

CREATION CONNECTION

RESOURCE FOR CHILDREN



Written by Elke Keeling
in partnership with A ROCHA AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND
for the ECO CHURCH NZ project

A ROCHA
AOTEAROA NZ

CREATION CONNECTION

RESOURCE FOR CHILDREN
(5-11 YEARS OLD)

An experiential and contemplative approach where children connect to God, each other and the natural world around them by connecting to and becoming aware of God's Creation and discovering together how to act with love, care and responsible, compassionate action within it.



INTRODUCTION

I would like to introduce this children's resource with some words about our human ability to learn from Creation, as presented in the book, *Earthwise* by Calvin de Witt. These words form the basis for the motivation to produce this resource for children. They speak deep into my heart and I hope to yours also as we journey with children to connect with God through God's world and God's works. I wish you joy and peace in this endeavour.

In his book, *Earthwise*, Calvin de Witt states:

"God endowed human beings with the ability to learn from creation. The precious gift of being able to learn from the "beautiful book" of nature gives us the ability to observe, behold, investigate, and record in our mind's eye what we see, feel, hear, and smell. The images and ideas that then take shape in our minds help us plan and do our work in this world to the glory of our Creator. The learning we gain is also continually tested against our experience. We learn from our mistakes, learn from others whose observations and experiments we trust, and revise our models of the world to better represent the reality of the creation we live in." (Earthwise page 36)

Colossians 1:15-20 reminds us to be like-minded with Jesus Christ, who reconciles all creation to it's Creator.

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross. (NRSV)

De Witt concludes the chapter with this challenge to us all:

"The Creator, in providing for all people, has given us minds and the capacity for mindful nurture of worldviews that allow us to image how the world works, to understand our place in it, and to act on our understanding in wisdom. We have been given the gift of being able to know God from his created world and from his Word, and to act on that knowledge to care for each other and for all creation. This provision allows us to adopt the mind of Christ, learning from the book of God's world and the book of God's works, to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth, in harmony with God's love for the world." (Earthwise page 38)

Elke Keeling

In partnership with **A Rocha Aotearoa New Zealand**
for the **Eco Church NZ** project.



ABOUT CREATION CONNECTION FOR CHILDREN

(1) CREATION CONNECTION for Children

Creation Connection is about introducing children to creation care. Connecting children to creation is a good starting point to get children engaging with creation care and other environmental themes or actions.

The resource consists of five sessions.

- Sessions 1-4 are for the children and their families.
- Session 5 is an intergenerational celebration to conclude the resource, to share stories with your community and begin some Creation Care projects.
- The resource is designed to be flexible for a variety of contexts and can be used for example for a Sunday School Children's Programme, a midweek Creation Connection Club or a five-day Holiday Programme.

(2) Home Connection

The home is a place where much is practiced and parents are encouraged to get involved with the ongoing learning in this resource. This resource has suggestions for ongoing learning and engagement at home.

(3) Link to other A Rocha resources or projects

While children are exploring creation care by connecting with creation, adults could explore the "[Rich Living](#)" series" or have intergenerational engagement on creation care themes. However the resource can also stand alone. This resource is particularly suited to church communities already involved in [Eco Church NZ](#).



The Rich Living series



(4) Building a Circle of Trust for Experience and Discovery

This resource uses a process that engages the child as an individual while at the same time building a circle of trust where children can discover new things, examine old things, ask questions, express their fears and doubts and discover new meaning for their lives together with a community of other people. You will discover in notes for each session, suggestions of how to build a circle of trust and engage children in open-ended wondering together.

(5) Principles of Creation Stewardship

This resource is based upon Principles of Stewardship as laid out in “The Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation”:

- We must keep the creation as God keeps us.
- We must be disciples of the Last Adam, not of the First Adam.
- We must not press creation relentlessly, but must provide for its Sabbath rest.
- We may enjoy, but not destroy, the grace of God’s good creation.
- We must seek first the kingdom, not self-interest.
- We must seek contentment as our great gain.
- We must not fail to act on what we know is right.

(from R. J. Berry , *The Care of Creation*, 2000, Chapter 4)

(6) Biblical Perspectives related to Creation Care

God communicates to us through God's Creation and God's Word. Therefore we need to pay attention to both these sources of wisdom as we engage children in nature to learn how to love it and care for it. The creation story in the Bible is used with an emphasis on the goodness of creation as a gift that needs to be cared for. Principles of living a sustainable life rooted in love is the focus when using the biblical text as an inspiration to do good and live life to the fullest. As we live a life of faith that is expressed in our love for each other as well as our love and care for the environment, we have hope that together we can all make a positive difference.

Some key Bible passages:

- Genesis 1 (Creation is good and we are created in God’s image and need to be good stewards of creation – in other words: Creation is a gift that should be cared for.)
- John 1:1-6 (Jesus was present in creation and now fulfils it. Presence of the Trinity in all creation.)
- Psalm 104 (The magnificence of creation.)
- John 13: 34 and 25 (Jesus commands us to love one another. We show this love by how we take care of creation which we all need to provide food and livelihoods for us all. Social justice focus.)
- Matthew 6:25-34 (Do not worry, God looks after creation and will provide you with all you need. Simple living, focus on God’s kingdom)
- Colossians 1:15-20 (We need to be like-minded with Christ. Christ is with all creation from beginning to end)

(7) Engaging the BIBLE and SCIENCE in the 21st century

It is important to make clear my biblical approach in this resource for children. I recently heard a presentation from Sarah Beattie at Auckland University called: *Finding meaning in Scripture and Science*. Her hermeneutic approach was very compelling and I have tried to use it for this resource as it seems useful for dealing with Creation in the 21st century context. She describes a method of interpretation of Biblical text as: “A hermeneutic of radical departure from the familiar, exploring imaginative alternatives to extend the boundaries of the thinkable.” (Sarah Beattie, *Finding Meaning in Scripture and Science*, 2020 Winter Lecture series)

This approach helps us to engage the Bible and Science in a productive manner in a 21st century context. Children have access to so much information about the world we live in and need to make sense of it all through experience, discovery, exploration and imaginations, extending their knowledge of science as well as the biblical stories to make meaning for themselves in this context. Scientific discoveries can help us to stand in wonder and awe as we discover new and wondrous things about our world, leading us to awe and respect for the Creator. The biblical narratives, particularly the teaching of Jesus, can help us discover what is important if we want to lead loving, compassionate lives within the limits of our worldly resources.

Above all we have hope, because the depth of creation gives us hope for the future. As Nicola Hoggard-Creegan (2018, p3) puts it: “The depths of nature funds and undergirds our stories of hope, because in nature we intuit the deeper hidden ultimate concern and love of the divine.”



SPIRITUALITY AND HOW IT CONNECTS TO CREATION

(1) CREATION CONNECTION as a part of spiritual formation

Children are born into this world with an innate sense of connection with the spiritual. Rebecca Nye (2009) identified this INNATE ability as 'relational consciousness' and explains that it includes how children relate to themselves, others, the world and something bigger than themselves that is transcendent, like God. We need all these four aspects to become whole human beings, able to act with love, grace and good ethics in our world. The love and care of creation is part of this holistic development for our children.

The way we therefore relate to our natural world is an important part of healthy spiritual nurture and growth. When we live simple, honest lives in gratitude to our Creator, we become human beings that can live abundant lives alongside all other human beings AND all of nature, without having to degrade the earth. Humans are designed to be in deep connected relationship with all of creation and to live lives of faith expressed in love that reflects the love of the Creator.

(2) SPIRITUAL PRACTICES to connect to Creation

To care for creation, we need to notice creation. To discover God through God's Creation, we need to learn how to notice God's action and presence in our lives and in the world around us. Living a life of faith expressed in love therefore means that we will use contemplative practices for personal examination and awareness, as well as action practices to make a tangible positive difference in our world. Some practices are suggested in the sessions.

(3) Characteristics of the FACILITATORS for these sessions

To facilitate an experiential learning and growing environment requires careful preparation of and by facilitators. They should be people who:

- are spiritually aware themselves
- have a high respect for the innate spirituality of children
- are spiritual facilitators or guides for the children rather than teachers
- are respectful of children's spirituality and willing to learn with the children as well as the children learning from them.
- have a genuine love and interest in creation and can model their care for it.

(4) Access to a natural outdoor environment

This resource will require you to have a natural environment available to explore. Some options are also offered to bring the natural environment into a classroom space. Exercises are included to help children notice their surroundings. You can also use other experiences like family camps or outings to take the children into natural environments.

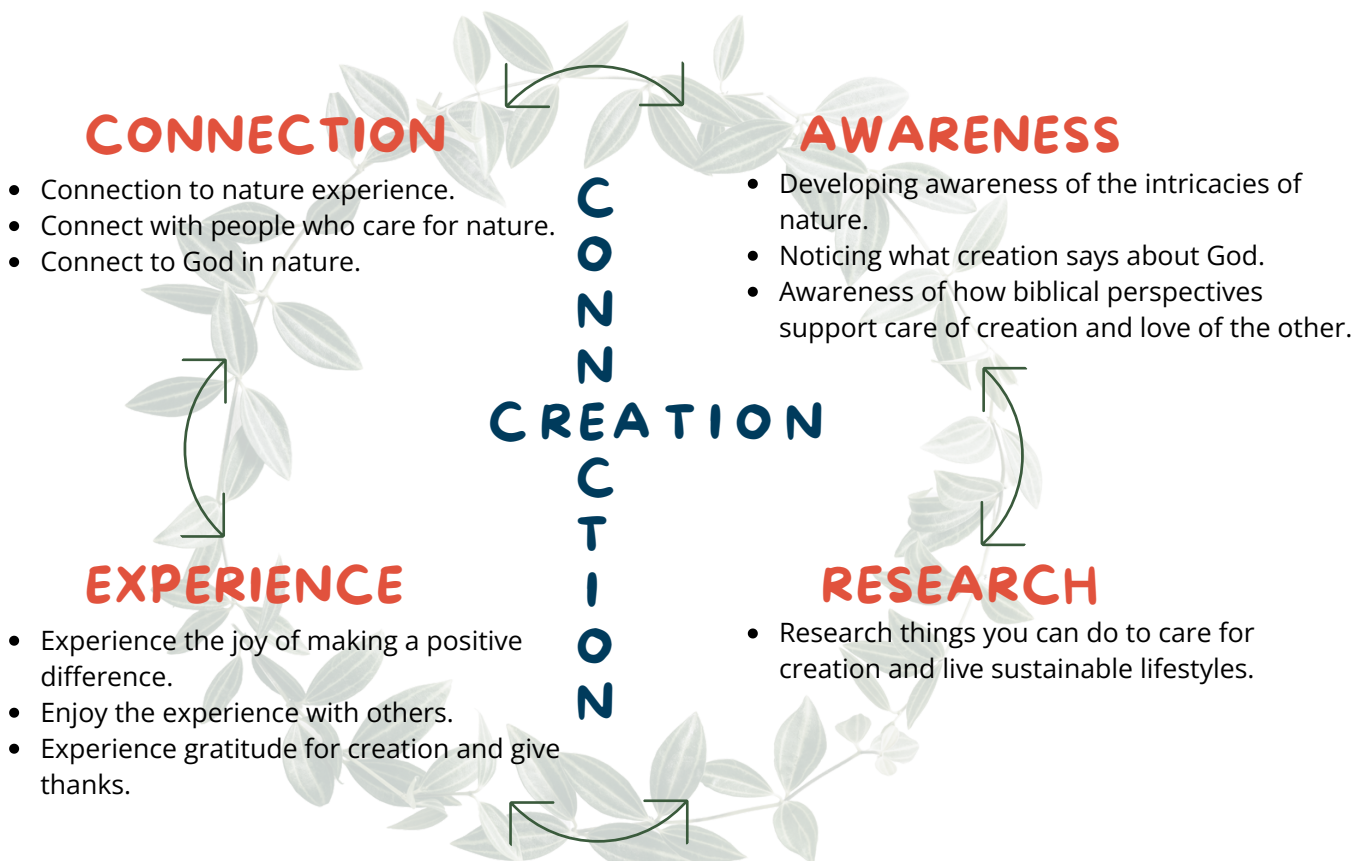
ELEMENTS IN THE RESOURCE

This resource uses an experiential and contemplative approach where children connect to God, each other and the natural world around them by connecting to and becoming aware of God's Creation and discovering together how to act with love, care and responsible, compassionate action within it.

We aim to give children experiences in nature where they notice the world around them, connect to it and learn to care for it. Through connection to nature, children notice the Creator at work in every detail and connect to God and each other through their experiences. We thus follow a cycle of Ecology, Theology and Contemplative Action to help children experience, learn and make meaning that leads to thoughtful action.

The resource uses this cycle of approach:

1. *CONNECTING* to what is happening in creation, learning to notice, and connecting to each other.
2. Developing *AWARENESS* of the intricacies of nature and the creative God who made it. Noticing what creation says about the character and nature of God and how biblical perspectives support care of creation and love of the other.
3. *RESEARCHING* environmental projects in their context and discovering sustainable practices for their lives.
4. *EXPERIENCING* the joy of making a positive difference to the environment around them, individually, in their families and in their communities.



INTRODUCTION TO CREATION CARE

Children will be: Learning to notice creation, exploring creation, caring for a piece of creation, connecting to the Creator in Creation, discovering the challenges facing Creation, showing gratitude for Creation.

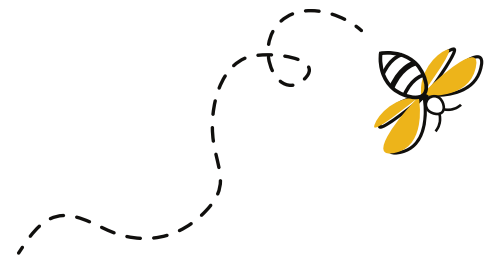
Session 1:
Creation Awareness -
Noticing the Creator's works

Session 2:
Challenges - Facing the reality of the
degradation of our earth and our part in it

Session 3:
The Gift of Creation and our
responsibility to take care of it

Session 4:
Gratitude and Joy - Giving thanks to God and
telling our Creation Care / Connection stories

Session 5:
Intergenerational Community
Celebration



SESSION 1

CREATION AWARENESS - NOTICING THE CREATOR'S WORKS



Build connection with the group:

- Introducing each other by name and sharing favourite parts of nature.
- Pray with the children.
- Give children time to personalise their journals with their name and write down their favourite parts of nature.



- Notice what happens in nature
- 5+ senses noticing: See, Hear, Smell, Taste, Touch + Spiritual sense/feeling
- Talk about where you feel most connected to nature
- Sit quietly and listen to someone reading Psalm 104
- What does nature tell you about the Creator
- Display Poster: "Creation speaks of the Creator"



- Give the children the gift of a tree.
- Notice your tree. Note down in your journal what you noticed.
- Research the lifecycle of your tree and how best to care for it.
- Stories of how people have grown a forest of trees.



- The children have responsibility for their trees and become aware of what it takes to care for something from nature.
- Gratitude: Give thanks for your tree and anything else in nature.



- Children take their tree home to show to their whānau.
- Children journal their observations of their tree and how they take care of it.

PREPARATIONS FOR SESSION I

All sessions will require:

- Internet access to access videos and websites for learning and research.
- A larger screen may be helpful to watch the videos together.
- Good speakers to listen to music or hear audio clearly.
- Bibles to read Bible passages.
- Creative art materials e.g. markers, felt pens, paint, clay, natural materials, etc.

Additional preparations for this unit:

- A native tree/plant (one per child) that children can care for and transport easily.
- If journals are used, provide journals for children or request them to bring their own.
- Display Poster: Prepare a large piece of recycled paper or cardboard for a display board of nature discoveries. Add an appropriate heading e.g. “Creation speaks of the Creator”.



SESSION 1: ADDITIONAL NOTES & IDEAS

CREATION AWARENESS - NOTICING THE CREATOR'S WORKS



CONNECTION

Group Connection:

Build the group – connect with each participant by name. Take time to introduce each person in the group and ask them to introduce themselves: I wonder... Where does your name come from? What is your favourite part of nature?

Pray for the children by name and ask God to birth gratitude and care for Creation in everyone.

Hand out journals. Allow time for children to personalise their journals with their name (Use journals to write your name and your favourite parts of nature)

AWARENESS

Creation tells us lots about God, because he made all of nature.

Spend time noticing Nature: Find a space in nature and take time to explore and notice nature.

Help the children to connect what they notice in nature to what might tell them about God.

Help children to read the Bible Psalm and see how it speaks about nature.

1. Spend time in nature and encourage the children to notice things in nature. 5+ Senses Noticing: Look for 5 things you See, Hear, Smell, Taste, Touch, +Spiritual Sense: What do you feel?
2. Discuss with the children what they noticed in nature. Write or draw in your journal. Where do you feel most connected to nature?
3. Read Psalm 104 to the children while they sit quietly
4. Discuss: What does the Bible passage say about the creator? What nature things in this passage are found in New Zealand?
5. Group Poster: Put a poster in your space. Ask children to bring parts of nature to stick on, or write or draw and stick on to create a collage poster of things in nature that they like. Add a title like: "Creation speaks of the Creator"

RESEARCH

Gather children and give each one a young kowhai tree in a container. Explain to them that this is a gift for them, that they now need to care for.

What do the children notice about their tree? (Shape? Colour? Leaves, bugs, soil, etc.)

Brainstorm with the children how to care for a young tree. (Water, Sunshine, etc.)

Tell the children that these trees need to be nurtured so that they can be planted outside in a few weeks, as part of the community celebration. (or wherever you have decided to plant the trees)

Children can read in their journals (and look on the internet) tips of how to care for the trees.



SESSION 1: ADDITIONAL NOTES & IDEAS

STORIES:

Read the story about [a lady who grew hundreds of kowhai trees at her house](#).

Extra story on video: [Good Sorts: The Hamiltonian on a one-man mission to supply NZ with thousands of native trees](#).

EXPERIENCE

From the above experience of connection, awareness and research, children experience some or all of the following:

- Children spend time noticing nature, what they like about it, and what it shows them about God, the Creator.
- The children have responsibility for their trees and become aware of what it takes to care for something from nature.

These experiences lead to awareness and gratitude: Lead the children in prayer and time before God to give thanks:

Give thanks for your tree and anything else in nature. Give thanks to God for how he cares for nature and for us and our needs. Give thanks that we are able to care for things in nature.

Give thanks that we can enjoy nature, etc.

HOME CONNECTION

Children take their tree home to show to their whānau and get support for the care of the tree.

Children journal their observations of their tree and how they take care of it.

Note to parents / caregivers with information about the tree and what is expected of the children and their parents (This will be different for every group, depending on context and parent expectations).

EXAMPLE:

Dear Parents,

Today your child was involved in experiences to help them become more aware of Creation and the Creator. They will be bringing home a journal to show you what they learnt and explored in nature, as well as finding out facts on the internet. You can show an interest by asking them about it: I wonder what you liked about what you explored, I wonder what was important for you?

Please help your child to keep the journal safe and bring it back to [.....your programme name] next time you come.

Your child has been given a gift of a young tree. We have asked them to care for the tree so that we can plant it in our [e.g. community garden] once it is big enough. They have instructions on how to care for it in their journals. Please support your child with this task.

Thank you for your support as we encourage your child to be aware of Creation and to care for it.

SESSION 2

CHALLENGES - FACING THE REALITY OF THE DEGRADATION OF OUR EARTH AND OUR PART IN IT



CONNECTION

- Build group connection.
- Feedback on tree care project - successes and challenges.



AWARENESS

- Read Matthew 6:25-34: Ask wondering questions.
- Listen to a song: If the Fields are Parched (Resound Worship). How do the words of this song make you feel?



RESEARCH

What can we do to help save the planet:

- WWF Video - How to Save Our Planet. Wonder about this video together.
- Discover our earth footprint.
- Explore what you can do to reduce your impact on this earth.



EXPERIENCE

- Prayer of confession and forgiveness.
- Gratitude and prayer for resources we have and request for help to care for creation.



HOME CONNECTION

- Discover your family's earth footprint.
- Talk about how your family could reduce their footprint.
- Set some realistic goals and how you will achieve them.

PREPARATIONS FOR SESSION 2

All sessions will require:

- Internet access to access videos and websites for learning and research.
- A larger screen may be helpful to watch the videos together.
- Good speakers to listen to music or hear audio clearly.
- Bibles to read Bible passages.
- Creative art materials e.g. markers, felt pens, paint, clay, natural materials, etc.

Additional preparations for this unit:

- Children's journals: To report and record their findings.
- TIME is needed so that children can process this hard information and ask any questions. Your conversations should help children to integrate the challenges with the possibilities to make a difference. In other words help them to figure things out themselves rather than telling them what to do.



SESSION 2: ADDITIONAL NOTES & IDEAS

CHALLENGES - FACING THE REALITY OF THE DEGRADATION OF OUR EARTH AND OUR PART IN IT

CONNECTION

Group Connection: Welcome children by name.

Share news from their caring for a tree project. What have been the good things, what have been the challenging things.

Note: Treat all news as feedback that we can learn from. E.g. if a tree is thriving, what does that tell us? If a tree is not growing well, what do we learn from that? It is important to emphasize the process of caring rather than whether or not the plant thrives. Challenges might also be faced because some of the ability to care for a tree is outside of the children's control.

AWARENESS

Read together Matthew 6:25-34

Wondering: I wonder what you liked about what Jesus said? I wonder what you think is important? I wonder what Jesus could be saying to you?

How do you feel when it becomes hard to look after your tree?

How do you feel when you hear what Jesus says about how God cares for creation?

God wants us to live simply, trusting him each day for our needs. This means we use only what we really need and take care of everything we have. What happens when we do not care for the Creation?

Let's listen to a song to help hear what will happen to the earth if we do not care for it.

Resound Worship lyrics: [If the Fields are Parched](#) | [Lyrics music video](#)

Wondering: I wonder how this song made you feel? I wonder which part of the earth you care for the most?

It can be quite hard listening to things about how the earth is suffering, but there are things we can do to help the earth become a healthier place for all of us.

RESEARCH

Let's look at a video about the state of the earth and some ideas of what we can do: WWF video: [How to Save Our Planet – David Attenborough](#)

Wondering: I wonder what you liked? I wonder what you think is important? I wonder what could be taken out? I wonder what has been left out and should be added?

We are only individuals but together we have a great impact on our earth. Science tells us that we use more resources from the earth than we should and so they are running out and causing damage.

Let's measure our footprint and see what we contribute and also what we contribute as a country to [Earth Overshoot Day](#). Research ideas that will improve this measure for us and our country.



SESSION 2: ADDITIONAL NOTES & IDEAS

Global Footprint Calculator: <https://www.footprintcalculator.org/>

Have each child calculate their footprint. Compare their score to the New Zealand data on this website. Children record their footprint in their journals to compare later to see if there is an improvement.

Where do you think you can make personal lifestyle changes that would improve your earth overshoot day?

It is up to you and the age of your children with how detailed you get using this footprint tool. There is a lot of information on the website.

(Note: It is up to you and the age of your children with how detailed you get using this footprint tool. There is a lot of information on the website. Another option: A New Zealand website for [Living Lightly](#) is also available. This is focused on saving energy but also useful with lots of practical resources for projects.)

EXPERIENCE

From the above experience of connection, awareness and research, children experience some or all of the following:

- Children realise that the earth is suffering degradation.
- Children discover how their lifestyle might be contributing to this degradation.
- Children begin to think about ways to improve their earth footprint and Earth Overshoot Day and find hope in being able to act in more sustainable ways.

Prayer: These experiences might lead to a realisation that we have not cared for the earth as we should. We can ask God for help and mercy as we try to improve our care for the earth, one day at a time, one step at a time. We can ask God for forgiveness where we have used the earth's resources wastefully. We give thanks to God that he cares for creation and helps us to also care for it.

HOME CONNECTION

Children continue to journal their observations of their tree and how they take care of it.

Children record their Global Footprint results in their journals.

Families do a Global Footprint calculation for their family and home and the family can begin to reduce their footprint and overshoot day scores.

Children and their family set some goals to improve footprint: e.g. reduce waste, reduce plastic, watch video clips on what NZ people are doing and take tips from them. See [Better Ancestors](#) for videos on a variety of topics.

SESSION 3

THE GIFT OF CREATION AND OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO TAKE CARE OF IT



- Build group connection.
- Share how you are doing with caring for your tree.
- Share ideas for reducing your earth footprint.



- Hear a meditation on the Creation story as gift and respond (Genesis 1:1-31 – Godly Play meditation).
- Listen to a song about Creation and respond in creative or quiet ways.



Some research options:

- Learnings about caring for their trees.
- The creation story told differently.
- Exploring challenges and wins with family goals to reduce their footprint.
- Hear/watch/read stories about what other people are doing to encourage you.



- When you notice that your actions makes a difference e.g. decreasing your waste, how do you feel?
- Share your family stories.
- Gratitude prayers.



- Keep on nurturing your trees.
- Keep on with your sustainability goals as a family and ensure children are included in this work.

PREPARATIONS FOR SESSION 3

All sessions will require:

- Internet access to access videos and websites for learning and research.
- A larger screen may be helpful to watch the videos together.
- Good speakers to listen to music or hear audio clearly.
- Bibles to read Bible passages.
- Creative art materials e.g. markers, felt pens, paint, clay, natural materials, etc.

Additional preparations for this unit:

- Children's journals: To report and record their findings.
- Godly Play Creation Story script from 'The Complete Guide to Godly Play Volume 2' by Jerome Berryman (available from <https://store.godlyplayfoundation.org/products/vol-2-lesson-5-creation-download>). To find out more about the material, contact Godly Play NZ trainer, Elke Keeling at keelingelke@gmail.com.



SESSION 3: ADDITIONAL NOTES & IDEAS

THE GIFT OF CREATION AND OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO TAKE CARE OF IT



CONNECTION

Group Connection: Welcome children by name.

Share news from their caring for a tree project. What have been the good things, what have been the challenging things. Treat all news as feedback that we can learn from.

Share news about their ecological footprint and what they think about their score or their family score? Treat all news as feedback that we can learn from.

AWARENESS

Experience Genesis 1 as a story about God's gift of Creation, Godly Play style: Gather the children into a circle, sitting on the floor and tell the story of Creation from Genesis 1 using the Godly Play style and then guide the children in their wondering. See this [video](#) for a demonstration.

NOTE: Use this story in the style presented, so that children can be engaged in open wondering about Creation, including the biblical account, what they have heard elsewhere e.g. Māori creation stories and anything they have discovered about the science of creation e.g. biology, zoology, paleontology, etc. By doing this we empower the children to integrate their scientific knowledge about the natural world and the biblical stories of creation.

Allow children to wonder about Creation and how to care for this good gift they have been given. Welcome all contributions by children. You do not have to have answers to their wondering. Remember you are wondering together as a group.

Contemplative, creative response: Offer creative, natural materials (e.g. leaves, water, blank paper, coloured pens, paint, clay etc.) so that they can respond in whatever way they choose. Have a range of books about the natural world for children to look at. You can also have some websites they can look at if you have a technology available.

Prayer time: Giving thanks for the gift of creation..... e.g. Thank you God for my favourite part of creation

Additional Option: Ask children to lie down in a comfortable position and listen to a song about Creation. [Heaven's Voice Brings the Dawn](#) (Doxecology).

Offer creative, natural materials (e.g. leaves, water, blank paper, coloured pens, paint, clay etc.) so that they can respond in whatever way they choose.



SESSION 3: ADDITIONAL NOTES & IDEAS

Heaven's voice brings the dawn,
out of chaos is born
new creation
exploding with wonder;
planets spin into space,
earth and sky find their place,
all of nature
awakes to its maker.

You say everything you've made is good:
the sun, the moon,
the stars that shine above.
You say everything you've made is good:
the land, the seas
and all that lives and breathes.

*We sing praise to the maker,
to our King, our creator:
praise to Almighty God.
All creation together
singing one hallelujah:
praise to Almighty God.*

We are formed from the dust,
with your image in us,
given life by the breath
you are breathing;
called to work and to care,
called to nurture and share;
called to serve you
and walk where you're leading.

CCL# 7157373

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RESEARCH

Choose research options depending on how children have responded or what they show an interest in:

- What have they learnt about caring for their trees?
- Find and read some Creation stories from different Bible version. E.g. Jesus Storybook, Children of God Storybook, NSRV Bible. What is the main idea in the stories?
- How are you going with setting up your family goals to reduce your footprint? What are the challenges? What feels good to do? What differences are quick to notice? What are the early wins? Celebrate these.
- Hear/watch/read stories about what other people are doing to encourage you: e.g. [Kariori Project](#) in Raglan, New Zealand or [Eco Church NZ stories](#).

EXPERIENCE

From the above experience of connection, awareness and research, children experience some of the following:

- Children realise that Creation is a precious gift and they are also a part of Creation.
- Children realise Creation is a gift that we should care for.
- Children discover how their lifestyle can change to help care for the earth in better ways.
- Children hear stories from others for encouragement.
- Families get involved in community projects to care for creation.
- Children and families continue to work on their projects to reduce their global footprint.

Prayer:

We give thanks to God that he cares for creation and helps us to also care for it.
List the ways you are able to care for Creation and thank God for them.

HOME CONNECTION

Children continue to journal their observations of their tree and how they take care of it.
Children and their family continue to pursue goals to improve footprint: e.g. reduce waste, reduce plastic, join local conservation projects.
Children and their family watch video clips on what NZ people are doing and take tips from them. See [Better Ancestors](#) for videos on a variety of topics.

SESSION 4

GRATITUDE AND JOY – GIVING THANKS TO GOD AND TELLING OUR CREATION CARE / CONNECTION STORIES



- Build group connection.
- Share how you are doing with caring for your tree.
- Share how you are caring for creation.



- Where did we see God at work in nature, in our trees growing, in our own lives?
- Gratitude Circle activity.



- Watch video stories of inspirational creation care projects in NZ and the world.



- Practice any contribution to the intergenerational service such as songs.
- Prepare anything you want to display e.g. artwork, videos
- Decide how to do the tree planting and where.
- Gratitude prayers



- Parents support children in the intergenerational service as the community gives thanks and learns together about Creation Care.
- As much as possible make sure to include all ages.

PREPARATIONS FOR SESSION 4

All sessions will require:

- Internet access to access videos and websites for learning and research.
- A larger screen may be helpful to watch the videos together.
- Good speakers to listen to music or hear audio clearly.
- Bibles to read Bible passages.
- Creative art materials e.g. markers, felt pens, paint, clay, natural materials, etc.

Additional preparations for this unit:

- Children's journals: To report and record their findings; to draw their gratitude circles
- Whiteboard / big piece of paper with markers



SESSION 4: ADDITIONAL NOTES & IDEAS

GRATITUDE AND JOY – GIVING THANKS TO GOD AND TELLING OUR CREATION CARE / CONNECTION STORIES

CONNECTION

Group Connection: Welcome children by name.

Share news from their caring for a tree project. What have been the good things, what have been the challenging things. Treat all news as feedback that we can learn from.

Share news about their ecological footprint and what they think about their score or their family score? Treat all news as feedback that we can learn from.

AWARENESS

Share stories of Creation Care from your family and lead the children to verbalise things they are grateful for. All contributions are valuable.

Option:

You can write them up on a whiteboard or big piece of paper as shown on the right.

Prayer time:

Spend time in silence and prayer giving thanks. Encourage children to speak words of gratitude to God.

Gratitude circle activity:

This could be done before or after the prayer time – use the circle diagram to draw in the middle circle spaces what you are grateful for; and write things in the outer circle that you are grateful for. This can be done in your journals or as a separate activity on card paper. These gratitude circles can be displayed at your community celebration.





SESSION 4: ADDITIONAL NOTES & IDEAS

RESEARCH

Check out videos and stories of how projects in New Zealand that are helping care for Creation. You choose which you want to select, depending on the interests of the children

- [Story of ōi protection in Raglan](#), New Zealand.
- [Stories from Trees That Count](#) NZ.
- [Success stories from Predator Free New Zealand](#).
- Video on "[How whales change the climate](#)"
- Forest and Bird [Kiwi Conservation Club](#) for children for further activities and information about NZ environment.

EXPERIENCE

Facilitate a time of creative expression of their experiences through stories about Creation projects, through gratitude circle prayers, through making video stories, through artwork. (You can add other things you might like the children to help prepare for the celebration service on the following week.)

From the above experience of connection, awareness and research, children experience some or all of the following:

- Children realise that they are part of a wide network of people across NZ and the world trying to better care for Creation
- Children identify and verbalise things about Creation to be grateful for.
- Children can pray for other projects around the world
- Children write their stories or make videos of their experiences to share with the church community.

Prayer:

We give thanks to God that he cares for creation and helps us to also care for it.

List the ways you are able to care for Creation.

HOME CONNECTION

Children continue to journal their observations of their tree and how they take care of it. Children and their family continue to pursue goals to improve footprint: e.g. reduce waste, reduce plastic, join local conservation projects.

Children and their family watch video clips on what NZ people are doing and take tips from them. See [Better Ancestors](#) for videos on a variety of topics.

Families make story videos of their experiences to share with the community.

Families help to prepare for celebration service and community planting.

Forest and Bird [Kiwi Conservation Club](#) for children for further activities and information about NZ environment.

SESSION 5

INTER-GENERATIONAL CHURCH COMMUNITY CELEBRATION

CONNECTION



- Set up a display area using the various elements from the Creation Care sessions.
- As people arrive they can walk through the creation care displays and connect with what the children have been learning and doing.
- Introduce the children and the theme that they've been working on.

AWARENESS



- "Things we notice in Nature" reflection and activity

RESEARCH



Digging deeper using ideas from the Research material that the children have explored:

- the Godly Play Creation Story
- Psalm 104 reading
- Doxology songs
- video resources

EXPERIENCE



Children and families sharing their experiences of:

- nurturing their trees
- calculating their carbon footprint
- exploring ways to reduce their global footprint

Prayer and thanksgiving.

COMMUNITY CONNECTION



- Ceremony of tree planting and blessing of trees.
- Feasting - Sharing food together in community lunch or similar.

PREPARATIONS FOR SESSION 5

Preparations for your community celebration will depend on what you choose to include. You may need:

- A display area showcasing various elements from the past sessions.
- Creative elements from past sessions such as nature posters, gratitude circles, and trees for planting.
- Resources from past sessions for sharing such as the Godly Play Creation Story, songs and readings.
- Children and/or parents to share stories.
- Whiteboard, markers and post-it notes.
- Planning for a tree planting ceremony.
- Planning for a community feast.



SESSION 5: ADDITIONAL NOTES & IDEAS

INTER-GENERATIONAL CHURCH COMMUNITY CELEBRATION



You can choose what you include in your celebration. The following are suggestions to help you structure a service for your community celebration.

CONNECTION

- Prepare a display area showcasing various elements from the Creation Care sessions such as the nature posters, gratitude circles, trees that have been nurtured - ready for planting.
- Welcome - As people arrive they can walk through the creation care displays and connect with what the children have been learning and doing.
- Introduction and Connection - Begin the service with a well known praise song.
- Bring children from the "Creation Connection" group forward and introduce them to the community. Give children the option of staying with parents and standing up where they are if they prefer – whatever works best for your context.
- If possible have one of these children share what they have been doing in the Creation Connection resource to introduce the topic. A parent might like to talk about their family experiences.

AWARENESS

Children have been encouraged to notice things in nature. So we are encouraging the rest of the church to do the same.

Set up a whiteboard with a top heading of: "Things we notice in Nature" and with headings of see, hear, smell, taste, touch, feel and give people post-it notes to note down their thoughts and to stick up under the headings.

When you think of the natural world outside, think about a time you were in nature, e.g. going for a walk in a reserve or on a beach, camping, perhaps surfing in the ocean, going on a bike ride..... Choose a time you enjoyed being out in nature.

In silence, we are going to think about these times and try to remember what we experienced: I will give you a few minutes to do some sensory thinking. It will seem a long time, but we will give it 1 minute each time to think in silence. You can note down your thoughts on post-it notes. There will be time at the end to stick up your post-it notes if you wish on the whiteboard.

- Think of 5 things you saw: pause in silence
- Think of 5 things you heard: pause in silence
- Think of 5 things you could smell: pause in silence
- Think of 5 things you could taste: pause in silence
- Think of 5 things you could touch: pause in silence
- Think of 5 things that made you feel closer to God: pause in silence



SESSION 5: ADDITIONAL NOTES & IDEAS

RESEARCH

Choose one or a few of the following:

- Story of the Gift of Creation – use the Creation Story from Session 3 to tell this story. Suggestion is to enlarge the pictures as posters that children can hold up or put them on powerpoint. Children can read the story, or have someone be the storyteller for the whole story.
- Psalm 104 reading – choose a family or several families to read various verses you choose.
- Sing or listen: Doxecology – [Heaven's Voice brings the dawn](#) or [If the Fields are Parched](#)
- Think about Creation challenges: Show David Attenborough's video – [How To Save The Planet](#) – and spend time in silence thinking and praying about our part in the degradation of this earth.
- Share stories or videos from projects / initiatives around New Zealand from the research done under Session 4.

EXPERIENCE

Children could share their experiences from their tree growing exercise.

Children and families could share their experiences to care for our planet and decrease their global footprint, e.g. with decreasing their waste.

GRATITUDE AND RENEWED HOPE

Bible Reading: Matthew 6:25-34:

Prayer and thanksgiving – Ask children to share their Creation Gratitude prayers

PRAYER

We give thanks to God that he cares for creation and helps us to also care for it.

Example prayer adapted from Richard Rohr (or use your own):

O Wonderful Creator, thank you for living and loving in us and through us.

May all that we do flow from our deep connection with you and all beings.

Help us become a community that vulnerably shares each other's burdens.

Listen to our heart's longings for the healing of our world. (...list your intentions for the healing of Creation..)

Knowing that you are hearing us better than we are speaking, we offer these prayers in all the holy names of God, Amen.

COMMUNITY CONNECTION

- Ceremony of tree planting and blessing of trees: If appropriate, the trees that have been nurtured by the children could be planted in the church grounds or in some community grounds. This could be done as a spiritual exercise with prayers said, thanking God for plants and trees and how they sustain us.
- Feasting - Sharing food together in community lunch or similar.



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*The silence of the Creator is thunderous,
Drowning out everything else,
And hiding in endless creativity.*

- Thomas Keating, "Out of a Stone"

About the author, Elke Keeling:

Allow me to introduce myself. I am of German descent. My parents arrived as refugees in South Africa after the Second World War and so I grew up in South Africa and was educated there. In 1994 my family and I moved to NZ. I have two grown children and two grandchildren. A friend kindly observed that since we have moved to NZ, our family has doubled in size. We have added two in-laws and two grandchildren. We are indeed blessed.

I was a Children's Pastor for many years and studied at Carey College for an Applied Theology degree at the same time. I consequently did further post graduate study at Carey, with a focus on Children's Spirituality and Spiritual Formation.

I co-lead Godly Play New Zealand which is a method of Christian Education where children are encouraged to discover God for themselves. I enjoy learning new things and read widely. For the last 10-15 years I have been involved in study, research and practice to evolve new processes of Spiritual Formation for children in our 21st century culture. I enjoy creating and writing projects that engage children both in God's World and God's Works.

