



Study Guide for *Laudato Si'*

Pope Francis recently released a highly anticipated papal encyclical on the subject of climate change. An encyclical is a letter which is intended to be widely circulated. In Roman Catholic terms an encyclical is normally addressed to the bishops of the world to guide them in their relationship with their flocks, but this encyclical, entitled [*Laudato Si'*](#) which translates into English as “Praise Be Unto You”, has been eagerly embraced by many protestants as well.

This study guide is intended to assist individuals or small groups to read and digest *Laudato Si'*. It follows the natural divisions of the letter and recommends scriptural and worship resources to create a seven part study designed to encourage fruitful conversation. It is my hope that these conversations will lead to a surge of faithful action on the part of Christians from all traditions to care for our common home.

How to Use this Study as a Group

Before beginning the study ensure that every participant is furnished a copy of this study guide, the text of *Laudato Si'* itself, and the additional resources that this study uses. All of these documents may be downloaded from the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship website or by following the links found under “Additional Resources” at the end of this document.

Select a moderator for the entire study, or a rotation of moderators for each week if preferred. It is the moderator’s responsibility to thoroughly read the texts for that week and choose one or two quotes from *Laudato Si'* which they find particularly worthy of discussion. The moderator will also guide the discussion and ensure all the participants are given an opportunity to contribute.

If this is a worshipping community consider utilizing the prayers at the end of *Laudato Si'* to open and close each meeting. If desired the poetry and music resources could also be incorporated into worship services based on the encyclical, and, of course, it would be highly appropriate to conclude the entire study with a celebration of the Eucharist.

The recommended flow of a single one-hour session is as follows:

- Moderator reads a couple highlights of that week’s reading and invites general feedback about the text.
- Reflect on the discussion questions
- Read the Scripture Readings aloud together and reflect on how they relate to what they read in *Laudato Si'*.
- Read aloud or sing the additional resources for that week and reflect on how they relate to what they read in *Laudato Si'*.



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Session One – Introduction

Prior to Meeting: read the introduction of [Laudato Si'](#) (pp. 1-16)

Scripture Readings: [Psalm 104](#)

Poem: [The Creation by James Weldon Johnson](#)

Song: *For the Beauty of the Earth* by Folliott S. Pierpoint

Encyclicals are a highly tradition-bound genre of Roman Catholic social teaching. This means that the beginning of the letter is primarily concerned with establishing its connection to the history and tradition of the church. For this reason Pope Francis quotes several of his immediate predecessors, and of course his namesake St. Francis of Assisi whose poem inspired the title of this encyclical. In a surprising connection, Francis reaches out to the Patriarch of Constantinople demonstrating common ground on this subject and expressing the hope of one day accomplishing full ecclesial communion.

Discussion Questions

1. What traditions formed your understanding of humanity's relationship to nature?
2. How do you relate to the tradition or Roman Catholic social teaching this encyclical is part of?
3. What do you think it means to view the world not as a problem to be solved, but as "a joyful mystery to be contemplated with gladness and praise?"



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Session Two - What Is Happening To Our Common Home?

Prior to Meeting: read chapter one of [Laudato Si'](#) (pp. 17-61)

Scripture Readings: [Matthew 6:25-34](#)

Poem: [Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front](#) by Wendell Berry

Song: [O God Your Heart Is Broken](#) by Edith Sinclair Downing

The first chapter of *Laudato Si'* is dedicated to looking at the facts on the ground. It's remarkable for a document of religious teaching to dedicate so much time and give such a prominent position to scientific findings. It contains strong clear statements about the overwhelming scientific consensus regarding climate change as well as hints of the social and economic analysis which will become the main subjects of later sections.

Discussion Questions

1. One of the key insights of *Laudato Si'* is that concern for the environment and concern for the poor are connected. What does it mean that developed nations owe an "ecological debt" to the developing world?
2. Francis warns that scarcity of resources, particularly water, may become a major source of conflict in this century. In what ways are warfare and climate change connected?
3. Why is it inadequate to think of endangered species as resources? Why does Francis urge us to see that they have value in themselves?



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Session Three - The Gospel of Creation

Prior to Meeting: read chapter two of [Laudato Si'](#) (pp. 62-100)

Scripture Readings: [Colossians 1:15-23](#)

Poem: [Canticle of the Sun by Francis of Assisi](#)

Song: *All Creatures of Our God and King* by William H. Draper

Having considered the facts of our situation, *Laudato Si'* turns toward the biblical understanding of humanity's relationship to creation. Francis makes a strong case that the Bible does not permit an ideology of ownership and domination, but insists that the whole earth and all its creatures belong to God, including ourselves. Humanity is entrusted with the responsibility of caring for the earth and assisting our fellow creatures in reaching our common destiny in Christ.

Discussion Questions

1. Francis sets out in this section to demonstrate that our Bible provides ample motivation for Christians to care for creation. How does the Bible motivate you to take care of the environment?
2. What does it mean that Judeo-Christian thought "demythologized nature"? How is this helpful in motivating ecological stewardship?
3. The principle that private property is subordinate to the common good is a striking challenge to our culture. How do you think it would impact our society if we embraced this principle?



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Session Four - The Human Roots of the Ecological Crisis

Prior to Meeting: read chapter three of [*Laudato Si'*](#) (pp. 101-136)

Scripture Readings: [Genesis 2:4-4:16](#)

Song: *Many and Great, O God* by Joseph Renville

In the third chapter, Francis approaches the question of the roots of our ecological crisis from a particular angle. He identifies a tendency which he calls our technocratic paradigm, to rush toward results and in the process to treat animals, the environment, and even fellow human beings as means to an end. For this reason our technology often creates as many problems as it solves, and he fears this pattern will continue unless we step back and take a more holistic approach.

Discussion Questions

1. According to *Laudato Si'* "Each age tends to have only a meagre awareness of its own limitations." What are some examples of limitations our society may not be aware of?
2. What does it mean that "technological products are not neutral?"
3. To ensure economic freedom for everyone "restraints occasionally have to be imposed on those possessing greater resources and financial power." What types of restraints do you think might be necessary?



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Session Five - Integral Ecology

Prior to Meeting: read chapter four of [Laudato Si'](#) (pp. 137-162)

Scripture Readings: [Leviticus 25](#)

Song: [This Land is Your Land by Woodie Guthrie](#)

Not content arguing that our ecological crisis requires a more holistic approach, in the fourth chapter, *Laudato Si'* provides an example of what this approach looks like. When we speak of the “environment” we are really speaking of a complex relationship between society and nature. Therefore, an integral ecology considers social, economic, and cultural systems alongside natural ones. How we build public and private spaces for leisure, beauty, cultural heritage, and with the people who live there in mind, and striving toward the common good not only for ourselves, but for generations to come is part of our ecology.

Discussion Questions

1. Often questions of environmental degradation are framed as though humanity and nature are opposing forces, but *Laudato Si'* reminds us that we are a part of nature and in constant interaction with it. How might this shape our ecological approach differently?
2. This encyclical calls for us to give special care for indigenous communities and their cultural traditions. How might your community live into this call?
3. This chapter argues that the common good necessarily includes “distributive justice”. What do you think that means and how do we further this aim?



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Session Six - Lines of Approach and Action

Prior to Meeting: read chapter five of [Laudato Si'](#) (pp. 163-201)

Scripture Readings: [Isaiah 11:1-16](#)

Song: [The Earth is the Lord's by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette](#)

In the fifth chapter of *Laudato Si'* Pope Francis turns away from diagnosis and toward prescription with great vigor. There is more than the usual calls for dialogue and cooperation here. Francis identifies specific roles for the international community, individual states, businesses, and grassroots organizations. Economic analysis which has been a theme of the entire document really comes front and center in this section.

Discussion Questions

1. *Laudato Si'* consistently charges developed nations with taking up the greater share of the burden for protecting the environment. What are the justice implications of this perspective?
2. What does it mean when Francis says we sometimes have a “magical conception of the market,” and why is it important to avoid this?
3. What role does this encyclical propose for religion in political and scientific dialogue about the environment?



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Session Seven - Ecological Education and Spirituality

Prior to Meeting: read chapter six of [Laudato Si'](#) (pp. 202-246)

Scripture Readings: [1 Corinthians 11:17-34](#)

Poem: [God's Grandeur by Gerard Manley Hopkins](#)

Song: [The World Turned Upside Down by Leon Rosselson](#)

Laudato Si' concludes with a section calling for an ecological conversion which acknowledges our common origin, our mutual belonging, and our shared future. Such a conversion is both individual and communal, entailing both personal spiritual disciplines as well as the mobilization of social networks which transcend the capacities of even groups of individuals. Ultimately this encyclical grounds its ecological convictions in the sacraments and trinitarian theology.

Discussion Questions

1. How have you experienced (or are you experiencing?) an “ecological conversion”?
2. What lifestyle changes are you prepared to make as individuals, and as a community? How will these changes bring “healthy pressure to bear on those who wield political, economic and social power”?
3. Since it is in the Eucharist that “all that has been created finds its greatest exaltation,” how can we celebrate the Lord’s Supper so that it motivates our concern for the environment, and directs us to be “stewards of all creation”?



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Additional Resources

Laudato Si' text:

(<http://presbypeacefellowship.org/sites/default/files/LaudatoSi.pdf>)

Laudato Si' Selected Quotes For Discussion:

(<http://presbypeacefellowship.org/sites/default/files/LaudatoSiQuotes.pdf>)

Poems:

The Creation by James Weldon Johnson

(<http://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/creation>)

The Mad Farmer Liberation Front by Wendell Berry

(<http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/manifesto-the-mad-farmer-liberation-front/>)

Canticle of the Sun by Francis of Assisi

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canticle_of_the_Sun)

God's Grandeur by Gerard Manley Hopkins

(<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/173660>)

Songs:

For the Beauty of the Earth by Folliott S. Pierpoint
(Presbyterian Hymnal 473, Glory to God 14)

O God, Your Heart Is Broken, by Edith Sinclair Downing

(<http://earthministry.org/worship/songs/#o-god>)

All Creatures of Our God and King by William H. Draper
(Presbyterian Hymnal 455, Glory to God 15)

This Land is Your Land by Woodie Guthrie

(<http://www.scoutsongs.com/lyrics/thislandisyourland.html>)

Many and Great, O God by Joseph Renville

(Presbyterian Hymnal 271, Glory to God 21)

The Earth is the Lord's by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette

(http://www.carolynshymns.com/the_earth_is_the_lords.html)

The World Turned Upside Down by Leon Rosselson

(http://www.stuffandnonsense.co.uk/archives/the_world_turned_upside_down.html)