

Storm of hope

ChristianEcologyLink

Going carbon free with Christian Ecology Link

2011

► Until we reduce our ecological impact to a sustainable level, we shall not find peace with the Creator, creation and God's image within us. Thankfully we know the kinds of choices we need to make.

However they remain untapped and undeveloped. That is why Christian Ecology Link has launched *ecocell*, its unique traveller's guide to sustainable living. *ecocell* not only invites you on that journey of a lifetime, but helps you to complete it. It enables you to plot your destination, and negotiate over a period of years the turning-points, landmarks and obstacles on the way. Crucially, it enables friends and fellow-travellers to share the journey with you, from your church or your neighbourhood, or on-line with an occasional meeting.

The final destination is sustainable living in our personal lives. How we get there depends on a host of factors, in our own lives and in society at large. *ecocell* helps you make the choices which are right for you and for the planet.

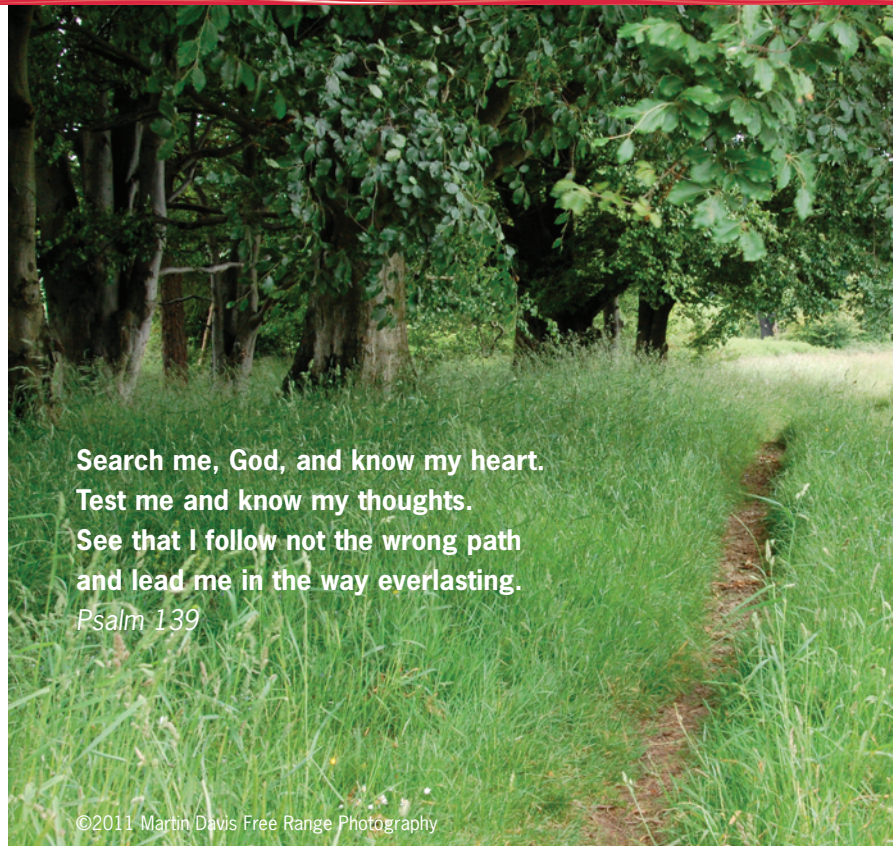
Above all it is a journey of the heart and soul. This pamphlet explores what it means to be on that journey, using the experience of some travellers in the Bible. Their experience gives hope to the 21st Century consumer society.

The Bible studies overleaf are suitable for small groups or personal reflection. You do not have to be a signed-up participant in the *ecocell* journey: the studies are suited to anyone exploring the challenge which the environmental predicament presents to our lifestyles.

The journey is long. It requires humility, fervour and persistence. Come along and join the journey, not just with us, but with God's people who have found the way before us.

Deborah says

For too long, I think, I have been trying to do the green thing on my own. We are in this together – the world will not sink or swim by my efforts alone, and I must let down those barriers, come out of my comfort zone, find the time, and join those who also have decided to make an intentional journey towards zero carbon. Not comfortable for me, to be dependent on others, no more comfortable in the end than it is to be dependent on God, but wholly necessary. We need each other, and the world needs us, pilgrims in a strange land.



Search me, God, and know my heart.
Test me and know my thoughts.
See that I follow not the wrong path
and lead me in the way everlasting.
Psalms 139

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journeys in carbon-free discipleship

ecocell 1: First steps helps you and your church, your friends and neighbours, get started on the journey, learning what harms God's creation, and how we can reduce our impact. Prayers, stories and group activities help us reflect on our habits and inspire us to change and act. This first stage can be completed in a few months.

For those who wish to go further, there is **ecocell 2: journeys in carbon-free discipleship**. The aim is no less than to reduce our carbon footprints to the actual level required for sustainability. It demands commitment over several years and a readiness to learn and change. We will need to engage politically to achieve what is currently not possible. Ultimately it is a journey the whole of humanity must take – but how, unless there are some to show the way?

► The Bible studies on the next two pages can be used in the time for reflection which is part of any *ecocell* meeting. For all *ecocell* modules, and other ideas for prayer and discussion, visit www.greenchristian.org.uk

1. Escape from slavery: Exodus 14

After generations of oppression in Egypt, it was a leap into the unknown. In this foundational story the people of Israel took the risk of trusting God's promise to Moses.

But the economic system they had left behind decided it could not do without them. Pharaoh sent his army to bring them back by force. The Israelites were encamped against the seashore, and when they spotted them coming, they could see no escape. Read **verses 10-13**.

- Do you sometimes feel you are being pursued by a system which seeks to take you captive?

The cornered Israelites were in a dilemma, apparently torn between their own survival and their faithfulness to God. In circumstances like that we all make compromises with the oppressors in our lives.

- In what ways are you currently choosing to 'go back to the Egyptians' in your choices as a consumer?

As the rest of Exodus 14 recounts, Pharaoh's army pursues the Israelites into the sea. Moses promised his people they would never have to see their pursuers again – and they took a step of faith into the water.

- Have there been any 'Red Sea' moments in your journey so far, when you have in some way become 'lost' to consumerism?

2. Faithfulness or survival?

The labyrinthine wandering of Israel does not end on the far shore of the Red Sea. They head into the desert, but soon the spectre of starvation begins to loom, and the same dilemma confronts them: faithfulness or survival. As **verses 2-4** explain, God again provides a surprising resolution, this time in the gift of manna. Jesus calls us to a risky, sometimes precarious life.

- Looking ahead in your journey to carbon freedom, can you envisage confronting any dilemmas where your 'survival' seems to be at stake?
- If you're honest, how much of this is actually about survival of a way of living, or a self-image, you know to be unsustainable?

To meet the Israelites' ultimate needs, God provides a day's supply of manna each morning. From this experience the people of God first heard the challenge of living by faith. It is a way of life being rediscovered by Transition Towns and the LOAF campaign (see back cover), which rely on immediate relationships of trust, rather than vast supply-chains contrived in anxiety and self-interest.

Each day people gathered just enough manna to meet their needs. Anyone tempted to stockpile it soon regretted it (see **Exodus 16.18-20**).

- How do the daily manna-gatherers challenge your own habits as a consumer?

Sandra says ...

For several years I have been working to reduce my own carbon footprint and live more simply. Living without a car and going 'veggie' (well almost) has been done fairly painlessly. One of my big concerns has always been about the fast pace of modern life. There is sometimes, as with climate change, an urgency about the need to take action but glorifying speed is idolatry. Learning the value of 'waiting' and not rushing is fundamental to change. We need to develop the contemplative spirit, such a vital part of our humanity.



The 'carbon exodus' is being developed further by Operation Noah, the climate change campaign founded by CEL. Look out for resources at www.operationnoah.org.

3. Prodigal parent, prodigal child: Luke 15

What on earth was he thinking? According to **verses 11-12**, it's not as though his son bullied him into it. The teenager had learnt just enough about money to be able to squander it, then asks for half his parents' wealth – and gets it. You could perhaps understand if the request had come from the sensible one.

- What was God up to, handing over the riches of creation? What does such behaviour say about God?

For a while the waster could indulge a fantasy of endless wealth, but none of the money was being replaced or invested – it was just falling through his fingers. Collapse was only a matter of time. It was only when he was facing death that he began to see straight.

He swallowed his pride and headed back home. That was a hard journey to make, a journey of courage, repentance and humility. The first step was perhaps the hardest of all, but with every mile he knew he was changing.

- Was there a moment when you 'came to your senses' and realised our society could not go on like this? Can you describe it?

We understand this as an archetypal story of repentance. The prodigal son turns himself and his life around, and is welcomed back and forgiven. Repentance is the root of the gospel – as John the Baptist preached.

- Would you recognise your reason for taking this journey as a kind of repentance? What might forgiveness and reconciliation look like?
- What does this story of 'homecoming' say about how God responds to our behaviour towards the living Earth?

Verses 22-24 see the father calling a feast to celebrate his son's return. It might seem strange that God's answer to the return of a prodigal is yet more conspicuous consumption. But the journey is one of learning how to enjoy creation as a gift rather than a birthright. The most valuable gift is the one that is not deserved.

- How can you live your daily life so as to be more mindful of God's generosity in creation?



4. Way of the cross: Matthew 16

In travelling to Jerusalem, Jesus took the journey which anticipates all our faith journeys, and the journey towards carbon freedom. He did not stop when the donkey he was offered reached the city gates – his final journey had scarcely begun. The events of the next few days would span earth, hell and heaven.

If he had allowed his friends to make his mind up for him, Jesus would have stayed at home: see **verses 21-23**. Jesus' rebuke of Peter seems harsh and unfeeling; but it's calling him 'Satan' that is most shocking of all.

Our nearest and dearest have a habit of tempering our most messianic moments of self-denial – especially when they have to be involved. Stories abound of family arguments over flying on holiday next year or turning lights out. Likening our loved ones to Satan is not tactful, and nor is it likely to be factually correct. But tensions are almost certain to arise as our inbuilt criteria for choices begin to shift.

- ▶ Do you ever wish those with whom you live (or work) showed more support for caring for the environment?
- ▶ Are you always right, and are they always to blame?
- ▶ Is your approach to handling such conflicts the best one?

Jesus' call to discipleship in **verses 24-26** is uncompromising. The complexities of family life soon water it down – or our part in the wider economy, for that matter.

Yet day by day, faithfulness and survival, love and death, must wrestle in us for the sake of a greater peace. The dilemma is disarmed as we surrender the things we cling to, until it is 'no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me' (Galatians 2:20).

Our society cannot hear the good news that we are God's beloved. To fill the desperate need for value it has created a poor, superstitious gospel which says simply 'I consume, therefore I am'.

Jesus calls us to name the falsehoods which have taken hold of us, and surrender them. Of course our ego will put up a fight.

- ▶ If the journey to a zero-carbon society is part of Jesus' call to discipleship, what does this mean for the task of 'making disciples of all nations', which we call evangelism?



Tony, national ecocell co-ordinator, says

I'm from Galway in the west of Ireland. Galwegians are a fairly cynical lot: we don't do hype. But I see the ecocell journey as one of the most exciting challenges of my life. If we can demonstrate that it is possible to live our lives within sustainability limits, and to live our lives to the full in doing so, we will be sending out a very clear message about the meaning of Heaven on Earth.

It's particularly a message for our political, business and church leaders. They may be nervous about taking effective environmental action at their levels. A growing number of their constituents, customers or members will not be put off by the significant changes required – we are showing that the changes we demand are both realistic and desirable.

5. Emmaus: Luke 24

Crowds of people had filled the streets to hail Jesus as king. They had hoped he would save them from the predicament into which history had trapped them.

But within days he was executed and his name an object of scorn. In **verses 13-15** we join two of his followers travelling home, dejected. As they explain to a stranger they meet on the way, 'we had hoped he would be the one who would redeem Israel'.

The hope God gives does not depend on optimism, hype or even on evidence. God invites us to surrender our insistence on the outcome, so that we can listen for a greater will, and act on it in our lives. That is quite a challenge when the stakes are as high as they are with the environmental crisis, but ultimately it is the only way to keep our sanity.

- ▶ What hopes have you lost, or do you fear losing, for the outcome of this crisis? Be as specific as you can.
- ▶ What hopes do you still cherish for ways in which it can be resolved?
- ▶ Would you describe yourself as 'driven' by hope, or 'drawn' by hope?

It is getting dark, and the pilgrims invite their fellow traveller in. He breaks and blesses the bread, and immediately they recognise him as Jesus. With us too he shares his life in everything we consume or use. Perhaps you also find you meet him in the Eucharist, in which all consumption can be made holy.

- ▶ What sustenance can you find in the Eucharist for your journey in carbon-free discipleship?

No sooner has Jesus broken bread than he vanishes. Night has fallen, and it will be 20 centuries before street lights are installed.

Undaunted by the darkness, as **verses 33-35** relate, the disciples head out for the seven miles back to Jerusalem to find their friends.

They discover they are not the only ones with proof that their hope lives on. The rest, as they say, is history.

- ▶ What do you gain, or seek, from your fellow-travellers on this journey?

The Labyrinth is an ancient image, common to many faiths throughout the world. It dares us to trust its disorienting way to peace with God and with God's planet.

Lord, lead us
through the
wilderness.

Humble us and
test us, and
know what is in
our hearts.

From
Deuteronomy 8:2

Join us

Since 1982 CEL has been working with Christians, churches and the green movement to witness to hope in the ecological crisis.

You can become a member for £18 a year, or £10 if you are on a low income (less with a standing order). Send your details to our Information Officer using the form below.

To find out more before committing yourself, visit our extensive website: www.christian-ecology.org.uk, sign up for our free monthly news e-mail or contact us for a free introductory pack.

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2. If you pay tax at the higher rate, you can claim further relief in your self-assessment tax return. You can obtain an Inland Revenue leaflet on Gift Aid from your local tax office.



Poppy says

For a long-time I've tried to recycle, compost, avoid processed foods, make clothes and furnishings. Now retirement brings lifestyle changes, so having sold the car how much should I use my freedom pass and senior rail card? We've reduced our household carbon through PV panels, insulation and wearing lots more clothes. So following the ecocell journey is going to demand more of me and will make greater changes to my life. In order to continue a support group is going to be essential.

CEL gatherings in 2011

Saturday 5 March, London

End of the age of thorns: surviving consumerism

With Revd Peter Owen Jones (presenter of BBC TV's *How to live a simple life*) and Prof Tim Cooper. CEL's conference in 2011 will explore spiritual roots for a new economics, for our own humanity and all life on Earth.

Wednesday 25 May, 7.30pm, Cheltenham

Talk by Jonathon Porritt, Friends Meeting House GL52 2NP

Saturday 9 July, London

ecocell workshop

A workshop on the core module for anyone taking part in *ecocell 2*. Sessions will focus on 'Visualising the Future' and 'Learning to Live on Rations'. Time to share questions and answers on measuring your footprint, and reflection on action so far.

14-16 October, Ringsfield Hall, Suffolk

Pilgrims in a strange land

Anyone who is taking steps to sustainability needs the support of friends and the freedom of the gospel. This weekend is an opportunity to meet fellow-travellers, share stories, pray and take bearings for the road ahead.

CEL brings together some 900 people in the UK and beyond who are praying and working for the journey to carbon-free discipleship. We offer:

Gatherings: Members meet in at least two conferences, retreats or workshops each year

Local groups: Eighteen groups are directly affiliated to CEL, and we are pleased to offer support, advice and materials to others

Prayer: Each month we publish a daily *Prayer Guide* available by e-mail, on our website or by post

Campaigns: Our LOAF campaign promotes food which is Locally Grown, Organically produced, Animal friendly and Fairly traded. We also support the climate change campaign

Operation Noah, which we established in 2001
Green Christian magazine: Published twice a year, *Green Christian* is packed with news, thought-provoking articles, reviews and resources

Exhibition materials: We can provide a range of leaflets, banners and posters for events and displays giving a Christian perspective on environmental topics

On-line: Members can join a discussion forum and social network to exchange news and advice. CEL has a Facebook Group at <http://on.fb.me/9fUYs8>

E-news: We publish regular e-mails for members and non-members on events and resources from CEL and other Christian environmental organisations

Website: You can find further details of all the above at www.christian-ecology.org.uk or contact our Information Officer at the address above.

