partway through Paul's great passage on creation. Here is the whole stretch:

> *Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will reveal to us later. For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who his children really are. Against its will, all creation was subjected to God's curse. But with eager hope, the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay.*
>
> Romans 8:18-21

The creation "will join God's children in glorious freedom." Paul doesn't picture believers escaping a doomed planet. He pictures the planet set free along with them.

Then he puts us in the same posture as the creation: "And we believers also groan, even though we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, for we long for our bodies to be released from sin and suffering" (Romans 8:23). The earth groans. We groan. The Spirit gives us a taste of what is coming, and that taste is exactly what makes the waiting ache.

Everything reconciled

Paul's letter to the Colossians says how far the reconciliation reaches:

> *For God in all his fullness was pleased to live in Christ, and through him God reconciled everything to himself. He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of Christ's blood on the cross.*
>
> Colossians 1:19-20

Everything. Paul could have said “everyone,” and the gospel certainly includes every person who comes to Christ. But he chose the larger word. The peace made on the cross reaches as far as the curse ever did, down into the soil.

Wounds that remain

The best picture of what God plans for the earth is what he did with Jesus’ body.

On Easter morning the tomb was empty, and the risen Jesus had a real body. He ate fish with his friends. He walked the road to Emmaus. And he still carried the wounds of the cross; Thomas was invited to touch them. His body was the same body, healed and glorified, with the marks of what it had suffered still visible.

Many theologians, from the early Church to today, have seen in that the pattern for creation’s future. God raises what was broken instead of starting over somewhere else. The new creation will be this creation, healed, and perhaps still carrying some memory of what it went through.

A river and a tree

The last two chapters of the Bible describe the end of the story:

> *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared. And the sea was also gone.*
>
> Revelation 21:1

In the visions of Revelation the sea often stands for chaos and danger, and many commentators read its absence as the end of everything the sea stood for. Then comes the line the whole Bible has been waiting for: “Look, God’s home is now among his people!” (Revelation 21:3). In John’s vision God comes down to live with his people, on a renewed earth.

And the one on the throne says, “Look, I am making everything new!” (Revelation 21:5).

Then John sees a river:

> *Then the angel showed me a river with the water of life, clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb. It flowed down the center of the main street. On each side of the river grew a tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, with a fresh crop each month. The leaves were used for medicine to heal the nations. No longer will there be a curse upon anything.*
>
> Revelation 22:1-3

Clear water. A tree with leaves for healing. And the line that answers Genesis 3: *No longer will there be a curse upon anything*. The ground that was cursed because of us is free.

Isaiah saw it coming centuries earlier: "Where once there were thorns, cypress trees will grow. Where nettles grew, myrtles will sprout up" (Isaiah 55:13). The thorns and thistles of Eden give way to a forest.

Living between

We don't live there yet. We live between the groaning and the glory, and that in-between place asks four things of us.

We grieve what has been lost, without hurrying past it. We confess our share in it, including the sins of the systems we live inside and benefit from. We act where we can, faithfully, in the places God has put us. And we hope, because the outcome doesn't rest on us.

That last part matters. People who think the whole planet depends on them tend to burn out or give up. People who think it doesn't matter what they do tend to do nothing. Christians have a third option. The earth belongs to the LORD, he has promised to heal it, and he invites us to start living now the way his kingdom will look then.

A gardener plants a tree she may never sit under. She does it because trees are good and the people who come after her will need shade. That is a fair picture of Christian hope.

FOR REFLECTION

1. Paul says creation will share in “glorious freedom.” How does that change the way you think about the earth’s future?
2. Of the four things this chapter names (grieve, confess, act, hope), which comes hardest for you right now?
3. Is there a “tree” you could plant this year, literally or otherwise, whose shade you may never enjoy? Write it down.

Part Five: Practice

10. Practices From the Whole Church

Christians have been caring for land and animals since long before anyone used the word “environment.” Monks drained swamps and planted orchards. Farmers prayed over their fields every spring. Every branch of the family has habits worth borrowing.

The practices below come from Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant believers, and from the Scriptures they all share. Think of them as a pantry, not a program. Don’t try them all. Choose one and try it for two weeks. If it doesn’t fit, set it down and pick another. None of them will fix the planet. They may change how you walk on your corner of it.

Practice	Rooted in	Time	Good for
The Creation Groans Breath Prayer	Romans 8:22	A few breaths, any time	Anxiety and overwhelm
The Morning Psalm	Psalm 104; Francis of Assisi	10 min, outdoors	Wonder
Learn the Names	Genesis 2:19	10 min a day	Paying attention
Leave a Corner Wild	Leviticus 25:2-5; Exodus 23:11	One season	Rest, room for the wild
Bless the Water	Orthodox (Great Blessing of the Waters)	1 min, daily	Gratitude
A Rogation Walk	Catholic and Anglican Rogation Days	An hour, once a season	Loving your own place
Count What You Throw Away	Genesis 2:15; Calvin	One week	Seeing your own footprint
Your Downstream Neighbor	Ezekiel 34:18-19; Luke 10	One afternoon	Turning worry into action

The Creation Groans Breath Prayer

Breath prayers are short prayers prayed in rhythm with your breathing. The best known is the Jesus Prayer of the Orthodox tradition, but anyone can use the pattern.

When the news about the planet overwhelms you, stop where you are. Breathe in slowly and pray, “Creation groans.” Breathe out and pray, “Glory is coming.” Repeat it a few times, as long as you need. The words come from Romans 8:22: “For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.” The prayer holds both halves of Paul’s thought, the pain and where it’s going.

The Morning Psalm

Once a week, or every morning if you can, take Psalm 104 outside. Read it slowly, out loud if no one minds. Stop at each creature or place it names and look for something like it around you: water, a bird, a tree, a rock.

On other days, pray Francis of Assisi’s *Canticle of the Creatures* instead. It is short and easy to find. Francis praised God through Brother Sun and Sister Water, through Brother Fire and Sister Mother Earth. Add a line of your own for whatever you see that morning.

Learn the Names

Adam named the animals. Most of us can’t name the trees on our own street.

Set a goal of learning ten living things near your home: five plants and five animals, say, or ten birds. A field guide from the library works. So does a free plant- or bird-identification app on your phone. Spend ten minutes a day looking. When you learn a name, say it out loud and thank God for the creature.

Leave a Corner Wild

Israel’s fields rested every seventh year, and what grew on its own fed the poor and the wild animals (Exodus 23:11).

Pick one corner of your yard, a strip along the fence, or a planter on your balcony, and give it a Sabbath for one season. Don’t mow it, spray it or tidy it. If your neighborhood has rules, plant it with flowers native to your area instead and leave them alone. Watch what comes: insects, birds, plants you didn’t sow. Let it remind you that the land belongs to God, and that some of it is meant for creatures other than us.

Bless the Water

Every year at Theophany, the feast of Jesus' baptism in the Jordan, Orthodox churches hold the Great Blessing of the Waters. The priest prays over water and blesses it, and in many places the congregation processes to a river, a lake or the sea. The service gives thanks that Christ, by entering the water, made it holy.

Borrow a small piece of that. The first time you turn on the tap each day, pause for one breath. Thank God for the water, for the rain and the rivers and the aquifer it came from, and for the people downstream who will need it after you. One sentence is enough.

A Rogation Walk

For centuries, in the days before Ascension, Catholic and Anglican parishes kept what were called Rogation Days, from the Latin word for asking. Farmers had their fields blessed. In England, parishioners walked the boundaries of the parish together, led by the priest, praying for the land, the crops and the people inside those lines. The custom was called beating the bounds. Some churches still keep it.

Once a season, walk the edges of your own place. It might be your block, your neighborhood, or the creek that drains your part of town. Walk slowly. Notice what is growing, what has been dumped, what has changed since last time. Pray for the land, for the people who live on it, and for whatever is struggling there. If you can, bring someone with you.

Count What You Throw Away

Calvin asked each owner to hand the land on "as he received it, or even better cultivated." The first step in leaving less of a mark is seeing the mark you leave.

For one week, keep a simple tally of what you throw away. You don't need a scale. Just notice: how many bags, what kind of trash, what could have been reused, repaired, composted or never bought. At the end of the week, look at the list without beating yourself up. Ask God to show you one change you could make, and make that one.

Your Downstream Neighbor

Ezekiel asked the strong sheep why the others had to drink water they had fouled. Jesus told a story about a stranger in a ditch.

Spend one afternoon learning who lives downstream from you. Find out where your town's landfill, wastewater plant or nearest factory is, and who lives closest to it. Find out where your storm drains empty. Then do one thing: join a creek cleanup, give to a group that works in that neighborhood, show up at a public meeting and listen, or simply go and meet the people who live there. Start by learning their names, the same way you learned the trees'.

FOR REFLECTION

1. Which one practice will you try for the next two weeks? Write it down, with a day and a time.
2. Which practice did you most want to skip? What might that resistance be telling you?
3. Two weeks from now, come back to this page. What did you notice that you hadn't noticed before?

A Benediction

You may have come to these pages carrying grief for a place you loved, or dread about the world your grandchildren will inherit. You may have come wary, after years of being told that caring about creation put your faith in question.

The earth is still groaning, and this guide hasn't pretended otherwise. But you know some things now that the headlines don't say. The earth is the LORD's. He sends rain on deserts where no one lives and takes pleasure in the wild goats. He made a covenant with every living creature. He told the first gardener to tend and watch over the ground, and he has promised that the curse on it will one day be lifted.

Isaiah's words were spoken to exiles longing for home:

> *You will live in joy and peace. The mountains and hills will burst into song, and the trees of the field will clap their hands!*
>
> Isaiah 55:12

So go outside and learn the names. Leave a corner wild. Keep your feet out of your neighbor's water, and go in peace.

> *May the LORD bless you and protect you. May the LORD smile on you and be gracious to you. May the LORD show you his favor and give you his peace.*
>
> Numbers 6:24-26

Notes

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CHAPTER 1

2 Peter 3:10. The NLT's footnote reads: "Other manuscripts read *will be burned up*; one early manuscript reads *will be found destroyed*." The NLT text follows manuscripts that read "will be found." The original reading and its meaning are debated.

CHAPTER 2

Roughly a third of the Psalms are usually classed as laments; counts vary with how the categories are drawn.

Glenn Albrecht, "Solastalgia: A New Concept in Health and Identity," *PAN: Philosophy Activism Nature* 3 (2005): 41-55. Albrecht describes solastalgia as distress caused by environmental change to one's home environment. The phrase "homesickness you feel while still at home" paraphrases his descriptions of the term.

988 is the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline in the United States (call or text). Readers elsewhere should contact their local crisis service.

CHAPTER 3

Mike Walker et al., "Formal Definition and Dating of the GSSP (Global Stratotype Section and Point) for the Base of the Holocene Using the Greenland NGRIP Ice Core, and Selected Auxiliary Records," *Journal of Quaternary Science* 24, no. 1 (2009): 3-17. The base of the Holocene is dated to 11,700 years before AD 2000. The Holocene is an interglacial within the Quaternary glaciation, which began about 2.58 million years ago; the cold stretch before it is often called the last glacial period.

Jessica E. Tierney et al., "Glacial Cooling and Climate Sensitivity Revisited," *Nature* 584 (2020): 569-573. The study estimates global cooling at the Last Glacial Maximum, about 20,000 years ago, of about 6 °C relative to the late Holocene.

Pre-industrial carbon dioxide of about 280 parts per million is the commonly cited figure from ice-core records. May 2026 Mauna Loa averages: Scripps Institution of Oceanography, 432.0 ppm; NOAA, 432.3 ppm (Scripps news release, June 11, 2026).

IPCC, *Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis*, Summary for Policymakers: statements A.1 (human influence "unequivocal"), A.1.2 (2011-2020 warming of 1.09 °C, very likely range 0.95-1.20 °C, above 1850-1900), A.2.1 (CO_2 in 2019 higher than at any time in at least 2 million years), A.2.2 (warming since 1970 faster than in any other 50-year period over at least the last 2,000 years), A.3 and A.3.1 (extremes; hot extremes "virtually certain" to have become more frequent and intense). Confidence statements on heavy precipitation, tropical cyclones and other extremes follow the same report as summarized by the World Meteorological Organization, "Regional Trends in Extreme Events in the IPCC 2021 Report," *WMO Bulletin* 71, no. 1 (2022).

World Meteorological Organization, "WMO Confirms 2024 as Warmest Year on Record at about 1.55°C above Pre-industrial Level," press release, January 10, 2025. The figure is a consolidation of six datasets, with a margin of ±0.13 °C. A single year above 1.5 °C does not mean long-term warming has reached that level.

Copernicus Climate Change Service, "Copernicus: 2025 Was the Third Hottest Year on Record," January 2026. Copernicus put 2025 at 1.47 °C above pre-industrial and estimated long-term warming at about 1.4 °C.

Genesis 41 (seven years of famine); 1 Kings 17-18 with Luke 4:25 and James 5:17 (drought in Elijah's day, given as three and a half years in the New Testament); Joel 1 (locusts).

CHAPTER 4

The Latin inscription on the doors of the original Cavendish Laboratory, Cambridge, is Psalm 111:2 in the Vulgate: "Magna opera Domini exquisita in omnes voluntates ejus." That it was placed at Maxwell's suggestion is the usual account. The new laboratory, opened in the 1970s, carries the verse in English from Coverdale's translation. See the Faraday Institute for Science and Religion, "The Door to the Old Cavendish Lab, with Inscription."

Gregor Mendel's pea experiments ran from about 1856 to 1863 at the Augustinian abbey of St. Thomas in Brno. Georges Lemaître proposed an expanding universe in 1927. Maxwell served as an elder in the Church of Scotland.

IPCC likelihood terms: "virtually certain," 99-100 percent probability; "likely," 66-100 percent. Confidence levels (low to very high) reflect the amount of evidence and the degree of agreement.

Katharine Hayhoe, "The Most Important Thing You Can Do to Fight Climate Change: Talk about It," TEDWomen, November 2018. Her argument is summarized, not quoted. See also Katharine Hayhoe, *Saving Us: A Climate Scientist's Case for Hope and Healing in a Divided World* (New York: One Signal, 2021).

CHAPTER 5

Genesis 2:15. On the Hebrew verbs *avad* and *shamar* and their use for priestly service (Numbers 3:7-8; 8:26), see the commentaries; the connection is widely noted but its significance is debated.

John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, on Genesis 2:15, trans. John King (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1847). Quoted as given at the Christian Classics Ethereal Library.

2 Chronicles 36:21. The Chronicler links the seventy years of exile to the land's missed Sabbath years (compare Leviticus 26:34-35).

CHAPTER 6

Francis of Assisi, "The Canticle of the Creatures" (1225), in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, vol. 1, ed. Regis J. Armstrong, J. A. Wayne Hellmann and William J. Short (New York: New City Press, 1999). That he composed it while ill and nearly blind comes from the early biographies.

Isaac the Syrian (Isaac of Nineveh), seventh century. The "merciful heart" passage is quoted as given in Hilarion Alfeyev, *The Spiritual World of Isaac the Syrian*, Cistercian Studies 175 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 2000). The rest of the passage is paraphrased. English translations vary.

Andrew Balmford, Lizzie Clegg, Tim Coulson and Jennifer Taylor, "Why Conservationists Should Heed Pokémon," *Science* 295, no. 5564 (2002): 2367. The study tested 109 British schoolchildren aged 4 to 11 with picture cards.

CHAPTER 7

G. Supran, S. Rahmstorf and N. Oreskes, "Assessing ExxonMobil's Global Warming Projections," *Science* 379, no. 6628 (2023). Between 63 and 83 percent of the projections, depending on the metric, were consistent with observed warming; the projected trend was 0.20 ± 0.04 °C per decade.

Geoffrey Supran and Naomi Oreskes, "Assessing ExxonMobil's Climate Change Communications (1977-2014)," *Environmental Research Letters* 12 (2017).

Isaiah 5:20.

Amnesty International, “This Is What We Die For”: Human Rights Abuses in the Democratic Republic of the Congo Power the Global Trade in Cobalt (January 2016). The DRC then produced at least half of the world’s cobalt; its share has since grown. The UNICEF figure of about 40,000 children (2014) is cited in the same report.

Ivanpah Solar Electric Generating System: National Geographic, July 27, 2013. The tortoise counts are as reported there.

U.S. Department of Energy, WINDExchange, *Wind Energy End-of-Service Guide*. Blade waste sent to landfills in 2018 was under 50,000 tons, about 0.017 percent of combined municipal solid waste and construction and demolition waste. Some 85-90 percent of a turbine’s mass is readily recyclable.

Scott R. Loss, Tom Will and Peter P. Marra, “Estimates of Bird Collision Mortality at Wind Facilities in the Contiguous United States,” *Biological Conservation* 168 (2013): 201-209; and the same authors, “The Impact of Free-Ranging Domestic Cats on Wildlife of the United States,” *Nature Communications* 4 (2013): 1396, which estimates that cats kill between about 1.3 and 4.0 billion birds a year. Both are estimates with wide ranges.

IPCC, *Climate Change 2014: Mitigation of Climate Change*, Annex III, median life-cycle emissions in grams CO_2-equivalent per kilowatt-hour. Later reviews (for example, UNECE, 2021) give somewhat different figures with the same broad pattern.

CHAPTER 8

World Health Organization, “Ambient (Outdoor) Air Pollution,” fact sheet, October 24, 2024. The 6.7 million figure combines ambient and household air pollution; 89 percent of the 4.2 million deaths attributed to ambient pollution in 2019 occurred in low- and middle-income countries. These are modeled estimates.

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, address at Santa Barbara, California, November 1997. Quoted as given by the Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale. The rest of the list is paraphrased.

CHAPTER 9

Luke 24:13-43 and John 20:24-29 (the risen Jesus on the Emmaus road, eating fish, and inviting Thomas to touch his wounds).

Revelation 21:1. The sea as a symbol of chaos draws on images such as Daniel 7:2-3 and Revelation 13:1; readings vary.

CHAPTER 10

Rogation Days: the Major Rogation (April 25) and the Minor Rogations (the three days before Ascension Day), the latter introduced by Bishop Mamertus of Vienne around AD 470. Observance continues in some Anglican, Lutheran and Catholic communities.

The Great Blessing of the Waters is celebrated at Theophany, January 6 (January 19 in churches following the Julian calendar).

Check-In Questions and Prayer Prompts

Take these slowly. Write in the Faith Journal or on the lines below. What matters is that each question gets an honest answer somewhere.

1 What were you taught in church about the earth and its future?

Write down one thing you heard, from a pulpit or a pew, that still shapes how you think about creation. Then write what Psalm 24:1 says to it.

PRAYER PROMPT

"Lord, I've heard a lot of things about your world in your name. Help me hear what you actually said."

2 What place do you grieve?

Name it and describe it the way it used to be. Then describe it now. You don't have to fix anything here. Just let yourself mourn it.

PRAYER PROMPT

"God, you heard the land cry when nobody else cared. Hear me grieving this place. I loved it."

3 Where do you land after reading the science: closer to dismissal, closer to despair, or somewhere else?

Write one sentence about what you felt reading Chapter 3. Then write one sentence about what you believe God has promised.

PRAYER PROMPT

"Father, the numbers are heavy. Keep me honest about them, and keep me from losing hope."

4 Where in your own life are you healing the ground, and where are you stripping it?

Think about your yard, your trash can, your shopping and your work. Name one place for each. Then choose one small change, the way Calvin asked each owner to leave the field better than he found it.

PRAYER PROMPT

"Jesus, you told the first gardener to tend and watch over the ground. Show me the patch you've given me, and help me keep it well."

5 Which practice from Chapter 10 will you try for the next two weeks?

Write it down with a day and a time, like a Rogation walk on Saturday morning or the breath prayer when you read the news. In two weeks, write what you noticed.

PRAYER PROMPT

"Lord, I can't heal the whole world. Help me love the corner of it you put me in."

A Blessing for the Road

May the God who sees the wanderer find you wherever you are tonight.

May Christ, who never needed you to have it all together, meet you in the questions you're still carrying.

May the Spirit steady your feet when the noise gets loud, and quiet your heart when the world won't.

Go gently. Tell the truth. Love the ones in front of you.

And when you fall, and you will, may grace be the first thing you find when you get back up.

You're Always Welcome Here

If this helped, don't carry it alone. Write your answers in the Faith Journal, free and private. Share this with someone who's wandering. And come find us at faithoverfactions.com, on Substack, Facebook, Bluesky, and Instagram.

Faith Journal

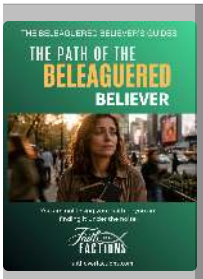
This piece online

The porch light is always on.

Take Something for the Road

You don't have to walk this alone, and you don't have to pay to keep going. Here are a few companions for the journey. All six are free. No email address, no catch.

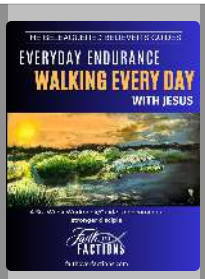
THE BELEAGUERED BELIEVER'S GUIDES



The Path of the Beleaguered Believer

"You are not losing your faith, you are finding it under the noise." For the one who keeps getting up.

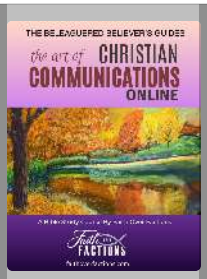
FREE DOWNLOAD



Everyday Endurance

Walking every day with Jesus: a six-week workbook for becoming a stronger disciple.

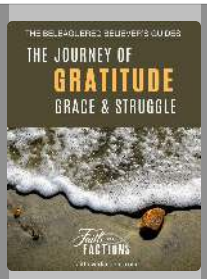
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The Art of Christian Communications Online

A Bible study course on speaking truth with grace when the internet won't.

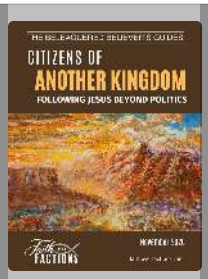
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The Journey of Gratitude, Grace & Struggle

You don't have to feel grateful to begin. You only have to turn toward the One who hasn't left.

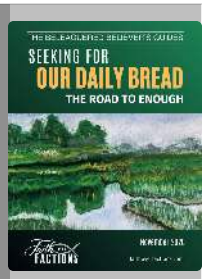
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Citizens of Another Kingdom

Jesus is Lord, and nobody else gets the title. For the one whose church picked a side.

FREE DOWNLOAD



Seeking for Our Daily Bread

Faith, debt and enough. For the one who was told to just trust God.

FREE DOWNLOAD

And a Quiet Place to Write It All Down

The Faith Journal is a private space for the questions in these pages, the prayers you mean, and the faith that doesn't fit neatly anymore. Write honestly. Share prayer requests only when you're ready. Free, private by default, no comment threads, no algorithm.

Grace and peace for the road.

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