

CARING FOR CREATION NEWS

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There's a natural cycle in which carbon molecules circulate from the earth to the atmosphere and back. Nature has a way of regulating that cycle; capturing CO₂ through photosynthesis, depositing it within the earth, and later releasing it again. It takes about five years for a molecule of CO₂ to complete the circuit. All of this is a good thing. CO₂ in the atmosphere along with water vapor and other gasses creates the so called greenhouse effect. Without this warming process the earth would be about 33°C cooler and unfit for life as we know it.

Scientists are now telling us that, as a consequence of human activity, the greenhouse effect is out of balance and the world is warming. There's evidence for that in the melting of glaciers and the migration northward of plant and animal species. All this they say is the result of our burning fossil fuels. Fossil fuels it turns out are one of those carbon sinks that exist within nature. In essence, we've opened the bank and released the stored carbon. The resultant increase in atmospheric concentration of CO₂ acts something like an extra blanket; as more of the sun's radiation is held in, the earth warms up. Ultimately, the carbon cycle process will rebalance and regulate carbon levels. But given the amount of CO₂ to be removed, that process could take anywhere from 100 to 1,000 years; nobody knows for sure.

It's possible to halt the warming process before it goes to far--the so called tipping point. Responsible scientists are saying that we have to cut our emissions of CO₂ by 80% by 2050. Failure to do so, they suggest, will result in catastrophic social disruption. We don't have all the pieces of the scientific puzzle and we don't clearly understand the ways in which a catastrophe would play out. But as physicist Richard Wolfson suggests, we do know enough to understand the big picture. We know enough to understand that action is called for.

Some years ago, another population of people faced a significant challenge. After forty years of desultory living in the wilderness and eventual entry into the Promised Land, Joshua called the Israelites together and laid out the significance of their situation. He goes on to identify a decision they must make and calls on them to make a choice. It should have been obvious of course; God's people should live in God's ways. But Joshua knows from past experience with these people, that it isn't obvious and is anything but a given. So he calls on them to make a conscious decision as a deliberate act of will. "...choose this day whom you will serve ...but as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."

The way we live on the land has consequences. Our gathering and distribution of resources has an effect on the earth's ability to sustain life. This effect is often referred to as our footprint. And just as Joshua called on his people to recognize the reality of their situation, the process of global climate change is calling on us to recognize the significance of our own. Our challenge will be to creatively and deliberately lessen the impact of our footprint. We are being called upon to make a choice; and as before, the outcome isn't all that obvious.

The Global Climate Change task force of the Caring for Creation Ministry will be producing a questionnaire that helps each of us to identify our own contributions to the footprint. That's a little ways off yet, but when it comes we ask that you give it due consideration. We still have the ability to make choices. The real question is whether or not we will.

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