Kill-a-watt Bible Study

Why is Kill-a-watt central to Calvin’s vision?
Kill-a-watt is a visible reminder that God calls us to be good stewards of his creation. In Genesis 2:15, God calls his people to tend to and care for the garden and even though we no longer live in the proverbial garden, his command remains central to our identity as Christians. Scripture continually calls us to care for the least of his creation, which encompasses not only oppressed peoples but also endangered plants and animals. Because God saw his whole creation as “good,” it is immoral to ignore those who cannot speak for themselves. To further abuse and degrade the environment, instead of working towards its restoration, runs counter to our calling as Christians. God has not given us the world so we can excessively consume its resources; the earth is on loan to us from God, and we are called to carefully steward it for future generations. To regenerate and renew creation, we must live with the land, not above it, for we are also a part of God’s creation.

Week One
Exploring the Biblical Vision of Justice
Read Micah 6:8 and Matthew 22

- What do you believe justice is and where do you see it in action? Where do you see a greater need for justice at Calvin? In Grand Rapids? In the United States? On a global scale?
- To what extent is justice central to our identity as Christians? Why?
- Matthew 22 calls us to loving our neighbor as ourselves. What is the role of love in seeking justice?

Reflect on the following quote from “Loving the Earth is Loving the Poor” by Gordon Aeschliman, which explores the connection between environmental stewardship and social justice:

“Serving God’s creation and doing justice for the poor are inseparable missions in today’s world. Said another way, to hurt the earth is to hurt the poor; to serve the earth is to serve the poor. It shouldn’t be surprising that creation and justice are inextricably linked… In the wealthy West we live what is called a ‘phantom’ lifestyle. Rather than relying on the earth around us, we almost invisibly (like a phantom) rely on the earth of others. If we run out of vegetables, we import them from another country. If we need more electricity, we import it from another state or river or region… Very often we lose our innocence in the capturing of those resources. We take land that belongs to another group of people; we invade countries; we destroy rain forests. The true cost of living the modern lifestyle is not measured by what we pay at the cash register. Rather, it is measured by what we have done to other people’s rivers, valleys, oceans, and land. And, more precisely, what we have done to the poor.”
**Read Isaiah 58:6-14 and Psalm 103**

- How is the biblical vision of justice described in Isaiah 58? What is our role in working towards this vision?
- Psalm 103:6 proclaims that the Lord works justice for the oppressed.
  - Consider whom around you, and in the larger global community, is oppressed. How do we contribute to their oppression?
  - How do they fit with your vision of working towards Christ’s kingdom?
- How is the Lord just in his dealings with us? What role does mercy play in justice? How does our role as God’s image-bearers compel us to pursue justice?
- How does overconsumption contribute to current societal injustices? Is it possible, as Christians, for us to be ‘just’ consumers?

**Closing Prayer**

Recite the Lord’s Prayer, reflecting on how we can intentionally work towards justice in our routine, quotidian actions.

**Week Two**

**Building a Theology of Creation Care**

**Read Genesis 1, Genesis 2, and Genesis 6:5-8**

Genesis 1:28 describes how humans must “have dominion over” creation; this phrase comes from the Hebrew word “Radah,” which means “to tread” or “to trample.” However, Genesis 2:15 describes how humans must also “till” the garden, which comes from the word “Abad,” meaning “to serve” or “to work for another.” While “Radah” and “Abad” may initially seem opposed, they together develop a complete creation narrative because their juxtaposition points to both our authority over and service to creation. Genesis 2:19-20 provides a description that beautifully reconciles humanity’s two roles: God calls Adam to name all living creatures. Most people recognize that the act of naming set Adam apart from all other living creatures, giving him authority over creation. However, the act of properly naming a creature more importantly requires intimate knowledge of it; to have this deep familiarity with the living creatures he named, Adam had to also be a part of creation. We too are called to compassionately exercise our God-given authority over creation in a way that simultaneously serves and nurtures creation. Our power must compel us to maintain and restore creation, not to abuse creation for our own selfish intentions; to do otherwise ignores God’s command for us to tend the garden (Gen. 2:15).

- What does it mean to say that God is the creator of ALL things?
- How is it striking that humans are entrusted and empowered to oversee creation (Gen. 1:28-29)? How can we reconcile this power with our duty to till and keep creation?
- God saw all creation as “good.” How have we deviated from this view of complete goodness? How can we return to that original state of peace?
Based on Genesis 6, how does human immorality affect God’s view of a harmonious creation? Does this passage imply that humans are a part of creation, apart from creation, or both?

Read Colossians 1:15-23
Colossians 1 claims Christ’s sovereign power holds the world together. In him all things were created and through him all things will be reconciled. The Creator not only actively holds the universe together but also has a plan for its ultimate redemption. And as God’s people, we are an integral part of this plan; we are called to engage in Kingdom-building work through restoring creation.

- How are we living out our calling as God’s image-bearers through engaging in restorative work?
- Does our view of the end times and the coming kingdom (i.e., whether the earth will be destroyed vs. a renewal of all creation) affect how much we care for creation now? How so?

The Kingdom of God
- Discuss the different portraits of God’s Kingdom presented in these passages, as well as Cornelius Plantinga, Jr.’s Reformed portrait:
  
  “We do not go to heaven; heaven comes to us. In a vision lovely enough to break a person’s heart, John shows us what God showed him, that up ahead of us, after centuries of tribal feuds and racial arrogance, after centuries of xenophobic sniping at each other, after we human beings have silted history full with the debris of all our antagonisms—after all that, the city of God will descend to us, and God will dwell with us, and, once more, God will make all things new.”
- Which portrait resonates most with you? Why?
- How does the Calvinist framework of Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Consummation help us understand the Kingdom of God? How does restoring the earth help us work towards God’s Kingdom?

Reflect on the following quotes:
“[I] do not worship matter. I worship the Creator of matter who became matter for my sake, who willed to take His abode in matter, who worked out my salvation through matter... Because of this I salute all remaining matter with reverence, because God has filled it with His grace and power. Through it my salvation has come to me.” – John of Damascus

“Jesus Christ is Creator, Integrator, and Reconciler; yet many who call on His name abuse, neglect, and do not give a care about creation. That irony is there for all to see. Honoring the Creator in word, they destroy God’s work in deed. Praising God from whom all blessings flow, they diminish and destroy God’s creatures here below. The pieces of this puzzle do not fit! One
piece says, ‘We honor the Great Master!’ The other piece says, ‘We despise his great masterpieces!’” – Calvin DeWitt

Recite the Lord’s Prayer together, pondering how we can further the Kingdom of God through our own individual and collective actions.

**Final Reflection Activity**

**Practicing Justice Communally**

This final activity is an opportunity to practicing justice communally, through which you can establish habits that will carry into the future. Based on Wendell Berry’s guidelines about food (listed on the next page), come up with a communal activity that will allow you to actively reflect on what you have learned during this Bible study and Kill-a-watt in general. Shop at a farmers market or local grocer, such as the Fulton Street Farmers Market (open Saturdays 10-1), Nourish Market on Wealthy St., or the Grand Rapids Downtown Market (open Saturdays 9-7). Using the food you purchase, cook a communal meal for your floor. Spend a Saturday volunteering with your floor for a local environmental or social justice organization, such as WMEAC. Plan a time when your floor can help out at the Calvin Community Garden. The options for communally practicing justice are limitless! Find a time when many people on your floor can participate either this week or weekend.

During your time today, pray that the Spirit will lead you to care deeply for a cause and to make a lifestyle change. Then, take action. Let your change of heart prompt you to engage in restorative, Kingdom-building work. Become involved with a Calvin club (such as ESC, INTRO, or SJC), educate your churches about these issues, and even begin volunteering for a local environmental or social justice organization.

Below are some guidelines for establishing just and sustainable consumption habits, adapted from *The Pleasures of Eating* by Wendell Berry, a Christian environmentalist who beautifully integrated his faith and devotion to sustainable farming.

1. Participate in food production to the extent that you can. If you have a yard or even just a porch box or a pot in a sunny window, grow something to eat in it. Make a little compost of your kitchen scraps and use it for fertilizer. Only by growing some food yourself can you become acquainted with the beautiful energy cycle that revolves from soil to seed to flower to fruit to food to offal to decay, and to ground again. You will be fully responsible for any food that you grow for yourself, and you will know all about it. You will appreciate it fully, having known it all its life.

2. Prepare your own food (cook and eat a communal meal together!). This means reviving in your own mind and life the arts of kitchen and household. This should enable you to eat more cheaply, and it will give you a measure of “quality
control”: you will have some reliable knowledge of what has been added to the food you eat.

3. Learn the origins of the food you buy, and buy food that is produced closest to your home (alternatively, find out more about how the dining halls source their food). The idea that every locality should be, as much as possible, the source of its own food makes several kinds of sense. The locally produced food supply is the most secure, the freshest, and the easiest for local consumers to know about and to influence.

4. Whenever possible, deal directly with a local farmer, gardener, or orchardist. All the reasons listed for the previous suggestion apply here. In addition, by such dealing you eliminate the whole pack of merchants, transporters, processors, packagers, and advertisers who thrive at the expense of both producers and consumers.

5. Learn, in self-defense, as much as you can of the economy and technology of industrial food production. What is added to food that is not food, and what do you pay for these additions?


7. Learn as much as you can, by direct observation and experience if possible, of the life histories of the food species.

Finally in all individual and collective actions you perform, remember your central calling to “do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”