

THE FOOTPRINT OF THE FOOTHILLS



BIBLE STUDY



A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Melting ice caps. Rising sea levels. Global wildfires. Mass extinctions. I have spent most of my life believing global warming was a problem too big to do anything about. I knew I wanted to take care of God's creation, but I did not know how.

After years of caring about the environment without doing much to care for it, I began looking for local solutions to the global crisis of climate change. In the summer of 2020, I discovered a growing network of people who were building local, sustainable ways of life in the Appalachian foothills of Southeast Ohio.

I spent a few months meeting with a small number of these gifted leaders, whose goal is to create long-term vitality for the environment, the economy, and the communities of Appalachian Ohio. This video-based study tells their stories. It is not intended to guide a mere abstract discussion, but to encourage practical steps for individuals, churches and communities to become more sustainable in their own local contexts.

Each session studies Scripture; explores the historic economies of Southeastern Ohio; examines a United Methodist Social Principle; interviews experienced leaders of sustainability initiatives; and discusses pragmatic ways for people to Change the Climate by living more sustainable lives.

From rolling hills to family farms, the people of Southeast Ohio live in a Land of Plenty. They have a lot to teach about how to care for God's creation while making a living off the land...if we are willing to walk with them and witness how they are changing *The Footprint of the Foothills*.

REV. RYAN GRACE

Director & Videographer

Sustainability is about meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It involves balancing the interests of the environment, economy, and community.



All video resources can
be found online at
www.westohioumc.org/footprintstudy

session 1:

THE FOOTPRINTS OF FORESTS

Appalachia contains the most diverse forest system in North America. Glaciers from the last Ice Age crawled to a stop just before they would have leveled these hills. Instead, they left an untouched wildland some 250 million years old. With thousands of plant species and hundreds of types of animals, these woods exemplify the beauty of God's Creation.

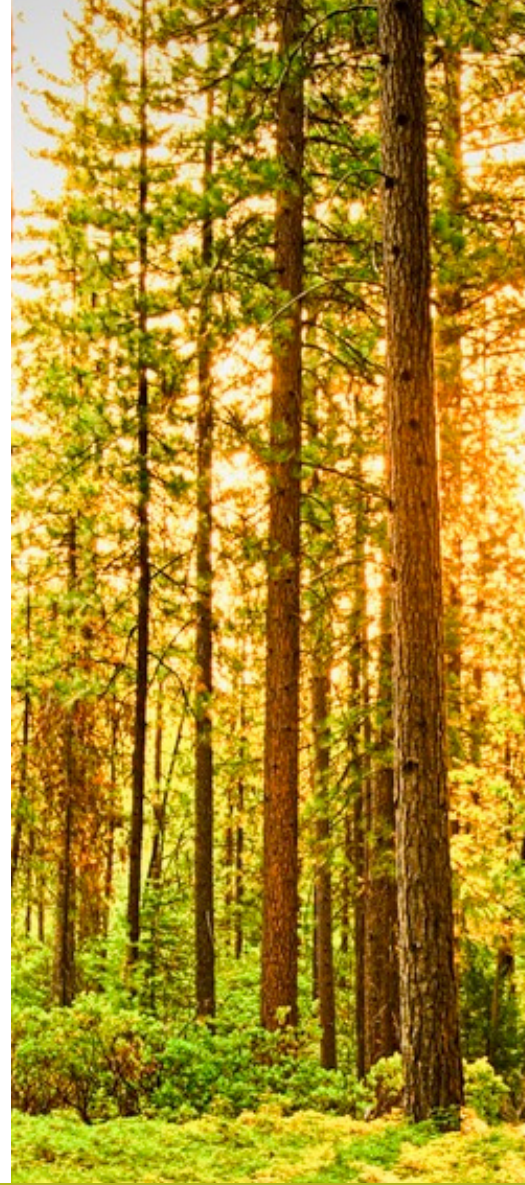
The book of Genesis talks about God's glory in Creation.

Read Genesis 1:1-2:3

The word "good" appears seven times in this account of creation. But the same Hebrew word could also be translated as "useful."

Questions to Consider:

- What does it mean to say creation is good?
- What does it mean to say creation is useful?
- What does it mean for creation to be both good and useful?





Forests are known to be both good and useful. They are not only beautiful, but also remove carbon from the atmosphere – helping to slow global warming and protect the planet. But in Southeast Ohio, forests have been threatened by wide scale logging.

Watch ***The Footprints of Forests***

www.westhioumc.org/footprintstudy



In Southeast Ohio, what could make wide scale logging unsustainable for the environment? For the economy? For the community?

Social Principle of the UMC

The United Methodist Church seeks to protect the footprints of forests, saying: “We call for the preservation of old-growth forests and other irreplaceable natural treasures, as well as preservation of endangered plant species. We support measures designed to maintain and restore natural ecosystems.”

- *The Natural World > Water, Air, Soil, Minerals, Plants*

Why would God care about preserving and restoring natural ecosystems?



The Arc of Appalachia is a non-profit organization working to preserve and restore natural ecosystems in Appalachian Ohio. We spent an afternoon talking with Nancy Stranahan, founder and director of the Arc.

Watch ***Changing the Climate with Nancy Stranahan***

www.westhioumc.org/footprintstudy



Compared to wide scale logging, what could make the Arc of Appalachia's use of forests more sustainable for the environment? For the economy? For the community?



Change the Climate

Here are a few ideas of practical ways to help preserve forests, taken from *A Non-Expert's Guide to Living More Sustainably*.

- Support organizations that work to protect forests.
- Sign up for e-newsletters and e-statements when possible.
- Use reusable cloths instead of paper towels.
- Use a handkerchief instead of paper tissues.
- Use and reuse gift bags instead of wrapping paper.
- Use double-sided printing where possible.
- Purchase digital subscriptions to newspapers and magazines.



To help preserve forests, what is one change you would be willing to make in your personal life? In your church? In your community? Are there any other ideas you would add?

Learn More

Learn more about how to protect the world's forests!

- Watch the Arc of Appalachia highlight video (on the Bible study web page)
- Read the full version of *A Non-Expert's Guide to Living More Sustainably*
- Visit arcofappalachia.org and ruralaction.org



session 2:

THE FOOTPRINTS OF FOSSIL FUELS

Appalachia has long been known as Coal Country. At the height of the area's coal boom, big mining companies would move into small towns, bringing the promise of jobs with them. Unfortunately, most of the profits were kept by larger corporations from outside the region. Local jobs would only last until the coal vein ran dry, at which point the company would move on to another place, leaving many towns devastated socially and economically.

The book of Ezekiel looks forward to a day when devastated towns would be rebuilt in Israel.

Read Ezekiel 36:33-36

In Ezekiel's time, many towns had been devastated by foreign invaders, who destroyed fertile land and ruined economic systems while exiling the Israelite people. Ezekiel's vision describes God restoring the towns to become rich and vibrant once again.

Questions to Consider:

- Why would God want to restore land to fertility?
- Why would God want to restore ruined economies?
- Why would God want to restore towns to vibrant life?





Towns built on fossil fuel economies are famous for going boom and bust, quickly moving from vibrant life to economic devastation, as outside companies show little concern for local people or environments. Around Southeast Ohio, the environmental impact of fossil fuels can be seen in ghost towns as well as streams with acid mine drainage. But the biggest footprint of fossil fuels is the effect they have on global warming.

Watch *The Footprints of Fossil Fuels*

www.westohioumc.org/footprintstudy



In Southeast Ohio, what could make the extraction of fossil fuels unsustainable for the environment? For the economy? For the community?

Social Principle of the UMC

The United Methodist Church seeks to decrease the footprints of fossil fuels, saying, "The whole earth is God's good creation and as such has inherent value. We are aware that the current utilization of energy resources threatens this creation at its very foundation. As members of The United Methodist Church we are committed to approaching creation, energy production, and especially creation's resources in a responsible, careful and economic way. We call upon all to take measures to save energy. Everybody should adapt his or her lifestyle to the average consumption of energy that respects the limits of the planet earth. We encourage persons to limit CO2 emissions toward the goal of one tonne per person annually. We strongly advocate for the priority of the development of renewable energies. The deposits of carbon, oil, and gas resources are limited and their continuous utilization accelerates global warming."

- *The Natural World > Energy Resources Utilization*

Why would God care about developing renewable energies?



Located in Athens, Ohio, Third Sun Solar is a registered B-Corp - a private business dedicated to benefitting the world through environmental sustainability along with building up local communities. We spoke to Third Sun's owners, Michelle and Geoff Greenfield.

Watch ***Changing the Climate with Michelle & Geoff Greenfield***

www.westohioumc.org/footprintstudy

Compared to fossil fuels, what could make solar energy more sustainable for the environment?
For the economy? For the community?



Change the Climate

Here are a few ideas of ways to reduce your use of fossil fuels, taken from *A Non-Expert's Guide to Living More Sustainably*:

- Use LED, halogen, or CFL bulbs
- Turn the thermostat up a few degrees in summer and down a few degrees in winter.
- Use curtains or blinds to help keep the cold or heat out.
- Wash your clothes in cold water.
- Ask your power company about switching to renewable energy sources.
- Research whether financing a solar system might cost the same as what you're currently paying for electricity!



When it comes to limiting your use of fossil fuels, what is one change you would be willing to make in your personal life? In your church? In your community? Are there any other ideas you would add?

Learn More

Learn more about renewable energy!

- Watch the Third Sun highlight video
- Read the full version of *A Non-Expert's Guide to Living More Sustainably*
- Visit thirdsunsolar.com and ruralaction.org



session 3:

THE FOOTPRINTS OF FARMS

People have been nourished by the land of Southeast Ohio for at least 12,000 years. From native cultures to European settlers, farming techniques have adapted and changed through generations. Yet in recent decades, it has become increasingly difficult for smaller farms to compete with the lower prices of big agriculture, as customers have begun to worry more about saving money than investing in local foods.

In the gospels, Jesus invites people to live more simply and to freely invest in the lives of others.

Read Luke 12:22-34

When Jesus says to sell your possessions and give the money to the poor, he is not speaking metaphorically. Throughout the gospels, many of the disciples who follow Jesus do just that. The practice of selling possessions and redistributing the wealth also continued into the early church, as described in Acts 2 and 4. Far from an individualistic view of wealth, the earliest Christians made the needs of the community a primary consideration for the use of money.

Questions to Consider:

- Why did the early church use money for the good of the community?
- How does considering the ravens, lilies and grass lead a person to live a more simple life?
- How does living more simply set you free to invest in the lives of others?





Large industrial farms are known to make a big footprint on the environment, while small-to-midsize farms often employ more sustainable farming practices. Sometimes it costs more money to shop locally, but doing so is better for the environment and for the community. Supporting smaller farms can be a way to invest in the lives of others today, as well as for future generations.

Watch *The Footprints of Farms*

www.westohioumc.org/footprintstudy



In Southeast Ohio, what could make buying from big industrial farms located in other states unsustainable for the environment? For the economy? For the community?



Social Principle of the UMC

The United Methodist Church advocates for the support of small-to-midsize farms: "The value of family farms has long been affirmed as a significant foundation for free and democratic societies. In recent years, the survival of independent farmers worldwide has been threatened by various factors, including the increasing concentration of all phases of agriculture into the hands of a limited number of transnational corporations. The concentration of the food supply for the many into the hands of the few raises global questions of justice that cry out for vigilance and action. We call upon the agribusiness sector to conduct itself with respect for human rights primarily in the responsible stewardship of daily bread for the world, and secondarily in responsible corporate citizenship that respects the rights of all farmers, small and large, to receive a fair return for honest labor. We advocate for the rights of people to possess property and to earn a living by tilling the soil. We call upon governments to revise support programs that disproportionately benefit wealthier agricultural producers, so that more support can be given to programs that benefit medium and smaller sized farming operations, including programs that build rural processing, storage, distribution, and other agricultural infrastructure; which link local farmers to local schools; and which promote other community food security measures. We call upon our churches to do all in their power to speak prophetically to the matters of food supply and the people who grow the food for the world and to develop ministries that build food security in local communities."

- *The Economic Community > Family Farms*



Why would God care about communities supporting small-to-midsize farms?



Integration Acres is a small farm in Southeast Ohio that focuses on sustainable practices. Co-owner Chris Chmiel took us on a tour of the farm, where we got to see native fruit trees and free-ranging goats.

Watch *Changing the Climate* with Chris Chmiel

www.westohioumc.org/footprintstudy



Compared to big industrial farms, what could make small-to-midsize farms more sustainable for the environment? For the economy? For the community?

Change the Climate

Check out the Food section from *A Non-Expert's Guide to Living More Sustainably* to think more about where your food comes from.

- Buy your produce from a local farmer's market.
- Join a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) – search online for ones in your area.
- Start a community garden or participate in one.
- Eat local, sustainably produced meat.
- Grow your own produce in a backyard or container garden.
- Try to make only as much food as you need.
- If you have leftovers, eat them the next day, or turn them into compost.





In regards to local foods, what is one change you would be willing to make in your personal life? In your church? In your community? Are there any other ideas you would add?



Learn More

Learn more about about small farms and local foods!

- Watch the Integration Acres highlight video
- Read the full version of *A Non-Expert's Guide to Living More Sustainably*
- Visit snowvillecreamery.com, athensfarmersmarket.org, chesterhillproduceauction.org, and ruralaction.org

session 4:

THE FOOTPRINT OF A COMMUNITY

People who are environmentally conscious often think about their own individual carbon footprint. However, in Southeast Ohio, groups of individuals are trying to change the footprint of an entire region. Nonprofit organizations, private businesses, and everyday people are working together to preserve the environment, restore the economy, and invest in local communities for the transformation of the world.

The book of Revelation describes a vision of a renewed world.

Read Revelation 21:1-5

It is common for people to think of the physical world as passing away at the end of Revelation. But what Revelation actually says is that the world will be made new. Most biblical scholars agree this passage refers to a renewal of the physical world.

Questions to Consider:

- Why would God care enough about the physical world to renew it?
- What does it mean to say God will renew the physical world?
- If God cares about the renewal of the physical world, what is our human role in caring for God's creation?





Some Christians question whether people should care about the physical world at all, suggesting God cares only for spiritual things. But The United Methodist Church asserts that God cares for creation holistically. A growing field of emphasis within the church is what is called ecotheology – which combines the words “ecology” and “theology” – and explores the relationship between God and all of Creation.

Watch **Ecotheology & Sustainability** with **Dr. Elaine Nogueira-Godsey**

www.westohioumc.org/footprintstudy



How can theologies that denigrate the physical world cause or allow long-term harm to the environment? To local economies? To communities?

Social Principle of the UMC

The United Methodist Church calls for the renewal of the environment, the economy and communities by envisioning a new earth for all of creation: "All creation is the Lord's, and we are responsible for the ways in which we use and abuse it. Water, air, soil, minerals, energy resources, plants, animal life, and space are to be valued and conserved because they are God's creation and not solely because they are useful to human beings. God has granted us stewardship of creation. We should meet these stewardship duties through acts of loving care and respect. Economic, political, social, and technological developments have increased our human numbers, and lengthened and enriched our lives. However, these developments have led to regional defoliation, dramatic extinction of species, massive human suffering, overpopulation, and misuse and overconsumption of natural and nonrenewable resources, particularly by industrialized societies. This continued course of action jeopardizes the natural heritage that God has entrusted to all generations. Therefore, let us recognize the responsibility of the church and its members to place a high priority on changes in economic, political, social, and technological lifestyles to support a more ecologically equitable and sustainable world leading to a higher quality of life for all of God's creation."

– *Introduction to The Natural World*

How can environmental sustainability lead to “a higher quality of life for all of God’s creation”?



In Southeast Ohio, a new generation of local leaders is rising up to create a higher quality of life for all of God’s creation. In an area where the environment, the economy, and the community have long suffered from unsustainable practices, they are seeking to transform attitudes and change the climate of environmental discussions.

Watch *Changing the Climate of Appalachian Ohio*

www.westohioumc.org/footprintstudy



Why is it important for people of faith to join forces with individuals and organizations to preserve the environment? Restore the economy? Invest in local communities?

Change the Climate

Check out the General section from *A Non-Expert’s Guide to Living More Sustainably* to get ideas about practical ways to renew God’s world.

- Spend more time in nature
- Recycle and reuse!
- Vote! Elect candidates with good climate plans.
- Talk about climate change.
- Travel to state and national parks.
- Disinvest from fossil fuels.
- When traveling, stay and eat at local establishments.
- Extend your efforts to your school, church, or club.
- Calculate your household’s carbon footprint.
- Do a home energy audit.





When it comes to renewing God's world, what is one change you would be willing to make in your personal life? In your church? In your community? Are there any other ideas you would add?



Learn More

Learn more about sustainability in your community!

- Watch *The Footprint of the Foothills* documentary to see how efforts to preserve the environment, restore economies, and invest in communities are reshaping the future of Southeast Ohio. You can schedule a virtual or in-person screening with the producers (email gracepicturesumc@gmail.com).
- Read the full version of *A Non-Expert's Guide to Living More Sustainably*
- Visit ruralaction.org, westohioumc.org/footprint, and facebook.com/GracePicturesLLC