

PART 1 - THE PROBLEM

INTRODUCTION ACTIVITY

You will need: print out of Appendix 1, scissors

What do you think are the top problems for the environment? Hand out these options on strips of paper, or visibly post them, and have the young people discuss and arrange them in order of importance.

Don't feel the need to micromanage this activity or correct the order they choose. Instead, use this activity as a chance to gauge the group's attitude and knowledge about environmental issues. They may be more passionate and informed about this topic than you'd think!

After some discussion, you can say: "You may not have thought before that the Bible has something to say about climate change! We're going to have a look this week and next week about what Christians believe about caring for our environment." Then move into the Scripture reading.

READ

Read out loud: Romans 8:21-22 NIRV – "God planned to set the created world free. He didn't want it to rot away. Instead, God wanted it to have the same freedom and glory that his children have. 22 We know that all that God created has been groaning. It is in pain as if it were giving birth to a child. The created world continues to groan even now."

DISCUSS

The Bible says that creation - the environment - is groaning... like it's in pain! Why do you think the Bible says the world is in pain? (Take some answers and ideas - they will have some environmental ideas, which is appropriate, but also try to steer the group towards the bigger idea of sin. For example: "Is climate change the

only reason world is in pain, or is there something more wrong?")

Christians believe that **sin** is what's wrong with the whole world, that's why the world is in pain! God's creation is not running how He intended it to, because we all do things out of selfishness, greed, etc. that negatively affect our environment and the whole planet. Romans 3:23 NIRV says: "Everyone has sinned. No one measures up to God's glory."

ACTIVITY



You will need: cloth bag with medicine cabinet contents, print out of Appendix 2

In a cloth bag, bring in a Lemsip, cough syrup, a box of tissues, calamine lotion and other items from your medicine cupboard. Bring them out one by one (or, if appropriate, have the children pull them from the bag) and guess what kind of ailment someone might have if they needed these things. Allow them to share stories about their own experience with sickness, as it comes up!

Sometimes we think of sin as individual wrong acts like stealing or murder, and many think that if they can keep themselves from doing those things, they would never sin! But it might be more helpful to think of sin like having a virus. You can treat the symptoms of a disease - if you have a cold, you could take a Lemsip, if you have chicken pox you put calamine lotion on your spots... but those just help with your symptoms! Ultimately the cold virus or chicken pox virus must be defeated for someone to get better.

And sin is like a virus that all of humanity has! Its symptoms can be seen everywhere... stealing, murder, lying... and the harming of our environment. Climate change is a symptom of sin

in the world, sin that ultimately comes from every human heart. Even if climate change is solved and the earth's temperature stops rising, people will never stop finding ways to harm this world – and themselves – until sin is defeated!

PRAY

One sin that definitely contributes to climate change is apathy... that might be a new word! Does anyone know what apathy means? Apathy means knowing the right thing to do, but being too lazy or selfish to do it! James 4:17 describes apathy perfectly: *‘Remember, it is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it.’*

Understanding that sin is the cause of climate change shouldn't make us apathetic about helping the environment, it should actually motivate us more! We know the real cause of this problem, and we know the good things we can do to stop climate change. And the first thing we need is a change of heart!

Pray: *God, forgive us for the sin of apathy. Jesus, you're the only one who can get rid of the sin in the world and the sin in our hearts. Please heal us from this illness! Change us and motivate us to do the good things we know we should do, especially as we think about how to heal our environment and planet!*

THE PROBLEM: APPENDIX 1

Environmental Problems:

Pollution in the Air (aka greenhouse gasses)

Human Litter and Waste

Deforestation (large forests are cut down and not replanted)

Endangered Animals (animals that could become extinct when they are killed or their habitats are destroyed)

Pollution in the Oceans

Toxic Waste (dumping harmful chemicals)

PART 2 - THE SOLUTION

Either read this quote at the start of the group, or have it posted where it's quite visible as the young people enter.

"I used to think that the top environmental problems were biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse and climate change. I thought that thirty years of good science could address these problems. I was wrong. The top environmental problems are selfishness, greed, and apathy, and to deal with these we need a cultural and spiritual transformation. And we scientists don't know how to do that."

- Gus Speth, climate scientist

READ



Romans 8:21-22 NIRV "God planned to set the created world free. He didn't want it to rot away. Instead, God wanted it to have the same freedom and glory that his children have. 22 We know that all that God created has been groaning. It is in pain as if it were giving birth to a child. The created world continues to groan even now."

DISCUSSION ACTIVITY:



MONSTERS

You will need: three pieces of flipchart paper, colouring pens or crayons

The Bible says all of creation will someday be free of death and pain. That's good news! But how will that happen? Split the kids into two groups and give each group a piece of poster or flipchart paper. On the top of one paper write fear and on the other shame, and have each group design one monster, either **fear** or **shame**. Chat with the children about what fear and shame mean as they design their monsters (*for example: shame is when we feel really embarrassed and guilty about something we've done*). What does the fear monster look like? What does the shame monster look like? No right or wrong answers here, just get the children thinking about what these words mean and how fear and shame make them feel.

Once the monsters are done and described, ask the children: *'How have these monsters been used to try and save the environment, or stop climate change? Do you agree or disagree with using shame and fear to make people care for the planet?'* Maybe write down a few of the group's thoughts on the pages with the monsters.

Now bring out a pre-prepared paper with a simple cross on it. On the paper you could write out either John 3:16 or Psalm 24:1. Tell the children, "Christians believe that God desires to save this world through His Son, Jesus Christ. Not through shame or fear!" Christ came to love and save his creation so that it would no longer be enslaved to sin. Healing the environment is a part of Jesus' mission in the world and each of us can be a part of His great plan when we believe in and follow Jesus. And this is so exciting because God's plan doesn't just deal with a few problems in the world, but with the root cause of everything that's wrong: sin!

POLLUTED OCEAN OBJECT LESSON



You will need: large bowl of water, pepper, fairy liquid.

Have the kids gather in a circle and bring out a large bowl of water. Sprinkle plenty of pepper across the surface of the water and say that our hearts are polluted, just like our oceans or our air. And try as we might to pick out all the nasty bits to clean up our world and clean up our hearts, somehow, it's never quite enough! (**Try picking out bits of pepper, or even invite a couple of kids to try it – it's impossible!**) And this is why Jesus came! His sacrifice on the cross covers us with his perfect goodness. (**Dip your finger in some fairy liquid and stick your finger in the water... watch the pepper run away from the soap!**) When we say sorry to God for all the wrong things that we've done, He forgives us for all of our sin and we are welcomed

into God's family! We become part of God's big plan to save the whole world.

Invite the kids to try it out for themselves: dip their fingers in soap and watch the pepper react! Remind them that although this is a nifty science experiment, it also points to the deeper idea that Jesus can wash us clean of sin when we can't do it ourselves.

PRAY

Now remember last week and the word we learned: apathy! Followers of Jesus are not apathetic about sin; once our hearts are fresh and clear of sin, we are fit and ready to go change the world! Not using those monsters, fear and shame, but with Jesus in our hearts and by our side!

Invite the kids to close their eyes and pray with you, if they wish: Jesus, we admit that all our hearts are like a polluted ocean – we have all sinned and we can't clean it up. But we know you can, so please forgive us now and help us to follow you. We don't want to be apathetic, but we want to be a part of your plan to save the world. Amen!

An alter call isn't appropriate for a school SU group! But if any kids have further questions about Jesus and the forgiveness of sins, don't be afraid to answer their questions. Spend some time in prayer for your group this week, that Jesus' offer of salvation would sink deep into their hearts.