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## The *ecocell* Concept



The *ecocell* programme, organised by Green Christian, can be seen as a journey, or pilgrimage, to be travelled by groups of friends, neighbours, or church or faith group members.

The final destination of this pilgrimage is sustainable living, in our personal lives. When we reach it we will be living within the limits of the resources available on Earth, and of the Earth's capacity to absorb our waste products, perhaps our greatest challenge in the 21st century. In practice this means action to avoid (further) climate destabilisation, species extinction and depletion of non-renewables.



Through *ecocell* we hope to fulfil our personal responsibilities to Creator and Creation. But, more importantly, we can use our personal demonstrations of what can be done to support campaigning at parochial and political levels. People are more likely to listen to those who walk the talk.

**The First Step:** You don't have to commit to the whole journey initially. You can commence a journey of carbon free discipleship by studying and taking action with ['Nine First Steps'](#).

You could get together with a group of friends to learn further about the main issues that give rise to ecological damage, discuss the influences on our collective and individual behaviours, think about our personal impacts and take action to minimise those impacts through the suggestions for action in 'Nine First Steps'.

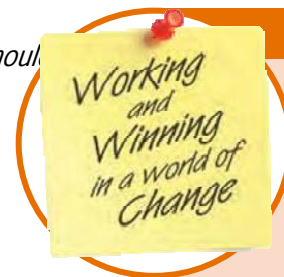
***ecocell* "Journeys in carbon-free discipleship"** is for those who are willing to take on the very demanding commitment of completing the journey to sustainability. We will commit ourselves to getting our carbon footprints down to the actual level required for sustainability. We will also ensure that we respect the laws of nature, in which we see the hand of our Creator, and the needs of the natural world, in all aspects of our lives. Green Christian, through the *ecocell* programme, provides relevant expertise directly or indirectly (e.g. by references to the best literature).

***ecocell*** is for people who have completed the 'Nine First Steps', or an equivalent programme. It will involve significant further learning, very committed action at the personal level, and at the local political level. We will be supported through prayer, poetry, stories and group activities, and by a range of resources available from Green Christian. We anticipate that this stage will take a period of about five years, to make the necessary changes in our lives.

*See the diagram on the next page to illustrate how our impacts should change over the course of the journey.*

Contact [info@greenchristian.org.uk](mailto:info@greenchristian.org.uk)

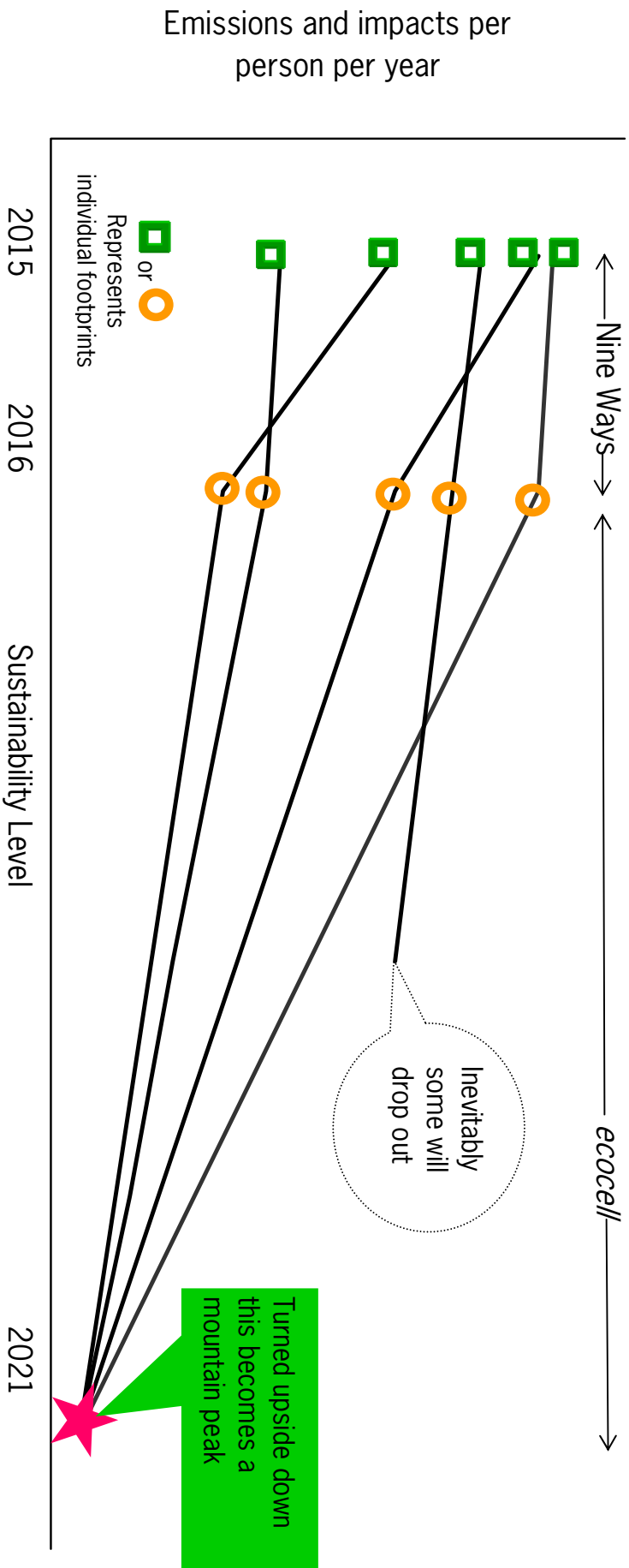
***ecocell*** can be downloaded from our website:  
<http://www.greenchristian.org.uk/ecocell/ecocell-documents>



The *ecocell* Concept



## The Emissions and Impact Descent Trajectory of ecocell Programme Members



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## Daring to Imagine Completing the Journey to Low Carbon Living



Chris Walton and Paul Bodenham reflect on the biblical foundations of this intentional journey

**GreenChristian member and SC member Tony Emerson has led the work for the creation of *ecocell*. He has facilitated the work on the concept and the modules with many, many others and addresses the question: 'If we were to live a near-zero-carbon life what would it be like?' Our vision, Green Christian's vision, is to create supportive groups who will decide to imagine completing that journey and dare to start it together. Tony has written a review of Tim Jackson's book, *Prosperity without Growth* and parts of that review appear in the boxes in this article (see also p.20 for another review of this book).**

### ***ecocell*: Daring to imagine completing the journey to lowcarbon living**

This programme is not so much a programme as a way of life: learning to take the consequences, over the long haul, of living with near-zero carbon emissions.

Why are we inviting others to embark on this journey? We believe that God the Creator is using the crisis we have caused in his Creation to draw his creatures back to the virtues and values of his Kingdom. What is the motivation to even imagine a life without high carbon use? We believe that throughout history God has led his people through different patterns of formation to become the people of God, a people like him in word and deed. *ecocell* has its foundations in biblical patterns of transformation.

Recent history has made plain the tendency our species has to sabotage its own future. In a hundred different ways – through indifference, political avarice or just plain fatalism – we have habitually failed to fulfil our responsibility to future generations. In a democracy we don't have the luxury of blame: all our lives are in some way complicit in the mess we are in. Sometimes it seems that nothing less than a miracle is needed.

But history shows us also that such miracles are possible. Time and again justice has been won when certain ordinary people are in the right place at the right time, listening to God and daring to share God's dream. As the Bible witnesses, only when our effort is a response to God's initiative, only when small, sometimes frightened, groups of individuals dare to trust, is deep change let loose. That kind of risk-taking is what the Earth needs of us today.

Tony Emerson writes: Christian environmentalism involves integrating environmental principles into our spiritual lives, our personal behaviour, and into the practices of our churches. But our mission also demands that we look outwards, to influence our political and business leaders and to make our contribution to the development of a new political philosophy that will both challenge and inspire people in these turbulent times.

Prosperity without Growth is a thoroughly researched, secular study that provides us with a vision of how we can achieve prosperity – in the fullest and collective sense – without relying on an ever-growing economy. In other words, how as a society we can put loving our neighbour and caring for Creation into practice, and get the best balance in attaining these two ends.

The first five chapters can be summarised as follows: economic growth cannot be 'decoupled' from serious damage to global life-support systems. Green technology and greater eco-efficiency are necessary – but not sufficient (as 'green business' advocates argue). Economic activity would need to be taking carbon out of the atmosphere, not adding to it, to maintain growth in a world of nine billion people.

But Jackson also argues that the pursuit of prosperity or well-being can, in effect, be 'decoupled' from economic growth, in the affluent developed world. Economic growth leads to horrifyingly high environmental and other costs, but bestows no overall benefits.

Both propositions – that environmental damage cannot be decoupled from growth but that well-being can – are clearly argued and supported by evidence from the relevant natural and social sciences. The book is both thought provoking and accessible – even to this reader, who normally views economics as a cure for insomnia...



Essentially, *ecocell* is a spiritual journey, that is, a journey of faith. It dares to imagine completing the journey to low-carbon living whatever the consequences. It is a Storm of Hope.

We also know that these transformations have deep roots. They do not happen in the twinkling of an eye, not yet at any rate. They are the fruit of long-cherished hopes, of a patient, disciplined struggle that engages the heart, the mind and the ear of the soul. The prophet's life is not an easy one – as we learn from experience and adapt to the flux of events, the struggle changes and unfolds. Yet the prophet's hope is sustained by the virgin freshness which is always characteristic of God's 'new thing'.

The primary event of salvation history, or rather the primary journey of salvation history, is the Exodus. God's people having become enslaved in Egypt, are released from captivity, delivered by God, led by Moses, but though they are promised a new land, there are 40 years of wandering in the desert before, under new leadership, they enter into the Promised Land. During this journey there were many moments of transformation and discovering, for instance, that deliverance from Egypt requires a new lifestyle, one of trust and dependence on God, where worship is telling the story of the action of God, celebrating the present, trusting God for the future and living justly.

It was a journey Jesus also took. On Mount Tabor, as Jesus was lit up by the transfiguration, Peter, James and John witnessed him talking to Moses and Elijah about an 'exodus' he too would complete. It would take him to the cross and beyond. The way of the cross – the way of compassion, self-giving and transformation – is the exodus which we too are called to make, and as Christians we make it in him who has gone before us.

Another journey of formation for the people of God was the Exile. Before exile, in the Promised Land they had struggled to trust God even when, contrasting with the situation in the desert, there was more and more abundance. The experience of abundance, at least for some, the owning of land and a growth economy generated a culture of reliance on self and the power of the moneyed few and a disregard for worship and dependence on God. Exile could become, for us, a template for our journey out of slavery to rampant consumerism, profligate use of and dependence on oil and fossil fuels and into a simple lifestyle.

What Exodus and Exile have in common is a longing for home. For the early people of Israel in the desert it was a home in the future: one they had been promised but not yet seen – and given all their tribulations it was a promise that they had to be constantly reminded of. For the later Israel, in exile, it was a home in the past, a distant memory, but one fundamental to their identity as a people. For the Israel of the consumer age, it is both a memory, inherited from cultures which managed to live sustainably, and a promise, residing where faith, justice, politics and technology meet.

Today, the urgent search is for a way to 'come home' to a finite planet, when the appetites stoked in us by our economic system are infinite, and our sheer population requires unprecedented self-restraint. When we are at home on the Earth, the Earth will be at home in us. But to reach that home we have a lot to learn from both the memories and the promises of sustainable human lives. We will not even set off unless we make ourselves vulnerable to God's word, and put our hand in God's hand. And we will surely need the help of God's Spirit when the going gets tough and the feet get tired.

*ecocell* is an intentional journey which asks the question again, "How can we sing the songs of the LORD while in a foreign land?" (Psalm 137.4). Or what would life be like if we were, in obedience to God in caring for his Creation, to reduce our carbon footprint to zero? It is, then, offered as a journey of exploration towards a new transformation of the people of God to become like him in word and deed.

Tony writes: Jackson provides a wonderful vision of a **frugal lifestyle** that is very compatible with a Christian concept of Heaven on Earth (as he points out, 'frugal' is derived from the Latin word for fruitful). The transition from working long hours, with large 'compensation' packages requiring lots of compensatory consumerism, to much shorter working hours and investing time and energy in our families and communities (social capital) will be a difficult but fruitful transition, bringing its own intrinsic rewards.

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There is always a danger in 'spiritualising' the history of the people of God. It is the actual history of actual people learning to relate to and be changed or transformed by the Creator God in order to become a part of his purpose and to join him in bringing all people, the whole Creation in the here and now, to be the new redeemed Earth. Therefore, while learning lessons about our personal walk with God from the history of the people of God is valid enough, we must always be sure when reading the story to compare 'like with like'. This means we must apply the experience of a 'people', a corporate experience, to similar corporate experiences today.

For instance, we have no need to apply learning to trust God for protection as in the Exodus journey, to, say, learning not to be afraid in the dark, or learning how to overcome the temptations of the flesh. Rather we have an obligation to apply this to our contemporary corporate experience as a nation, say, in our trust in an arsenal of nuclear weapons for our protection rather than trusting in God. If we change the question by spiritualising or privatising the texts we have neatly escaped the environment in which we can be formed into the people of God.

If we use a formation 'lesson' from the exilic journey we discover that it was during the exile that the theology of the Messiah was developed. Vocation was restored for the people of God in the hope of the anointed one to come, the Messiah. Through the Messiah they would return to the ways of seeking God for provision and protection and their worship would reflect the nature and activity of God, in word and deed. Here was an intentional strategy, the Servant-King would suffer 'the punishment that brings us peace'. His vocation would be accomplished not by 'the might of many armies but by my Spirit'. If this was the vocation of the Servant-King, it is also the vocation of his people.

*ecocell* is an intentional strategy to walk the talk of environmental intelligence whatever the consequences, with the hope of discovering again that, just as dispossession and exile became understood as gift by the people of God in their historical circumstances, so a radical letting-go of our espousal of the present economic system, supported by the might of armies, will also emerge as gift and vocation for the people of God in our present historic ecological crisis.



Green Christian has identified this as prophetic discipleship and *ecocell* recognises the prophetic cycle – See, Grieve, Hope, Act. This is why it is not a programme to try for a few weeks or months; rather, it is an intentional strategy to explore a new way of being formed into the people of God in a particular society, at this particular time in history. This is why it is to be undertaken by groups of people who will be a support to each other, challenging and admonishing one another to see; supporting one another in grief and repentance; encouraging one another in imagining a new way of hopeful living; and acting corporately together.

Essentially, *ecocell* is a spiritual journey, that is, a journey of faith. It dares to imagine completing the journey to low-carbon living whatever the consequences. It is a Storm of Hope.

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