



# A Life of *abundance*

## Energy and Ethics

*Energy is one of the drivers of the global economy, and for many of us it has created a system of previously unsurpassed wealth and comfort. Deuteronomy 8:17-18 provides a necessary reminder: “Do not say to yourself, ‘My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth.’ But remember the Lord your God...”*

Conversations about energy often revolve around the concept of scarcity. But the truth is that God has given us energy sources in abundance. We may have a finite supply of some sources of energy like coal and gas, but sun, wind, and water are examples gifts from our Creator with the potential to generate power in perpetuity. Creation is brimming with energy, and a Christian perspective on energy involves acknowledging the abundance of God’s Creation and the call to care for Creation including our “neighbors.”

Energy is a gift from God, whether it takes the form of food that fuels our bodies, gasoline that fuels our cars, or electricity that lights our nights. God intends abundant life for all people, and energy is a critical part of that.

Unfortunately, we have not always lived out our call to be good stewards of energy. We waste energy in myriad ways. We fail to acknowledge that some forms of energy, like gas and oil, are finite. And, we fail to make energy available to everyone in order for them to meet basic needs. We also have not made good choices regarding how and where we get our energy. From extraction to production to transmission, the decisions we make about energy have consequences, sometimes devastating, on God’s Creation and on the health and well-being of our neighbors.

*The Earth is the Lord's and all that is in it proclaims the psalmist (Psalm 24). In order to make wise energy decisions, we need to understand that ultimately the Earth is the Lord's and our decisions have an impact on each other and on Creation.*

**So, how do we, as Christians, fuel our families, communities, and world in ways that are Christ-centered and honor God's gift of Creation?**

## THE ETHICS OF ENERGY EXTRACTION

Whether our energy comes from coal, oil, gas, or wood, the process for “harvesting” that fuel source, called extraction, has an impact on God's Creation. Some extraction processes have a greater negative impact on Creation than others. In addition, the extraction process for some types of energy has disproportionate impacts on low-income communities and communities of color. As Christians called to seek justice for all people and to care for Creation, these issues pose a serious challenge.



## Go Tell it on the Mountain: Mountaintop Removal Mining

*They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.* Isaiah 11:9

Coal is the primary source of electricity for much of the United States because coal is a cheap and abundant source of energy. Some of that coal probably comes from mountaintop removal mines in the Appalachian Mountains. Mountaintop removal coal mining is a practice that removes 500 or more feet from the tops of mountains in order to reach buried seams of coal. Earth from the mountaintop is then dumped as “fill” in the neighboring valleys. Fill from mountaintop removal mines has buried more than 1,000 miles of streams in the Appalachian region and the mines have leveled at least 500 mountains.

According to the National Mining Association (NMA), there are more than 14,000 mountaintop coal miners in the Appalachian Region, with the highest levels of coal production in the area at the intersection of West Virginia, Kentucky, and Virginia. The NMA estimates that for every mining job, an additional 3.5 jobs are created through mining services, sales, and other related business.

Coal mining in Appalachia is a complex issue. On the one hand, coal mines provide well-paying work in a region that has been systemically poor for most of its history. Many families have worked in the mines for generations, despite the difficulties and dangers of this work, making coal mining an integral part of the history and rich cultural traditions of the region.



Origins

Extraction

Use

Emissions

On the other hand, the relatively recent practice of mountaintop removal mining is destroying the mountains and streams that are so much a part of the fabric of God's Creation in these ancient mountains. Once clear mountain streams are contaminated with mine waste or buried under rubble and mountain vistas are reduced to grey-brown gravel pits. Families are either forced to leave the land that has sustained their families for generations or to suffer health consequences that can be life-threatening. Communities that experience mountaintop removal mining are twice as likely to suffer birth defects. In addition, Mountaintop mines employ far fewer people than traditional underground mines, so unemployment rises and people who were already struggling to make ends meet are forced to leave the land they love to find work.

**In this complexity, how do we, as Christians, discern how God wants us to respond?**

### Oil if by Land. Oil if by Sea.

*God's land and water provide rich and valuable sources of energy—particularly oil. However, in order to extract the oil from oceans or land we often put the needs of ourselves over the health and well-being of the whole of Creation and in many cases before the needs of future generations.*

**Oil Drilling on Public Lands.** Thousands of acres of public lands define the western U.S.—wilderness areas, forest service lands, and lands owned and run by the Bureau of Land Management. All of these lands are given to us by God and legally owned by the people of the United States. However, the federal government often leases parts of these lands to be developed for oil and gas below the surface. Even though each of us is part owner of these lands and minerals, we rarely have a say in which lands are leased,

how they are developed, or how the companies will compensate us for their findings.

During the past 20 years, thousands of permits have been granted to oil and gas companies allowing them to drill on public lands. Oil and gas production has been rampant on public lands throughout the Rocky Mountain West especially Colorado, Wyoming, Utah, and Montana. In Wyoming, companies have been drilling for natural gas in the Wyoming Range, a mountain range in the western part of the state. The infrastructure required for this process is so intense that last year the area of Pinedale in the Wyoming Range recorded higher ozone pollution levels than Los Angeles. In addition to degraded air quality, energy exploration is leaving permanent scars on the landscape and destroying wildlife habitat.

Another serious threat that comes with energy development on land is water use and contamination. Gas explo-





*“And God said, ‘Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky.’ So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good.”* Genesis 1:20-21

ration requires large amounts of water, often pulled from nearby aquifers and rivers. This reduces water available for the surrounding community and wildlife. In addition, drilling for gas has been known to contaminate fresh water resources, threatening the health and well-being of those in the community.

**As Christians, how do we advocate for energy sources that provide for all without degrading the very land that God so cherishes?**

**Ocean Oil Disasters.** On April 20, 2010, the Deepwater Horizon oil rig exploded, killing 11 workers and injuring dozens more. Oil gushed for 95 continuous days and spilled nearly 200 million barrels of oil into the Gulf of Mexico. The immense amount of oil that spilled—19 times more than the 1989 Exxon Valdez spill—was treated with an equally unprecedented amount of chemical dispersants (nearly 2 million gallons). The oil dispersant used, Corexit, contains toxic chemicals known to cause liver, kidney, and genetic damage, among other health problems.

The oil spill contaminated wetlands along Louisiana and Mississippi and fisheries across the Gulf region had to be shut down. Endangered sea turtles, migratory birds, and marine animals such as dolphins suffered as their habitats were coated in oil. Fragile coastal wetlands, already disappearing at an alarming rate, were compromised with the invasion of oil from the spill. These wetlands not only provide habitat for birds, fish, and other wildlife, but they also provide critical flood protection for coastal cities during hurricanes and other storms along the Gulf.

After the Exxon Valdez oil spill in Alaska’s Prince William Sound, a similarly productive fishing area, many aspects of

the local economy were harmed. Businesses that are directly and indirectly supported by fishermen, such as fish markets, shipping services, marine equipment manufacture and supply, tourism, and others suffered. The economies of Gulf Coast communities, many of which were only just beginning to recover from the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, will likely feel these impacts for years to come.

Each of us bears some responsibility for the disaster that occurred two years ago on the Gulf Coast. Each of us, when we drive a car, take a plane, or throw away a plastic bottle, make up a small part of our nation’s massive consumption of, and dependence on, oil.

**As we reflect on this and other disasters, as Christians we can ask, “Am I doing all I can to ensure that this never happens again?”**

### **Community Challenge: “Fracking” and Our Energy Future**

*Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.* Philippians 2:4

Because of concerns about air pollution and climate change, some experts view natural gas as a cleaner source of electricity than other fossil fuels like coal and oil. Some coal-fired power plants are already switching over to natural gas, and this trend is expected to continue. However, easily available sources of natural gas are dwindling, and many of the largest remaining untapped natural gas reserves are in hard-to-reach underground rock formations. To reach these reserves, miners must use a technique called hydraulic fracturing, commonly known as “fracking.” Fracking involves

injecting water mixed with sand and chemical fluids into deep wells in order to break open the rock and force natural gas out.

Many claim, however, that fracking may be contaminating local drinking water. Recent studies have linked drilling and fracking for natural gas to groundwater pollution from methane and other chemicals. In addition, the fracking process uses large amounts of water (between one and nine million gallons per well) and the storage, disposal, and recycling of the waste water, which can contain hazardous chemicals, may also threaten surface water supplies. Some states, including Texas, Wyoming, and Arkansas, are now requiring that companies disclose the chemicals they are injecting into fracked wells. Other states, including Pennsylvania, do not have disclosure requirements, posing a risk to those who live nearby and to those who respond to emergencies when wells explode or accidental releases occur.

Fracking poses some challenging questions for our energy future. On the one hand, natural gas is far cleaner than coal or oil, and shale formations potentially contain a substantial supply of gas that could give us the time we need to develop new, cleaner sources of energy such as wind and solar. Drilling and fracking can bring revenue to rural landowners and jobs to struggling rural communities.

On the other hand, the natural gas boom also comes with risks. In addition to the potential to pollute ground and surface water supplies, communities dealing with fracking also may experience the “boom and bust” impact that drilling a non-renewable energy source will have on the long-term health of their local economy. Some recent studies have also linked fracking and the underground injection of fracking wastewater to an increased risk of earthquakes, prompting some communities to ban these activities near seismic faultlines.

If we follow the advice of Paul in his letter to the Philipians and consider the interests of others before we consider our own, it raises questions about how we approach fracking. **How do we as Christians show that we value the interests of others for clean air, clean water, and just energy sources?**

## THE ETHICS OF ENERGY PRODUCTION

The ways in which we generate electricity have serious implications for the health of our neighbors and all Creation. Many forms of energy, when used to generate electricity or power machinery, also pollute our air, land, and water. Renewable sources of energy are cleaner and more

enduring but are still relatively expensive. And our methods of transmitting energy from place to place waste this precious resource.

## Energy, Health, and Justice

Clean air is essential for human life. An average person breathes in more than 3,000 gallons of air each day. At the same time we inhale life-sustaining oxygen, we also breathe in the byproducts of our energy choices. Our heavy reliance on fossil fuels adds millions of pounds of harmful pollutants to the air every day. Major contributors to poor air quality include power plants and industrial factories, as well as mobile sources such as cars, trucks, planes, and trains. Poor air quality impacts human health, including increases in asthma. With more than half of the country’s population living in areas with polluted air, this problem is of growing concern. A 2002 study by the National Institutes of Health estimated that 30 percent of childhood asthma is caused by environmental exposure.

In addition to air quality issues and the health problems associated with them, our energy choices also impact our water. According to the Energy Information Administration, in 2010 45 percent of U.S. electricity was generated



**Smooth Transitions: Visions for an Energy Future** As we think about a more sustainable energy infrastructure—one that incorporates less pollution, better community health, and an improved caretaking of God’s Creation—we also need to envision an energy future that provides livelihoods for those who are currently working in fossil-based industries. As we envision more Creation-friendly energy practices, worker justice for coal miners, oil rig operators, and other such workers should be part of the vision. A smooth transition and true worker justice will provide training and assistance for workers so that they can also embrace a more sustainable energy future.

from burning coal—the largest single source for power generation. Unfortunately, burning coal releases a powerful neurotoxin as a byproduct: mercury. Coal-fired power plants are the single largest source of mercury in our air and water. Mercury also ends up in our food chain—most states have issued mercury advisories for fish caught in their lakes, rivers, and streams—and in our bodies, posing a serious developmental risk to children and pregnant women.

Energy production choices also raise questions of justice. The people who suffer the most from the pollution generated by our current modes of energy production are those who live in low-income communities and communities of color. Research by the Environmental Protection Agency finds that neighborhoods with the most polluted air are those with the highest percentages of African American, Latino, and Asian American residents. While low-income communities may also live in neighborhoods with poor air quality, communities of color, regardless of income, live in communities with poorer air quality than white communities of the same income. This is particularly true in urban areas where in every major city African Americans are more likely than white to be exposed to higher concentrations of air pollution. According to the Centers for Disease Control, in 2007, African Americans were reported to be three times as likely to die from asthma-related disease than the white population.

**As Christians, how do we reconcile ourselves to the role our energy needs play in harming God’s people and creating inequality?**

## TRANSMISSION AND WASTE

The century-old North American electric power grid, according to the Department of Energy, consists of more

than one million megawatts of generating capacity and is connected to more than 300,000 miles of transmission lines serving more than 283 million people. But because energy is difficult to store, most of it must be consumed the moment it is generated. Therefore, peak demand, or the highest demand possible for a particular area during a specified time period, is what drives production capacity. Peak demand determines the number and size of power plants needed to supply energy in a particular state or region.

Of all the energy consumed to produce electricity, only a portion reaches consumers; the rest is lost during generation, transmission, and distribution. According to the U.S. Department of Energy, from 1988 to 1998, U.S. electricity demand rose by nearly 30 percent yet the transmission capacity of our power grid grew by only 15 percent, leading to a growing energy supply problem as peak demand has increased.

The current electricity grid also lacks the infrastructure to carry wind and solar power from the more remote areas where energy is produced to big cities where energy will be consumed. Renewable energy sources like solar and wind power are intermittent and difficult to store; thus the energy they produce is not always available when demand peaks. Reducing peak demand through better grid management would help to alleviate this problem and allow more of our electricity to come from renewable sources.

To more effectively deal with growing and changing electricity demands our power grid needs to be updated so that it can respond quickly and meet the needs of consumers. A smarter electric grid would make it possible to reduce the high cost of meeting peak demand by allowing a two-way flow of electricity and information and the monitoring of power plant output, consumer preferences, and even indi-

vidual appliances plugged into the grid. Proposed smart power grids will use computers and sensors to coordinate the distribution of power, help optimize the use of electricity from renewable sources, including solar and wind power, enabling consumers and utilities to save money and reduce power plant pollution.

**How do we, as people of faith, work to embrace appropriate emerging technologies that will allow us to be better stewards of God's Creation and decrease our energy consumption?**

## TRANSPORTATION: DRIVING OUR ENERGY USE

The transportation we use in our daily lives accounts for 71 percent of the total amount of petroleum used each year, more than 13.5 million barrels per day. Compared to other parts of the economy, transportation accounts for almost 28 percent of the energy we use—that's almost one third of our total energy use. To adequately address our energy consumption, and ensure that we are good stewards of God's gifts of energy, we must address our reliance on transportation and therefore on oil. While it is possible to walk more and use public transportation, these activities won't meet our every need. Though hybrids are available to us as consumers, it is not realistic for every family to go out and buy a new car or outfit their old vehicle with solar panels.

As Christians, then, we must be vigilant about using less: walking more, carpooling with friends, and combining our errands into one trip. We must encourage our communities, churches, and elected officials to build or enhance current transportation systems. In urban environments, this means more buses, light rails, and accessible communities that provide neighborhoods with the necessary items. In rural communities, this means making hybrid vehicles more accessible to families and thinking creatively about how we deliver food and other necessities.

We will always need some form of transportation in our lives to move from place to place, visit friends and family, and get to church on Sunday. We must begin to develop a vision for the future that reduces our dependence on oil while meeting the needs of communities around the country.

## A FUTURE FOR RENEWABLE ENERGY

Today we have the technology to produce energy in renewable or sustainable ways, using God's gifts of sun, wind, and water. Shifting away from an energy economy based on

scarce fossil fuels to more renewable and site-specific energy technologies allows us to embrace an economy of abundance. Renewable energy sources such as solar, wind, geothermal, and hydroelectric may also have negative impacts on God's Creation; however, renewables generally produce less pollution than traditional carbon-based energy sources and, unlike more traditional sources of energy, they will be available as long as Earth endures.

In addition, renewable energy offers the potential for



local energy development. In the U.S. this has meant new economic opportunities for struggling rural communities, which are often the best locations for solar and wind farms. In less developed countries renewable energy has the potential to allow off-the-grid and mini-grid systems in rural communities to support necessities such as irrigation and food preservation, as well as aiding in the development of a robust economy. And not all renewable energy development requires highly technical solutions: in rural Malawi, for example, a teenager built an electricity generating windmill out of an old bike and pieces of plastic piping.

Cost is often cited as a barrier to large-scale development of renewable energy sources. But by looking only at the market cost of renewables, as compared to that of fossil fuel-based energy, you may miss some other values

innate to renewables that deserve equal consideration. First, the higher financial cost of renewable energy sources is deceptive. In the U.S., the lower price of fossil-based fuels reflects decades of support from federal and state governments through tax breaks and other government incentives for exploration, research, and other production costs. Although renewables also receive support through government-funded research and the tax code, fossil fuels still receive the lion's share of federal support even though the industry is mature and established as compared to the far younger and less-developed renewable energy industry.

Second, the lower financial cost of fossil fuels ignores their steep social and economic costs. Burning fossil fuels leads to air pollution that causes and exacerbates health problems such as asthma, emphysema, lung cancer, and heart disease. The process of extracting and refining fossil fuels also raises health and environmental concerns—from the communities in Appalachia dealing with water contamination from mountaintop coal mines to the communities in Pennsylvania worried about water contamination from hydraulic fracturing for natural gas to the fishing communities along the Gulf Coast living with the impacts of decades of oil drilling and the 2010 oil disaster. The health and environmental problems associated with water and air quality issues come with substantial costs to our economy in the form of increased health care needs, missed days of work, and clean up costs. None of these factors is reflected in the low price of fossil fuel-based energy.

One particular source of renewable energy—solar—is

expanding rapidly in the U.S. According to an industry association, the solar industry employs more than 100,000 people in all 50 states and grew nearly 70 percent in 2010. It currently provides enough power to run more than 630,000 homes. But despite the enormous potential of solar power, there are still significant barriers to expansion, including the current power grid.

**How do we as people of faith ensure that the decisions we make regarding our energy sources include our Christian values—justice, stewardship, and love for our neighbor?**

## ENERGY STEWARDSHIP

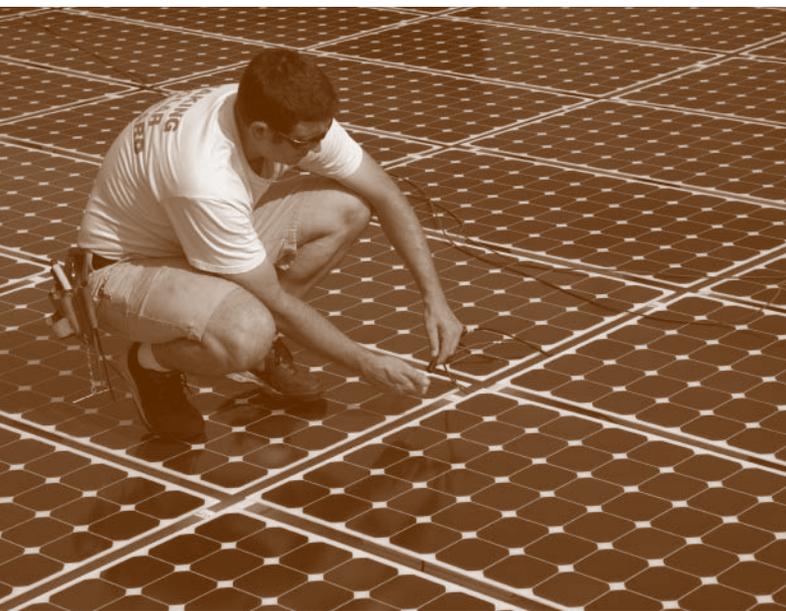
In the U.S., we have easy access to cheap and plentiful energy. As Christians we are taught to be good stewards of the gifts God has blessed us with. One way we can steward God's gift of energy is by using energy more efficiently and more effectively. This will not only reduce our energy bills, but will also help protect God's Creation from the pressures of energy extraction and production. Energy efficiency is the cheapest way to increase the amount of energy available to us as consumers. While efficiency programs do not actually create new energy, they do reduce the amount of energy that each person, household, and congregation uses.

Energy efficiency can be done in multiple ways including using more effective energy appliances, weatherizing homes and churches, and using energy efficient lighting. If efficiency tools were put in place in our homes, our congregations, the work place, and at the industrial level, we could reduce our energy use to the point that we could prevent the building of new power plants, thus reducing our dependence on fossil fuels such as coal and natural gas. From using efficient appliances and automobiles to insulating our homes and churches to installing energy efficient lighting, opportunities abound for us to reduce our energy consumption.

## ENERGY POVERTY

*“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.”* John 1:5

The coming of Christ is described in the first chapter of the gospel of John using the imagery of light breaking through the darkness of sin that plagues our world. Finding light to alleviate actual darkness is a more prosaic task, but can also pose challenges for those without easy access to energy. We



**The Peterson Institute for International Economics calculates that nearly one-third of the recent increase in poverty in the U.S. can be attributed to the rapid rebound in oil prices. The poorest fifth of Americans spend 10.3 percent of their income on oil compared to 2.4 percent for the top fifth.**

take for granted in our highly-developed country that we can easily switch on a light, or turn a knob on our stove to cook a hot meal. Many people live without easy access to energy to light their way and feed their families.

The International Energy Agency warns that people living in extreme poverty, particularly in Africa and the Indian sub-continent, suffer from an “alarming” lack of access to energy. Globally, about 1.4 billion people (about 20 percent of world population) do not have access to electricity. Without access to reliable energy sources, economic development is difficult, and everyday life can be a challenge.

About 2.7 billion people (about 40 percent of global population) rely on traditional biomass—mostly wood and animal dung—for household cooking. Wood and dung may be relatively easy to find and may provide for a family’s basic needs for cooking and heating in the home, but they come with some significant problems. Inhaling the smoke from indoor cookfires can lead to respiratory problems and related heart and lung diseases; the World Health Organization estimates that illnesses related to cook stove smoke could be killing up to 1.5 million people per year by 2030.

Reliance on wood for household energy needs means that trees must be cut down, and wood gathered by someone in a household. Deforestation also contributes to loss of biodiversity and erosion of soil. Finally, wood used in cooking is a source of “black carbon” which is second only to carbon dioxide as a contributor to human-caused climate change.

The solutions to this reliance on wood and other biomass are actually relatively low in cost, easy to implement, and would not increase global reliance on fossil fuels. Stoves that use fuel more efficiently, or run on low emission fuels or renewable sources of energy, offer relatively low-cost solutions to this problem.

For example, a Lutheran World Federation project is working in Eastern Uganda to replace traditional wood-burning cooking stoves with locally-sourced energy saving stoves that still burn wood, but use significantly less of it. This project is combined with local reforestation projects that plant tens of thousands of new trees each year, includ-



ing trees that produce both fuel and timber. By reducing their consumption of trees, and replacing the trees they consume, people in Eastern Uganda are working to achieve environmental sustainability on the local and global levels.

**How can we, as Christians, serve communities in need so that they can experience the bounty of God’s good Creation?**

Yet even in the U.S., some people struggle to pay their utility bills or to buy gas for their cars. As people of faith, we must recognize that the biblical call to justice means caring for Creation and for our neighbors around the world by justly and sustainably using energy. **How do we as Christians, who strive for justice, sustainability and sufficiency, eliminate our own wastefulness while also advocating for others who lack access to energy?**

*References and citations are available online at [www.ncccejustice.org/earthday/](http://www.ncccejustice.org/earthday/)*

# SERMON STARTERS



*“Do not say to yourself, ‘My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth.’ But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power . . .”* Deuteronomy 8:17-18

## A TIME FOR REST: THE SABBATH AND ENERGY

The Sabbath is a day of rest not only for people, but for the land as well. The Bible dictates that the land is to have a Sabbath every seven years. In ancient Israel, this was a very real agricultural practice. It was and remains necessary in order to let the soil replenish its nutrients after growing crops and providing food for six years.

Today, rather than allowing time for the soil to rest and rejuvenate as God intended we are doing everything we can to get as much production out of the land as quickly as possible. It is not only our production of food that we have sped up; our demand for cheap and reliable electricity has also led to developing inexpensive but damaging ways to produce energy. We are trying to extract as many sources of energy as we can with little regard for safety and public health. But that is not what God intended. God created for six days and rested on the seventh.

Keeping the Sabbath is difficult because it requires trust in God’s providence. (Lev 25:20-21 “Should you ask, ‘what shall we eat in the seventh year if we may not sow or gather in our crop?’ I will order my blessing for you in the sixth year, so that it will yield a crop for three years.”) In fact, the Israelites did not always keep the Sabbath year either. Trusting that there will be enough food is not easy. This is not just true of food but can also be true of energy production. The idea of a Sabbath year of rest, or even a slow-down, from energy production can also be frightening. But the Bible is equally clear on what happens if the land is not granted a Sabbath. The land will take it by force (Lev 26:34-35, 43-44, 2 Chronicles 36:20-21). Taking a year off of production would be impractical, and wouldn’t resolve the underlying issues of our energy economy, so it would be a mistake to take the Sabbath year as a prescription for our current situation. However, learning to work with God’s Creation by allowing both the land, and ourselves, a chance for rest and renewal is an important and still relevant implication of the Sabbath.

Our current energy policy is not sustainable; we are using some energy sources more quickly than they can be replenished. Making a radical change in our energy policy requires clear-thinking and good solid planning. But it also requires trust. It requires us to trust that God really did provide us with enough to slow down and not constantly take as much as the land and Creation will give. It requires trusting that other ways of life are possible. The Sabbath was and continues to be both an ecological and a religious practice.

## WHOSE POWER IS IT, ANYWAY?

In the reading from the book of Acts, Peter addresses a crowd at the temple in Jerusalem. These people have just seen him heal a crippled beggar, who a man the scripture says was “lame from birth,” and, not surprisingly, they are staring at Peter. Peter calls their attention to the true source of healing, and of all power. He asks them “Why do you

wonder at this, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk?” (Acts 3:12) This question is as relevant to us as it was to that crowd in Jerusalem almost two thousand years ago. Surrounded by an amazing array of technology and inventions, it is tempting to credit the humans producing those products with the incredible comfort, power, and healing that they can provide. We forget that all of the power we have, all of the energy we use, all of the wealth we can create, and all of the healing we can offer are originally and ultimately gifts from God. As we consider questions of energy, we should keep Peter’s question in our hearts, and consider the powerful reminder from the eighth chapter of Deuteronomy: “Do not say to yourself, ‘My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth.’ But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power . . .” Because God is the source of all our energy and power, we are called to use that energy and power in a way that is pleasing to God, a way that is truly just for all.





*The National Council of Churches Eco-Justice Program* develops Earth Day Sunday materials each year to help congregations celebrate and care for God's Creation. For more information about the Program, to make a donation, or for additional Earth Day resources, visit [www.nccecojustice.org](http://www.nccecojustice.org) or email [info@nccecojustice.org](mailto:info@nccecojustice.org). For more information on how your congregation can practice stewardship of God's Earth or for fact sheets on the topics covered in this energy ethics resource visit [www.nccecojustice.org](http://www.nccecojustice.org) or contact [info@nccecojustice.org](mailto:info@nccecojustice.org)

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# A Life of *abundance*

## Energy and Ethics

Energy conversations often revolve around talks of scarcity. While we do need to be good stewards of energy, just as with the rest of God's Creation, this is not the only way to look at energy. Creation is brimming with life. A Christian perspective on energy involves acknowledging the abundance of God's Creation and being a good energy steward that respects our human "neighbor" and the rest of God's Creation. Like all things, energy is a gift from God. Whether in the form of the food that fuels our bodies, the gas that fuels our cars, or the electricity that lights our day-to-day lives, energy is part of the make-up of Creation. God intends abundant life for all people, and energy is a critical part of that. God has supplied enough energy for not only for our lives, but for all of life. Unfortunately, humans have not always been good stewards of energy. We waste food, we use some forms of stored energy like gas and oil more quickly than they can be replaced, and we fail to make energy available to everyone in order for them to meet basic needs. We also have not made good choices regarding how we get our energy. From extraction to production to transmission, the choices we make on how we obtain our energy have consequences, sometimes devastating, on God's Creation.

So, how do we, as Christians fuel a world in ways that are Christ-centered and honor God?

### CALL TO WORSHIP

*Adapted from Psalm 49, Psalm 95*

**Leader:** Hear this, all you peoples; give ear, all inhabitants of the world,

**All:** Both low and high, rich and poor together.

**Leader:** Let us come into God's presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to God with songs of praise!

**All:** For the Lord is a great God, and reigns above all gods.

**Leader:** In God's hand are the depths of the earth, the heights of the mountains are God's also.

**All:** The sea is belongs to God, for God made it, and the dry land, which God's hands have formed.

### CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

**All:** Creator God, we confess that we have sinned against you and against our neighbor, in thought, word, and deed, both by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have used more than our fair share of the gifts

of energy you have given us. We have not worked to ensure fair access to energy for all peoples, especially the most vulnerable among us. We have not considered the effects of our energy use on our neighbors in our community and around the world. Have mercy on us, forgive us, and help us to strive for a just energy future, in which all people can receive the resources they need, and in which our energy use is sustainable and treads lightly on your Creation.

**Leader:** God who redeems all Creation has given his Son to us and, by his self-giving sacrifice and resurrection, forgives us all our sins. Let us trust in God's grace to help us turn from our selfish ways to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God.

## PRAYERS

Gathered together as people of God's Creation, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need. Creator God, help us to be wise caretakers of the gifts you have given us. Help us to use energy in a way that benefits all people and treads lightly on your creation. Creator, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

**Compassionate God,** we pray for those in the world who are most vulnerable to the effects of our unwise use of energy, that they may have safe homes and daily bread, and that you would grace them with your presence in times of crisis, displacement, and famine. Creator, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

**God of peace,** we pray that the nations will work peacefully to find solutions to our common energy needs, that we may avoid bitter conflict over limited energy sources. We pray that you would lift up leaders for peaceful cooperation and give strength and your blessing to the peacemakers. Creator, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

**Loving God,** we pray for those who depend most on your gifts of energy for vital aspects of their daily lives, for the sick,

the aging, the poor, and the children. Help us to achieve a sustainable and just energy future that will guarantee these vulnerable groups the services they need, especially as our changing climate makes our weather more erratic and more dangerous. Creator, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

**Holy God,** we stand in awe of the wonders of your Creation. Help us to protect these wonders and find the energy we need from sources that do not tear down your mountains and poison your rivers. Creator, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

## SENDING FORTH

**Leader:** Go forth into the world to serve God with gladness; be of good courage; hold fast to that which is good; render to no one evil for evil; strengthen the fainthearted; support the weak; help the afflicted; honor all people; love and serve God, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit. Go in peace. Care for Creation and for your neighbor.

**All:** Thanks be to God.

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The National Council of Churches Eco-Justice Program develops Earth Day Sunday materials each year to help congregations celebrate and care for God's Creation. For more information about the Program, to make a donation, or for additional Earth Day resources, visit **[www.nccecojustice.org](http://www.nccecojustice.org)** or email **[info@ncecojustice.org](mailto:info@ncecojustice.org)**. For more information on how your congregation can practice stewardship of God's Earth visit **[www.nccecojustice.org](http://www.nccecojustice.org)** or contact **[info@ncecojustice.org](mailto:info@ncecojustice.org)**

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