

The Shape of Your Shopping

Allowing your consumption to reflect love and justice



Contents

Introduction

Australians are masters in the art of consumption. We consume things - food, wine, clothes, and cars. We consume services - healthcare, education and communications. We consume experiences - travel, fun-park rides, and swimming on a hot summer's day. And we consume in volume. In the 2008 Christmas period alone Australians spent \$37 billion shopping, including \$15 billion on food, \$3 billion at department stores, \$2.5 billion on apparel, \$6.3 billion on household items and \$4.8 billion on hospitality.

In this series of studies you will have an opportunity to put your consumption under the spotlight, for at the same time our consumption brings many benefits, it can also exact a heavy toll. In the book *Affluenza*, Clive Hamilton describes the paradox that although we consume at higher levels than any previous generation, Australians don't report higher levels of life satisfaction. No sooner do we get something new than we start thinking about what we can get next, leaving us feeling like we never have enough.

Beyond this impact on our emotional well-being, our consumption has a large impact on the well-being of others and the planet. Many of the things we buy are sourced from the developing world. While this means jobs for the world's poor and taxes that allow their governments to provide healthcare, education, and other public goods, the income many of those workers receive is so meagre it leaves them trapped in poverty, unable to afford even the most basic goods and services, and the workplaces in which they toil are often dangerous.

Likewise our consumption exacts a heavy toll on the health of the planet. The world population is ten times larger today than it was 250 years ago and the incredible advance in technology over the same period allows us to consume the earth's resources in ways previously unimaginable. This has brought us to the point where our consumption, on existing technologies, is simply unsustainable. Perhaps the most widely discussed example of this is 'climate change'. Over the centuries the climate has always changed, but scientists tell us that this process of change is being driven in new and unprecedented ways by human activity. Unchecked, the consequences for the world, and especially for those living in the world's poorest countries, will be devastating.

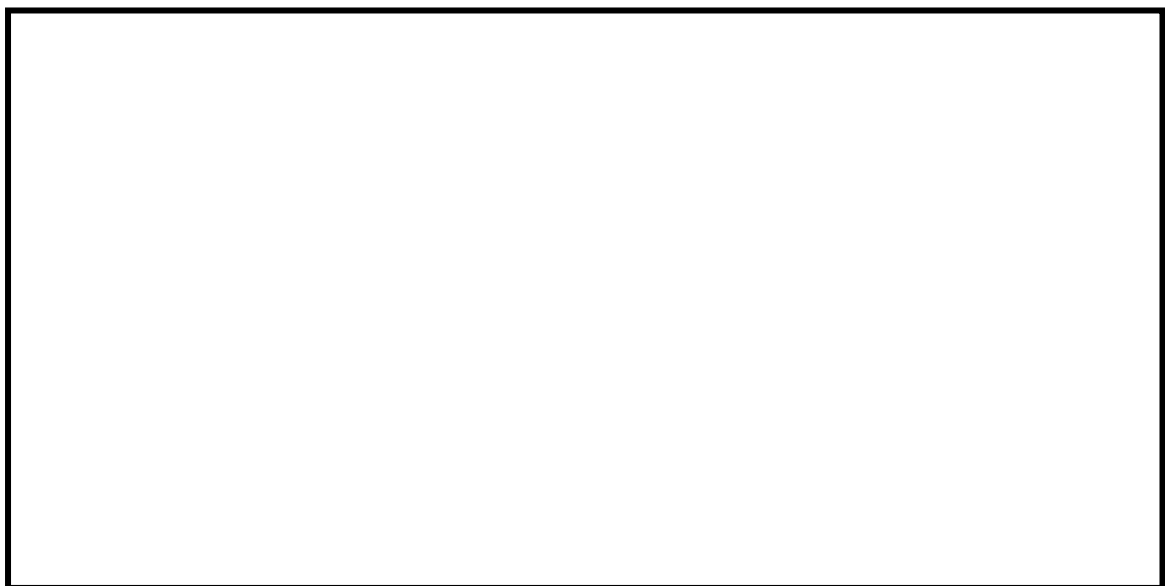
These studies invite you to place your consumption under the spotlight of Scripture. You will have an opportunity to consider how biblical themes of love, justice and stewardship impact on contemporary patterns of consumption.

Study 1. Consuming Without Consumerism

When Genesis 1 describes the creation of the world it imagines a place of abundance and beauty. The land produces seed-bearing plants and trees; the oceans teem with living creatures; birds fly across the expanse of the sky; livestock and wild animals of myriad kinds walk the land; humankind is crafted in God's image and commissioned to "be fruitful and multiply". And having created this breathtaking world, God declares that the vegetation will provide food sufficient for all.

Godly consumption of the earth's resources is then part of God's purpose for the creation. Delighting in the earth's beauty and being satisfied by its rich bounty are God's gifts to us. Sadly however, humankind repeatedly steps beyond this. We can all too easily turn consuming within the limits God has set into an ungodly consumerism that places us on a merry-go-round of never ending consumption, calls us to locate our identity in what we possess rather than who we are, and drives us to find meaning in accumulating possessions and extending experiences rather than loving God and our fellow human. In this study we will explore how we might leave consumerism behind in favour of a contented, thankful and joyful embrace of the earth's beauty and bounty.

1. List three things you really enjoy doing when you have some spare time. Share them with the group. What is it about them that you find so enjoyable?
2. The biblical creation stories do not picture humankind eking out a pained, miserable existence on a barren and inhospitable planet. Rather, they envisage an abundant and beautiful world that provides amply for our physical sustenance, delights our senses, and serves as a wonder-filled environment for deep and satisfying relationships. Read through the second creation story (Genesis 2.4-25). In the space below draw a picture of the scene described, highlighting the elements that show the beauty and bounty of creation. Once you have drawn this add yourself and the activities you mentioned in question 1 into your picture. In what ways do they allow you to enjoy the beauty and bounty of the earth in ways consistent with the creation stories?



- 3.** In a 'fallen world' the creation does not cease to be good (1 Timothy 4.4), but our attitude to it can become dysfunctional. We can end up "worshipping and serving created things rather than the Creator" (Romans 1.25). A good example of this is the person described in Jesus' story of the 'rich fool'. Read Luke 12.13-21 and then discuss the questions below.
- a. Australians are often described as "aspirational", that is, we aspire to have more – to have bigger and better homes, new holiday experiences, more 'luxuries', plenty of money for retirement and so on. In what ways does the man described in the story epitomise the 'Australian dream'?
 - b. In verse 15 Jesus identifies the rich man's problem as 'greed'. Using the story as your reference, how would you define greed? Given your description do you think ours could be characterized as a 'greedy' society? Why/why not?
 - c. The rich man spent his life "storing things up for himself" instead of living a life "rich toward God" (verse 21). What do you think it means to live a life "rich toward God"? Why does Jesus consider this incompatible with storing up things on earth (see also Matthew 5.19-21)? What would it mean for Australian Christians to live a life "rich toward God" rather than a life "storing up things for themselves"?
- 4.** The problem for Australian Christians is not consumption. In its right place, consuming the earth's resources is something God intends for us. God wants us to be nourished by the earth's produce and delighted by its beauty. The problem is that for most Australians consuming has become 'consumerism'. Consumerism suggests that the meaning of life is to gain happiness by accumulating possessions and experience, that our worth as people is intimately tied to the value of what we can buy. It holds out the false promise that, no matter how much we have, if we can just have a little bit more we will be happier and more worthwhile people. It seduces us to devote our time, energy and money to having more. Is this your experience? What are some ways we can consume in a godly fashion without falling into the trap of consumerism?

5. In the book *Living from the Centre. Spirituality in an Age of Consumerism*, Jay McDaniel describes the 'Ten Temptations of Consumerism'. Read through them. Identify the three that are most relevant to you. How do these three temptations work themselves out in your life (be very specific)? Share your answers with the group and then spend time brainstorming godly alternatives to the temptations identified. Discuss practical ways you might implement these godly alternatives in the coming week.
- i. That appearance, affluence, and achievement are – and ought to be – the central organising principles of our lives.
 - ii. That being compulsively busy, even to the point of exhaustion, is a sign of healthy and productive living.
 - iii. That having a successful career is more important than being a good parent, being a good neighbor, being a kind and loving person, or taking walks in the woods.
 - iv. That good work is reducible to making money, and that unpaid work - particularly in the home – is not really working.
 - v. That the appropriate goal of life – higher than service to the poor or service of God – is to enjoy prosperity in the suburbs with the perfectly manicured lawn
 - vi. That depression can be cured by shopping
 - vii. That the most important thing in life is “to have my needs met.”
 - viii. That we humans are not citizens of our communities, much less vessels of God’s love, but rather “consumers” who participate in a “global marketplace,” and that other creatures are “commodities” for our use
 - ix. That the universe is not a communion of subjects, but rather a collection of objects
 - x. That we are all on our own, because there is no grace – no ultimate mercy – within the depths of things.
6. Identify one action you will take as a result of this study and how you will start implementing it this week.

Study 2. Live Simply

Begin this study by having group members report back the action they decided to take as a result of the last study, the outcomes of that action, and any lessons learned.

Australians enjoy a very high standard of living. Most of us have more than enough food to eat, clean water to drink, adequate clothes to wear, decent houses to live in, energy to power, heat and cool our homes, doctors and hospitals to care for us when we're sick, parks to play in and beaches to swim. Beyond this we have the income to enjoy a range of discretionary goods and services, such as plasma TVs, holiday trips, Playstations, ipods, surround sound stereo systems, dining out, mobile phones, books, movies, cars (often with multiple cars in the one household), internet services and more.

Yet at the same time Australians consume like this over 1 billion of our fellow humans are unable to consume at even the most basic level. They live in extreme poverty, which means they don't have enough food to eat, don't have clean water to drink, don't have clean toileting facilities, and cannot afford even rudimentarily decent housing. Crushing poverty means that every hour 1000 children under the age of five die, almost all of them in developing countries. Two-thirds of child deaths could be prevented with simple, low cost interventionsⁱⁱ. These children die because their families are too poor to afford basic health care.

For thoughtful Christians this creates a tension. On the one hand we give thanks to God for the rich array of goods and services we enjoy. A delicious meal, the thrill of a fast ride, or the challenge of the latest computer game can be received as gracious gifts of God. On the other hand it seems abhorrent that we, who have more than enough to satisfy our needs, spend more on 'discretionary' items than on saving the lives of our fellow human beings. In 2007 Australians donated an average of \$36 each to overseas aid and development charities, yet we spent two and a half times more on computer games (average of \$91 each), more than eleven times more on fast food (\$431 each), and sixty one times more on recreation (\$2200 each)ⁱⁱⁱ.

In this study you will have the opportunity to explore this tension. We ask whether God calls us to reduce our consumption in favour of providing more to the world's poorest.

1. The biblical creation stories do not picture humankind eking out a pained, miserable existence on a barren and inhospitable planet. Rather, they envisage an abundant and beautiful world that provides amply for our physical sustenance, delights our senses, and serves as a wonder-filled environment for deep and satisfying relationships. Yet hundreds of millions of people don't experience this. Instead they live in abject and grinding poverty. Read through the stories below. In what ways do you see the people described as robbed of their opportunity to enjoy the goodness of God's earth? What do they need in order to enjoy life as God intended?

Poor in Lahore

LAHORE, Pakistan 9 February 2009 - "I suffer from hepatitis C. Please help me live by giving your charity to help me buy medicine. I have five children who depend on me."

Thus reads a placard next to Shahida Bibi, who has taken to begging on the streets of Lahore in her spare time in a bid to afford the medicines which could save her life.

As a cleaner she earns about US\$40 a month. On this income and about \$53 handed over each year by her brother, she must support her children - the eldest of whom is 15. Her husband, a drug addict, abandoned the family two years ago.

"I don't know how I contracted hepatitis C. It could have been when my youngest daughter was born about 18 months ago. A 'dai' [traditional, untrained midwife] delivered her. But now doctors say I need injections that cost at least Rs 50,000 [\$666] for a six-month treatment plan if I am to live," she told IRIN. "I beg, even though I hate doing it, because somehow, for my children, I must live," she said.

Shahida is one of millions unable to afford medical care...

"Fewer and fewer people consult doctors. Fees have not gone up, but the cost of medicines is high, and even when they see a doctor they often cannot follow up on care, as medicines are beyond their budget," said Waheed Sharif, a general practitioner in Lahore. As an example, he cited the case of a patient with high blood pressure who took the pills she is supposed to take each day only once a week "because that's all she can afford".

Consumer prices have risen by over 20 percent in the last year, according to the Federal Bureau of Statistics, placing enormous stresses on most households.

"My wife suffers diabetes. Her feet are now swollen and she often feels tired. Apart from medicines, the doctors have suggested a special diet - but how can we afford to give her fruit and meat when I earn only Rs 8,000 [about \$106] a month and must educate my children as well," said Qaiser Hussain, 35, a father of two.

Hussain suffers from a shortage of breath, but says: "If I go to a doctor they will prescribe expensive tests and medicines and I cannot afford them. Therefore I simply do not go".

Amir Omair, an associate professor in the community health sciences department at Lahore's Fatima Memorial Hospital College of Medicine and Dentistry, told Herald, the local monthly magazine, that people were now consulting doctors only when disease became acute, because of the financial burdens they faced.

"Basically health has become a luxury. The rich can get the best treatment. But people like me cannot afford to be sick," said Qaiser Hussain. He fears that, like his father, who died of cardiac arrest in his 50s, he has a heart disease. "I suspect this, but what can I do? I must just wait and see," he said.

Hungry in Nairobi

NAIROBI, Kenya, 27 January 2009 - As the Kenyan government struggles to contain a growing food crisis by importing food and distributing it to the worst hit areas, many urban and rural poor are finding it increasingly difficult to put food on the table.

Peter Munabi, 52, who is HIV positive, lives in Kibera, the largest informal settlement in the Kenyan capital, Nairobi. He told IRIN/PlusNews that feeding his family depended almost entirely on luck.

"My wife died from HIV-related complications in 1999. I got tested the following year and was found positive. I am on ARVs [antiretrovirals] now, and I am also on medication for TB [tuberculosis].

"My wife and I had five children, but two died from this disease. I now live with the remaining three children and five other children who belong to my late brothers and other relatives...

"Before my wife died, I was a shop assistant in town but since then, because of the kids and the illness, I have been unemployed, just working when I can find odd jobs.

"I live in a one-room house with all the kids and pay 1,500 shillings [US\$20] per month. I must admit that since last year's post-election violence [in 2008], when my landlord was chased away from the neighbourhood, I have not paid any rent. Unfortunately, he's back now and demanding money - I don't know where I'll get it.

"The biggest issue we have now is food; occasionally the Kibera district [local government] headquarters gives us some food, but since the recent food shortages, it is hard to get food there because everyone in the neighbourhood is short of food. Even today I came with a paper bag, hoping there might be some, but it's all gone.

"I live like a bird, eating food whenever I can find it. The ARVs make me so hungry - if I don't have food then I just sit at home, shaky with weakness."

2. In the bible God calls human beings to work together to confront poverty. In the Old Testament, God's law showed Israel how to structure its life in order to ensure adequate consumption for everyone (see Leviticus 25:8-28; Deuteronomy 15:1-11; Deuteronomy 5:12-15; Deuteronomy 23:24-25). In the New Testament Jesus called his fellow Israelites to take up God's concern for the poor (see for example Luke 4 .14-19; 6.20-26; 12.13-21; 16.19-31). This concern continues in the New Testament letters to churches, where the emphasis shifts from what nations should do to what individuals and churches can do. We will focus on one of those texts – 2 Corinthians chapters 8 and 9. It was written against the background of a severe famine in Judaea. The churches outside Judaea, including the Corinthian church, agreed to provide financial support. Week by week they set aside funds, which Paul would later collect and take to Jerusalem. The Corinthian Christians had been collecting funds for some time but their enthusiasm appears to have waned. In 2 Corinthians 8-9 Paul calls them not to give up. He appeals to three major principles. Read 2 Corinthians 8-9 and identify the core principle in each section (see the table below). How do you think these principles apply to us today? What would it mean for the sick woman in Lahore or the hungry man in Nairobi if Christians today made a firm commitment to implement the principles Paul provides?

Verses	Core Principle To Guide Giving to the Poor
8.1-9, esp verses 8-9	
8.13-15	
9.6-12	

3. In Matthew 6 Jesus says “*Do not* store up for yourselves treasures on earth...but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven.” Note that Jesus does not say “store up treasures on earth as long as you are also storing treasures in heaven”. Rather we are to avoid storing up treasures on earth and *instead* we are to store up treasures in heaven. Part of the key to making sense of this is to understand what Jesus means by “storing up treasure in heaven”. Look up and read Matthew 19.21, Luke 12.33-34, 1 Timothy 6.17-19. According to these passages how do the wealthy “store up treasure in heaven”? How should this work out in our lives?

4. In light of what you have seen so far what do you make of the following statement?

The problem for Australian Christians is not consumption. The earth is a rich and beautiful place, filled with foods to delight the senses, vistas to overwhelm the mind, experiences to enthrall the spirit. These are wonderful gifts of God. When we savour the taste of a mango, stand breathless before a sunset, or exult in the coolness of the surf on a hot summer's day we enjoy the good gifts of God. The problem for Australian Christians is that, like others in our society, we have become addicted to consumption. We're not satisfied with having enough. We're forever wanting more. And our addiction is never satisfied because there is always more to be had. We no sooner get something new than we're thinking about what we'll get next.

We have adopted the mentality of the world rather than Jesus. This is why we speak of the person who renovates their already adequate home, takes extravagant holidays, or shows up in a luxury car as “getting ahead”. If we really took Jesus at his word we would refer to these things as “falling behind”, for the time, energy and money we pour into them is time, energy and money we don't pour into other things, like sharing with the world's poor”.

5. Christians can share their resources with the world's poor either directly (eg your church may have a partnership with an overseas church) or by donating to an overseas aid and development agencies. Aid agencies will normally use the money you donate in one of two ways. First, it may be used to provide the poor with the things they don't have but need right away – to pay for health care for the sick woman in Lahore or provide food for the hungry man in Nairobi. Second, it may be used to address the underlying causes of poverty, such as helping the woman in Lahore and the man in Nairobi develop the skills they need to get better paying jobs that will in turn enable them to afford their own health care and food. In this study we have been challenged to place a higher priority on these sorts of spending than on other good, enjoyable but less important things. Spend some time brainstorming practical, achievable ways you could consume less in order to give more. Identify one of these and commit to implementing it between now and the next study. Make sure this includes giving the money saved to a charity or program that helps the poor and vulnerable.

Study 3. Shop Fairly

Begin this study by having group members report back the action they decided to take as a result of the last study, the outcomes of that action, and any lessons learned.

Wandering through the local supermarket I came across a 'School Projects Pack'. As a parent of school aged children it caught my eye. I discovered that while assembled and packaged in Australia the pack contained crayons and paper made in China, pencils made in Brazil, a glue stick made in Korea, scissors made in Taiwan, and paints made in the USA. It struck me that as my child used this pack she would be connected with people all over the globe by virtue of the products they made.

Consuming things made overseas is an everyday activity for Australians. A large number of the goods we buy, like the School Projects Pack, are sourced from other countries. In many ways this has been a blessing to us and the world. Australians get jobs making the things we sell to the rest of the world - Australian miners are employed extracting the coal we sell to China; farmers find work rearing the lamb we sell to Japan; vignerons produce the wines we sell to America; and educators are employed by our universities to teach students from across Asia. Likewise, people living overseas get jobs making the things they sell to us - Chinese people get jobs making crayons and paper; Brazilians get jobs making pencils; Koreans get jobs making glue-sticks; Taiwanese get jobs making scissors and Americans get jobs making paints. Those jobs and the wealth trade creates are a potential pathway out of poverty for people across the developing world.

Indeed, in recent decades the jobs and wealth created by global trade have seen tens of millions of people lifted out of poverty, something for which we can give thanks to God.

But the jobs created by global trade have not always proven a pathway out of poverty. At the same time multinational firms earn massive profits selling products sourced in the developing world it is not uncommon for the people who made those products to remain trapped in poverty. Under pressure to keep prices down and existing in an environment with imperfect markets and weak enforcement of labour and safety laws, developing world suppliers often 'cut corners' to save on costs. Developing world farmers often receive less for their crop than it cost them to produce it and many factory workers are paid wages so low they remain stuck below the poverty line. Workplaces are often dangerous, workers can be forced to work extremely long hours of overtime and their human rights breached, and child and slave labour can be employed. In these instances instead of providing a pathway out of poverty trade keeps people trapped in poverty while making us and our firms rich.

In this study we will explore the dark side of global trade, God's expectations for justice, and ways we can ensure our shopping habits help rather than harm developing world workers.

1. Spend 4-5 minutes discovering the country of origin for the things you have on you right now (eg clothes, watches, jewellery, shoes, wallets, purses, phones, books). Compile a list. What do you know about working conditions in the countries on your list?
2. Countries like Australia tend to have well-enforced laws around workplace safety, minimum wages and fair treatment of workers. In many developing countries these laws are often absent, or if present, not enforced. This has sparked a debate around wages and working conditions of the people who make the products we buy from developing countries. What does it mean to pay a worker a 'fair' wage or a farmer a 'fair' price for her crop? One school of thought says a 'fair' wage is the wage a person is willing to take. If someone is prepared to sew clothes for \$1 a day then there is nothing wrong with paying them this. Another school of thought says a 'fair' wage is a wage that fits within the law. It is up to Governments to set the minimum wage and as long as the

workers are paid the minimum or more the wage is fair. A third school of thought argues a 'fair' wage will provide enough for a worker and his/her dependents to meet their basic needs and have some money left over for discretionary spending. Read through the story below and discuss what you think is a 'fair' wage for the workers described in the story.

Nike is the world's biggest sports shoe manufacturer. In 2008 the company sold US\$18.6 billion worth of shoes and apparel. From the outset a key part of Nike's success has been to source their shoes from countries with low manufacturing costs. In 1964 Adidas and Reebok were manufacturing their shoes in higher cost countries such as the USA and Germany. By sourcing shoes from Japan, where production costs were much lower, Nike was able to gain a competitive edge. After the costs of manufacturing in Japan and the US rose, Nike shifted its factories to Korea and Taiwan. When costs began to rise in these countries Nike shifted its factories to Indonesia, China and Vietnam.

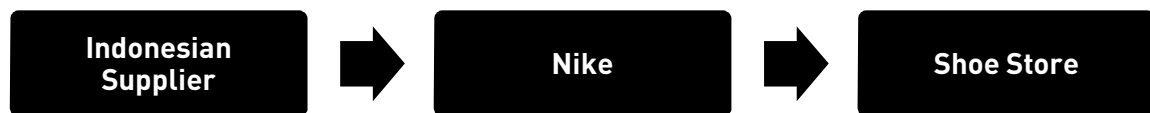
In the 1990's a blaze of negative publicity surrounding the abuse of workers in the factories that made Nike products saw Nike introduce a Code of Conduct for all its suppliers. This appears to have been effective in reducing many workplace abuses. Yet it remains concerning that Nike's Code requires only that workers be paid the legally mandated minimum wage. In 2000 anti-sweatshop activist Jim Keady travelled to Tangerang, Indonesia, to see if he could live for a month on the minimum wage of US\$1.25 a day paid to workers making Nike shoes. He rented a home in the slum district where many of the factory workers lived. 'Home' was a 3 metre by 3 metre cement room with no windows, no heating or cooling and a reed mat for a bed. Raw sewage flowed through the street. Outside children played alongside burning piles of discarded Nike materials and the toxic and carcinogenic fumes they emitted.

After paying rent and electricity Keady had enough left over to buy some drinking water and just one meal a day, which consisted of a bowl of rice and spinach-like greens. When Keady's colleague fell ill they were faced with the difficult choice of buying medicine or food. They could not afford both. In just one month Keady, a fit sportsman, lost 25 pounds (11.3 kilograms).

The minimum wage paid to the factory workers left them with just one third to one half the amount needed to meet the basic living expenses of one adult. Fast forward to 2008 and little has changed. Indonesian factory workers still receive the minimum wage, which the Indonesian Government admits is, in most provinces, well below subsistence level. At seminars Keady points out that the shoe Nike sells for US\$200 costs them just US\$16.25 to produce, of which US\$2.25 (or just a fraction more than 1% of the retail price) goes to the workers who made the shoe. Keady estimates that if Nike doubled the wages of its 800,000 factory workers across the world the cost would be US\$300 million, which represents just 1.6% of Nike's annual revenue of US\$18.6 billion and just 19% of Nike's annual marketing spend of US\$1.6 billion^{iv}.

3. In light of the story we've just read it is important to consider a biblical perspective on the question of 'fair' wages. We will do so by looking at 1 Corinthians 9. In this passage Paul reminds the Corinthians of his rights as an apostle, including his right to be paid. In verses 7-10 he applies some values from the Old Testament to this question, including the principle that you should "not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain". What does this mean and how does Paul apply this to the issue of fair pay for humans? What other values/principles does he apply? What implications does this have for your discussion of what constitutes a 'fair' wage for workers in the developing world? How would it apply to the example of workers in Indonesian clothing factories?

4. Workers in the developing world may experience a range of other abuses. These can include physical and emotional abuse, unsafe working environments, excessive overtime, with-holding of wages, heavy fines for minor infractions, and even the use of people as slaves. One of the questions is who is responsible for changing the situation? The product supply chain means the companies selling the final product rarely make it themselves. Consider the Nike example above. You buy a pair of shoes from the local shoe store. The shoe store has purchased them from Nike. Nike in turn doesn't own the factory in which the shoes was made but contracted with the company in Indonesia to make shoes according to Nike's design and specification.



In this example, who is responsible to ensure fair pay and fair conditions for workers in the Indonesian factory? Is it the Indonesian Government? The Indonesian supplier? Nike who contracted the shoe order out? The shoe store in Australia? You as a buyer of the shoe? In answering this question consider what would happen at each step of the chain. What would Nike do if the Indonesian Government or the Indonesian supplier decided to pay higher wages? What would the shoe store and the Australian consumer do if Nike raised it's prices to enable higher wages? Finally, consider what biblical values such as the responsibility to love one another mean for you as a consumer and Nike as a manufacturer.

5. There are at least three ways Australian Christians can help workers in the developing world secure justice. Read through each, discuss which you think are most effective, and identify one action you will take this week.

a. Buy Fairtrade

Fairtrade is a movement to change the trading relationship between developing world producers and developed world consumers. Buyers agree they will never pay a price less than what it cost the farmer to produce the crop, to pay a premium over and above the contract price (used for community development projects), to provide affordable credit to farmers, and to work with farmers to improve their skill base and access to markets. Producers agree to pay a living wage to any employees, to treat workers fairly and to use environmentally sustainable farming practices. You can identify Fairtrade products by the presence of the FAIRTRADE Label.

Makandianfing Keita, Cotton Farmer, Mali

Makandianfing is a cotton farmer in Dougourakoroni village, Mali, west Africa. The village cotton farmers are members of the UC-CPC de Djidian cooperative, which has been Fairtrade-certified since 2005. Makandianfing married last year.

"Cotton prices were going down and down until they were below the cost of production. People were demotivated and it was very depressing. But now, we can make a sustainable living. My family can eat and we have better health.

"In the past, children had to walk 10km to go to school, so really it was impossible. We have now been able to build a school. At first it had two classrooms. When we had more money and wanted to expand, we challenged the government to match our investment. Now there are five classrooms in total, and every child in the village can go to school.

"Pregnant women had no access to healthcare. Many died in childbirth and there were high rates of infant mortality. Now we have built a maternity centre. We have also built a food storage facility so that we can have a year-round food supply, and we have installed a pump for drinking water. We have built a new road, enabling us to travel further than 5km outside of the village without difficulty.

"Fairtrade standards called for better agricultural practices. Before, empty pesticide containers would be used as water carriers. In some cases this led to death. Now, we dispose of waste properly. We don't burn bushes any more, we prevent soil erosion and we have effective irrigation.

"Fairtrade has really changed the life of my community. I feel as though I have a future, which I didn't before. My wife is pregnant with our first child - this is how optimistic we are!

I encourage everyone to buy more Fairtrade products if they want to make an impact on millions of lives."

b. Lobby Multinationals

A second way to improve conditions for developing world workers is to lobby multinational and international firms to change their ways. A number of campaigns exist along this line. They ask the multinational to develop a code of conduct for suppliers that covers labour and workplace conditions and have these independently monitored to ensure compliance. At present most codes focus on paying workers the legal minimum wage, but many activists are demanding this be changed to include a living wage.

In 2009 Woolworths Ltd (Australia) started the rollout of a Code of Conduct for all suppliers making products for Woolworths own brands. The Code sets out the social, economic and environmental conditions suppliers must meet. It forbids the use of child and forced labour, demands workplaces be safe, and includes this clause about wages:

"Wages and benefits paid for a standard working week meet, at a minimum, national legal standards or industry benchmark standards, whichever is higher. In any event wages should always be enough to meet basic needs and to provide some discretionary income"

The Code also requires suppliers to undergo regular audits by an independent and specialised social auditor to ensure they are complying with the code. Where breaches of the Code are found Woolworths will work with the supplier to implement change.

As at February 2009 Woolworths indicated it had started the rollout and had commenced audits of some suppliers. Given the company has thousands of suppliers they anticipate it will take some time before the rollout is complete.

Woolworths Group Sustainability Manager, Armineh Mardirossian, indicated the Code of Conduct process had been introduced in response to advocacy by Australian consumer groups.^{vi}

c. Lobby for aid and trade justice

A third way to improve conditions for developing world workers is to lobby the Australian Government to deliver more aid and better aid and to advocate for trade justice within the international community. Effective aid can help developing world farmers and workers access credit, build their skills, access communications technologies, etc, all of which can help lift their incomes. Trade justice would see developed nations end practices that harm developing world workers.

Study 4. Tread Lightly

Begin this study by having group members report back the action they decided to take as a result of the last study, the outcomes of that action, and any lessons learned.

An English biologist, Gavin Maxwell, tells the story of how two otter cubs were brought to the UK from Nigeria. One morning a Church of Scotland minister was walking along the foreshores of a nearby lake and saw the otter cubs playing by the edge. He pulled out a shotgun and shot them. One of the cubs died instantly, the other died later in the water. When a local journalist questioned him about it the minister replied there was no moral problem for "the Lord gave man control over the beasts of the field."^{vii}

This episode, which occurred quite some time ago, meets with howls of disapproval today. Many Christians believe that God calls us to be careful, caring stewards of the creation, and that this means we should avoid cruelty to animals and unsustainable use of the environment.

In the 21st century these issues have become more urgent than ever. Major environmental challenges threaten the wellbeing of current and future generations. In this study we will explore some of the key challenges, a biblical perspective on our relationship to the animals and the environment, and how we can modify our consumption in order to be good stewards of the earth.

1. What do you see as the three major environmental challenges of our time? Share your responses with the group. Did common themes appear?
2. The first creation story describes the creation of the world, including the instruction that humanity is to "subdue" the earth and "rule" over the animals (Genesis 1.28).
 - a. This language is taken by some to imply we can do with the earth and the animals as we please. Others find the language difficult, believing we are called to be caring stewards of the earth. What do you make of the language?
 - b. A number of biblical scholars point out that the terms "subdue" and "rule" are associated with kingship^{viii}. That is, humankind is given the kingly job of ruling the earth and the animals. Look up and read Proverbs 31.1-9. What are the responsibilities of the king? How does this impact on your understanding of Genesis 1 and our relationship to the creation and the creatures?
 - c. We are to "rule" and "subdue" as those created in the image and likeness of God. Read Psalm 104. How would you describe God's rule of the earth and its creatures as pictured by this psalm. What implications does it have for our attitude to the earth and its creatures?
3. Genesis 1 calls us to "rule" the animals in a godly fashion. Just what this means in practise is debated. Some, like the Scottish clergyman at the beginning of this study believe we have carte blanche to treat animals as we please. Others suggests we all be vegetarians. Yet others argue that we are free to rear and slaughter animals but must ensure we do so in a humane way. Look up Exodus 20.8-11, Deuteronomy 25.4, Proverbs 12.10 and Jonah 4.11. What light do they throw on this issue?

4. The RSPCA argues that all animals should be able to enjoy five freedoms:
- *Freedom from hunger and thirst:* by ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigour.
 - *Freedom from discomfort:* by providing an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area.
 - *Freedom from pain, injury or disease:* by prevention through rapid diagnosis and treatment.
 - *Freedom to express normal behaviour:* by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animal's own kind.
 - *Freedom from fear and distress:* by ensuring conditions and treatment which avoid mental suffering.

In view of what you have discussed so far do you agree with the RSCPA? What practical difference might this make to the way you consume?

5. In the book *Common Wealth. Economics for a Crowded Planet* Jeffrey Sachs suggests that in the last 200 years the massive growth in the world's population (from 1 billion people in 1830 to 6.5 billion by 2005) and the massive technological innovations unleashed since the 'industrial revolution' have seen humankind reach a point where we are placing unsustainable pressure on the environment. *"If we simply do what we are doing on the planet with unchanged technology – but on a much larger scale as China, India, and other large populations experience rapid economic growth – the environmental underpinnings of global well-being will collapse."*^{ix}

Sachs describes the three major environmental challenges facing the world as:

(1) climate change – gases such as carbon dioxide are being emitted into the atmosphere at a rapid rate as a result of human activity. These have added to the amount of naturally occurring gases to such a degree that the earth is warming up. This is resulting in changed weather patterns, more frequent and more intense storms, shifting disease patterns (eg a spread in the areas malaria carrying mosquitos are able to survive).

(2) loss of biodiversity - humankind has become the single most destructive force on Earth for non-human life. Massive depletions of different species (eg fish, amphibians, bees) and large-scale extinction of species threaten the capacity of the eco-system to sustain our lives and that of the earth's creatures;

(3) water scarcity – large scale agriculture and industrial pollution are seeing water resources depleted faster than they can be replaced. "The impacts on global society, and especially the poor, can be devastating. Without drinking water there is no survival beyond a few days. Without water for crops there is no food. Without clean water there is pervasive disease."^x

Given the biblical texts we explored earlier in this study, what attitude should we take to these global environmental challenges?

6. As a result of our high levels of consumption wealthier countries such as Australia have been the biggest contributors to the problems Sachs outlines. Yet it is the inhabitants of poor countries who

are impacted the most harshly. Read the report of climate change impacts in Bangladesh provided below. What implications does this have for our consumption? What environmental responsibility do we bear to the world's poor?

DHAKA, 16 December 2008 (IRIN) - Climate change is affecting Bangladesh in many ways. For instance, rising sea levels are causing some agricultural land in coastal areas to become more saline, reducing both the quality and quantity of the produce available.

In southern districts where land is only centimetres higher than the brackish estuarine water, large swathes of agricultural land are becoming arid: Crop yields are shrinking as a result of increased salinity due to rising water levels in the Bay of Bengal.

Agronomists and agricultural experts now worry that creeping salinity will engulf more and more land in the low-lying nation.

"The impact of climate change on agriculture is undeniable and will most certainly worsen if governments and donors fail to take appropriate steps right now," Ghulam Mohammad Panaullah, former research director of the Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI), warned.

In coastal areas, cocoa nut and betel nut trees do not yield half of what they did two decades ago, while banana groves are dying out in their hundreds, Panaullah told IRIN.

At the same time, vegetables sold in the urban markets of Dhaka, Khulna and Rajshai are deemed tasteless and fetch low prices compared to produce from salt-free regions.

Climate-resilient agriculture

In a country where almost 80 percent of the population live in rural areas, this is bad news...

Bangladesh needs support for climate-resilient agriculture, ActionAid said in a report at the UN climate change summit in Poznan, Poland, which ended on 12 December.

Citing an Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report which said South Asia might experience a 30 percent drop in agricultural production by 2050, ActionAid said the slide was already evident...

The report said support for sustainable climate-resilient agriculture was key to enabling farmers to increase food security and adapt.

New techniques

Meanwhile, in an effort to address this, farmers have taken to raising their vegetable beds, maintaining the soil's moisture by covering the seed beds (and the manure around plants) with straw and leaves to prevent excessive evaporation and erosion, and increasing the amount of organic material in the soil.

Others are modifying their cropping patterns altogether, the report said...

Climate risk index

Bangladesh tops the Global Climate Risk Index 2009, followed by North Korea and Nicaragua.

Launched at the UN climate change conference in Poznan on 4 December, the index lists 170 countries and was drawn up by international NGO Germanwatch.

Natural calamities in Bangladesh led to the deaths of 4,729 people last year, and the average loss of property in Bangladesh due to natural disasters was over US\$4 billion per year, the NGO said.

These changes are already having major impacts on the economy and on the lives and livelihoods of millions of poor people, according to a World Bank report.

It said predicted rainfall increase, particularly during the summer monsoon, could increase flooding in more vulnerable areas in Bangladesh.

In the longer term, global warming could lead to the disappearance of many glaciers that feed many rivers in South Asia, the report said.

"If that happens, green Bangladesh would turn into a grey desert and most people would die of starvation," predicted Mosharraf Hossain, a former parliamentarian from the coastal district of Laxmipur.

- 7.** If the earth is to sustain human and animal life into the future we will need to change some of our consumption habits. Spend some time brainstorming practical ways you can tread more lightly on the earth. Identify one or two actions you will implement this week.

NOTES

ⁱ Source: Daniel Palmer (Jan 13, 2009), "Christmas sales meet expectations, food retail leads the way", www.ausfoodnews.com.

ⁱⁱ Child death statistics and information on health interventions was sourced from the World Health Organisation's website on February 11, 2009.

ⁱⁱⁱ Surveys on spending patterns occur at different times, meaning they are indicative of spending in 2007 not all strictly derived for that year. The figure for donations to aid agencies is for the financial year 2006-7 and provided by the Australian Council for International Development; figures for fast food and recreation are derived from the 2003-4 Household Expenditure Survey by the Australian Bureau of Statistics; and the figure for computer games comes from a January 20, 2009 news report on the website [mcvuk.com](http://www.mcvuk.com) and related to 20008 (<http://www.mcvuk.com/news/32995/AUSTRALIA-Market-jumps-by-47-per-cent>).

^{iv} Details gained from 'Behind the Swoosh' documentary; the website of www.teamsweat.org, accessed in February 2009; *The University Register*, Campus Newspaper of the University of Minnesota, 'Jim Keady Presents "Behind the Swoosh"' 17/12/2008; and Locke, Qin and Brause, (2006) "Does Monitoring Improve Labor Standards? Lessons from Nike", *MIT Sloan Working Paper No 4612-06*

^v Source: Rachael Dixon, "Teach Us How to Fish – Do Not Just Give Us The Fish", guardian.co.uk, March 12, 2008

^{vi} Woolworths Code of Conduct is available from the Woolworths website. Further details provided via meetings and email contact with the Group Sustainability Manager.

^{vii} Reported in John Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today*

^{viii} Throughout the ancient near east kings were usually spoken of as being the image and likeness of their god. As the god's representative on the earth, when the king ruled the god was thought to rule through him. Genesis draws on this background but democratises it. Not the king, but humankind, images God on the earth and is a vehicle for God's rule on the earth.

^{ix} Jeff Sachs (2008), *Common Wealth. Economics for a Crowded Planet* 57

^x Sachs, *Common Wealth* 115