

Climate testimonies

Small group Bible study materials on climate change



Methodist
relief and
development

These studies of familiar Bible passages seek to help people to apply Biblical principles as we face up to the reality and responsibility of climate change.

Climate change

All We Can works with people in some of the world's poorest communities. Our approach to climate change comes from seeing its effects in the areas where we work and an awareness of how rich countries are contributing to the problem through carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions. We respond out of a desire to see justice for people living in poverty and a world where all may have the opportunity to fulfil their potential.

We hope that these studies will be a starting point, not an end in themselves. Do not worry if you are not an expert in climate science! This resource does not attempt to explain the science behind climate change. The international scientific consensus of the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is that climate change is happening and is primarily caused by human activity. This leads us to ask what we can do in response, and so in each session we will suggest specific actions for your group to take.

This pack contains

- **Two Bible studies** – use insights from the Bible to explore and discuss the issues of climate change, justice, and stewardship of the Earth's resources.
- **Stories from around the world** – learn how climate change is already affecting real people today and hear the voices of people who are already speaking up for change.
- **Worksheets** – as individuals and as churches there are many ways in which our actions can make a tangible difference.

Tips for using this resource

- Adapt the material to make it relevant to your group. You can choose how much context and input you provide depending on how much your group may already know.
- Prepare materials for each session in advance. Read through the Bible passages, leader's notes, and discussion questions before the meeting and pray for your group as you prepare to study together.
- Please do not feel limited by the prayers provided. You may wish to sing a song or hymn together and/or have an open time of prayer.
- The Bible studies cluster a number of questions together, but do not feel that you need to ask them all at once; rather, use them to help develop the discussions as you consider appropriate.
- Make a note of any questions that arise from discussions that you feel unable to answer, and after the session contact All We Can for more information to share with the group when you next meet.

Both sessions follow a similar outline and should last no more than 90 minutes.

Key

Throughout the resource you will find notes for the group leader marked in *italics*.



Bible
reading



Input from
leader



Prayer



Group
activity

Bible study 1: Caring for God's creation

Before the session

Invite group members to bring along a picture of something in the natural world they are thankful for. It could be a favourite place, animal, etc.

You will need

- Printed copies of the worksheet found on pages 5-6 (one per person)
- Bibles for group members (or ask people to bring their own)
- Pens and coloured paper
- If you want to show the *For the love of...* film highlighted in the optional activity you will need a laptop with access to the internet and speakers. Got to: <http://bit.ly/climatefilm>

Introduction



Leader: Today, as we look together at passages from Genesis, we will focus on the goodness and orderliness of God's creation, the impact of climate change on the natural world and our God-given responsibility to care for creation.

Discussion starter



Starting with yourself, encourage everyone in the group to share brief answers and any pictures they have brought along in response to the following questions about the natural world.

If members of the group have forgotten to bring pictures, encourage them to write or draw their responses on coloured paper.

What have you seen or experienced recently to do with the natural world that you want to thank God for?

What have you seen or experienced recently to do with the natural world that has saddened or alarmed you?

Bible reading



Genesis 1:1-25

Discussion questions



Leader: The story of creation is probably one of the first Bible stories we learn. It is also one of the most familiar to non-Christians, and its accuracy and relevance have been the cause of much debate through history. This passage is full of powerful imagery as God, the Creator, forms the heavens and the earth and brings into being the oceans, plants and creatures.

1. What words would you use to describe God's creation, as described in this passage?

These might include: Lavish, orderly, diverse, good, integrated and many more.

2. In pairs, choose to read one of the *Climate Testimonies* from the worksheet. What words would you use to describe the natural world depicted in these case studies? How would you describe the current relationship between humans and the natural world?
3. What do you think it means for humans to be "created in the image of God"?

*Explore the characteristics of God implied in this passage: for example, creativity or responsibility, and consider this statement: "God's character and personality are described by what God does... when men and women are described as being 'in God's image' that does not mean they look like God or are made of the same stuff. It is, rather, a way of saying they are intended to be extensions of God's own personality, and to play a central role in God's own ongoing activity in the world." (John Drane, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 2010)*

4. How does the idea of being "created in the image of God" inform our response to climate change?

It can be seen as giving us responsibility, as God's representatives, in caring for creation and stewarding natural resources wisely, including reducing the use of greenhouse gases (such as CO₂) which contribute to climate change.

5. Verse 28 uses words like "rule" and "subdue" to describe humanity's relationship with the earth and other creatures. What are the characteristics of a good ruler? How can we emulate these characteristics with regard to our stewardship of the natural world?

Compare this with the models of leadership in Deuteronomy 17:16-20 and Luke 22:24-27. The idea of the "shepherd king" who cares and sacrifices himself for his people is an important Biblical model of kingship. All rulers should take their authority from God, not from their own desires.

Group activity



Draw an imaginary line across the room, with "strongly agree" at one end and "strongly disagree" at the other. Read each statement in turn and ask people to stand along the line according to how they feel and discuss responses as a group.

- a) It takes too much effort to do things that are environmentally friendly
- b) I don't believe my behaviour and everyday lifestyle contribute to climate change
- c) Humans are capable of finding ways to overcome the world's environmental problems
- d) Climate change is beyond our control – it's too late to do anything about it

Take action



Leader: As Christians we have a God-given responsibility to care for creation. Today we have shared the things that we love about our world, but many of the things we treasure are at risk from climate change.

Optional activity: For the love of...

Show the *For the love of...* film from All We Can's campaign partner The Climate Coalition. View it at: <http://bit.ly/climatefilm>



Leader: When facing the sheer scale of the problem of climate change it can often be hard to see how our individual actions can make a difference. But if we act together to reduce our personal, national and global carbon emissions now, we have a chance to stop global temperatures from rising. Experts predict that a rise above 2°C would bring more extreme weather events, floods and droughts, devastating communities and disrupting the delicate balance of God's creation.

So what can we do? *Discuss the ideas on the back of the worksheet and decide how you can respond individually and as a church.*

Prayer



Invite the group to place the images and slips of paper from the start of the session in the centre of the circle. In your prayers of thanksgiving and concern, name some of the things that were shared by the group and close with the following prayer.

Creator God,
In your hand are the depths of the earth.
The mountain peaks belong to you,
The sea is your creation,
The dry land is your handiwork,
The fruit of the land is your design,
The taste of the produce is your gift,
And we are your people, a flock under your care.
We give you our thanks and praise, O God.
Amen.

By Claire Welch, All We Can

Worksheet 1: Caring for God's Creation

Climate testimonies from the Philippines

In the hours following Typhoon Haiyan in November 2013, Yeb Sano, lead negotiator for the Philippines, addressed the opening session of the UN climate summit in Warsaw to make a plea for action on climate change:

“Despite the massive efforts that my country had exerted in preparing for the onslaught of this monster of a storm, it was just a force too powerful and even as a nation familiar with storms, Super Typhoon Haiyan was nothing we have ever experienced before, or perhaps nothing that any country has every experienced before.

The picture in the aftermath is ever so slowly coming into clearer focus. The devastation is colossal.

To anyone who continues to deny the reality that is climate change, I dare you to get off your ivory tower and away from the comfort of your armchair. I dare you to go to the islands of the Pacific, the islands of the Caribbean and the islands of the Indian ocean and see the impacts of rising sea levels; to the mountainous regions of the Himalayas and the Andes to see communities confronting glacial floods, to the Arctic where communities grapple with the fast dwindling polar ice caps, to the large deltas of the Mekong, the Ganges, the Amazon, and the Nile where lives and livelihoods are drowned, to the hills of Central America that confronts similar monstrous hurricanes, to the vast savannas of Africa where climate change has likewise become a matter of life and death as food and water becomes scarce. Not to forget the massive hurricanes in the Gulf of Mexico and the eastern seaboard of North America. And if that is not enough, you may want to pay a visit to the Philippines right now.”

Climate testimonies from Ethiopia

In Ethiopia, All We Can's partner ADHENO works with farming communities to help people gain the knowledge, skills and resources they need to make their land fruitful and to provide for their basic needs. For years these communities had been struggling to make their land productive. Deforestation in the area meant that when the rains came the fertile topsoil was washed away leaving the land barren. To add to the problem, variations in climate also started to affect weather patterns in Ethiopia, making conditions even more difficult for farmers to grow crops and feed their families.

Rahel Hiletework, Programme Officer for ADHENO, has observed how the changing climate is affecting communities in the region. She says “Now the heat is increasing. The farmers have told us that rain has decreased significantly, this year especially. The rain is not very regular. It was the end of July 2014 that people started sowing but when the rain came it was very very heavy, so there were lots of floods. People started praying to God for the rain to stop because it was starting to damage the wheat, it would fall down under the heavy rain, but thank God it stopped.”

Reduce your carbon footprint

Ideas for individuals:

- Use this carbon calculator to measure your carbon footprint: www.carboncalculator.co.uk
- Reduce your carbon footprint by walking/cycling/taking public transport for short journeys and explore alternatives to flying to your holiday destination
- Simple things make a difference. Buying energy-saving light bulbs and turning off lights and appliances when not in use can make surprisingly large savings in CO₂ – and to your electricity bill
- Switch to a home energy supplier that uses renewable energy (e.g. wind and solar power) instead of fossil fuels

Ideas for your church:

The Methodist Church's Carbon Reduction project has lots of ideas for how you can reduce the carbon footprint of your church (however large or small). From changing to energy-saving light bulbs to insulating your roof, check out ways in which your church can make a difference: <http://bit.ly/CarbonReduction>

Take it further

- Watch and share with other the *For the love of...* film from All We Can's campaign partners The Climate Coalition: <http://bit.ly/climatefilm>
- Read how the things we love will be affected by climate change: www.fortheloveof.org.uk/stories
- Climate science: The Royal Society has produced a handy *Short Guide to Climate Science*. Download the PDF and explore their online interactive Q and A guide: <http://bit.ly/RSclimateguide>
- Pray for communities affected by climate change and for global decision makers as they prepare for the international climate talks in Paris this December.

Keep up to date

Sign up to All We Can's monthly e-news to receive the latest campaigns news. www.allwecan.org.uk/enews

All We Can (formerly MRDF) helps people in the world's poorest communities to become all that they can.



All We Can is the operating name of the Methodist Relief and Development Fund, a charity registered in England and Wales, number 291691.

www.allwecan.org.uk

020 7467 5132

info@allwecan.org.uk

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Bible study 2: Climate justice

You will need:

- Bibles for group members (or ask people to bring their own)
- Printed and cut out sets of the response options found on page 9 (enough for one set per group of 2-3 people)
- Pens and coloured paper
- In advance, to have visited www.allwecan.org.uk/climate to find out about All We Can's latest actions and campaigns on climate. You may want to print some information, order resources or have a way of accessing the website when it comes to the last section of the Bible study.

Discussion starter

Before you begin it might be good to recap what was covered in the last study group. Ask if anyone has taken action as a result or has made any lifestyle changes to reduce their carbon footprint.



Leader: Today, as we look together at a passage from Leviticus, we will explore God's plan for a society and economic structure that ensured freedom from inequality and poverty and enabled the land to thrive. Together we will reflect on the challenges in bringing about this vision in our modern world and discuss how we can inspire global leaders to take action on climate change.

Bible reading



Leviticus 25:18-28

Discussion questions

1. In the passage, who or what does the concept of the Sabbath Year (every 7 years) and Jubilee (every 50 years) benefit?

The Sabbath Year is for the land. During this time both rich and poor have access to the produce of the land, as do the animals. The land belongs to God and is for all members of society (including poor and future generations).

The Year of Jubilee was to take place every 50 years, when everyone would return to the land first allocated to them and all slaves were to be released. Jubilee was designed to ensure that poverty was not passed on from generation to generation so that all may have the opportunity to fulfil their potential and flourish.

2. How might our culture today and economic system prevent both people and the earth from having the rest that they need?

You could reference consumerism, greed, conflicting political agendas, use of natural resources, desire to develop at whatever cost, etc.

3. Reflect on examples in the world today where people are facing the consequences of past actions. This could be the legacy of the industrial revolution on poor and rich countries, international debt, energy consumption such as burning fossil fuels or deforestation. How should the message of Jubilee influence our thinking today?

The prosperity of rich countries can be attributed in part to the industrial revolution where the burning of fossil fuels such as oil, gas and coal allowed for technological advances in manufacturing and energy production that formed a solid foundation for the Western economy in the last century. Although this boom in industry enabled countries to strengthen infrastructure and improve healthcare, education and sanitation, the burning of fossil fuels released more and more CO₂ into the atmosphere, which is extremely harmful to the environment and has increased global temperatures.

The CO₂ level in 2012 was about 40% higher than it was in the nineteenth century. Most of this CO₂ increase has taken place since 1970, about the time when global energy consumption accelerated. (Royal Society Short Guide to Climate Science)

Seemingly small temperature changes in the climate will have big impacts on health, hunger and poverty levels. Developing countries are particularly at risk because their economies rely more heavily on agriculture and fishing livelihoods, which are dependent on predictable weather patterns, and weaker infrastructure means that communities are more vulnerable to natural disasters.

4. God says, "The land shall not be sold in perpetuity for the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants."(v23). If no-one but God has true ownership of the land and resources then how should this inform our response to climate change?

God wants people to avoid greed and materialism. It is difficult to be generous with land and resources if you are bound by the concept of ownership. Climate change is bound up with inequality and injustice, as everyone will be affected by the consequences but not everyone is equally responsible. Climate change affects different countries in different ways. However the consequences of climate change will be far more devastating for vulnerable people in poor countries.

Activity



Leader: So how can climate change most effectively be tackled? We're going to think about some of the possible ways in which the world – and each of us – could respond.

Split the group into pairs or threes. Give a cut out set of response options (see next page) to each group and ask them to rank each possible action – and any others they think of – in terms of their impact and effectiveness in tackling climate change.

Discuss the results as a whole group and use the Climate fact sheet on pages 11-12 to help facilitate feedback.

Response options

Recycle more
Reduce my personal carbon footprint
Switch to renewable energy sources
Reduce meat consumption
Set national and international targets for carbon reduction
Something else?

The Paris climate agreement

 **Leader:** In December 2015 in Paris, 195 countries agreed a new global deal to tackle climate change. The agreement followed years of campaigning by groups including All We Can, working as part of the Climate Coalition. The Coalition hailed the deal as: “a rare and genuinely historic step forwards in tackling climate change together around the world.”

The agreement included commitments to:

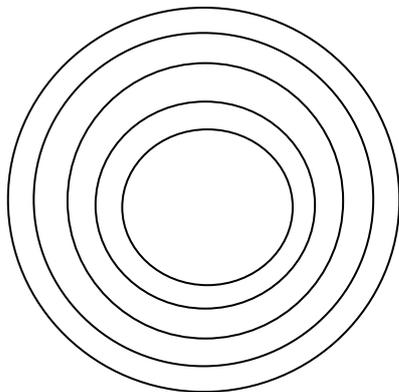
- Keep average global temperature rises below 2°C, and aim to limit them to 1.5°C – the maximum currently thought to be advisable to avoid climate change having irreversible and catastrophic consequences.
- Reduce net carbon emissions to zero by between 2050 and 2100.
- Review each country's contribution to cutting emissions every five years – as current commitments are calculated to still mean a temperature rise of 2.7°C.
- For richer countries to provide financing to help poorer nations adapt to climate change and switch to renewable energy, of \$100bn a year by 2020.

While it welcomed the agreement, All We Can believes that it means we need to keep up the pressure on leaders and demonstrate continuing public support for action on climate change, in order that they fulfil their promises and take the opportunities at each review to set more ambitious targets for cutting carbon emissions.

Our circle of influence



Draw the diagram below on a piece of flipchart paper and label each circle starting with “Me” in the middle to “Internationally” in the largest circle. Invite the group to think about their circle of influence and what actions they could take at to raise awareness and tackle climate change and write them within each circle e.g. at a church level they could give a presentation about climate change to the congregation, at a national level they could write to their MP, at an international level they could support All We Can to help some of the world’s poorest communities to adapt and protect themselves from the impacts of climate change.



Me

My family and Friends

Church/Community

Nationally

Internationally

Commitments for action

Share information about All We Can’s current climate change actions and campaigns. Decide together on some actions that you will take.

Closing prayer



Ever-loving and gracious God, we thank you for the potential for creativity, service and healing that each new day brings.

We pray you will help us to live every moment remembering that we are part of a human family, which reaches to the farthest corners of the globe.

Holy Spirit, connect us, transform us, reconcile us so that together, we may celebrate and protect your creation and defend the dignity and worth of all God’s children who draw life from it.

Amen

Kathleen Loughlin

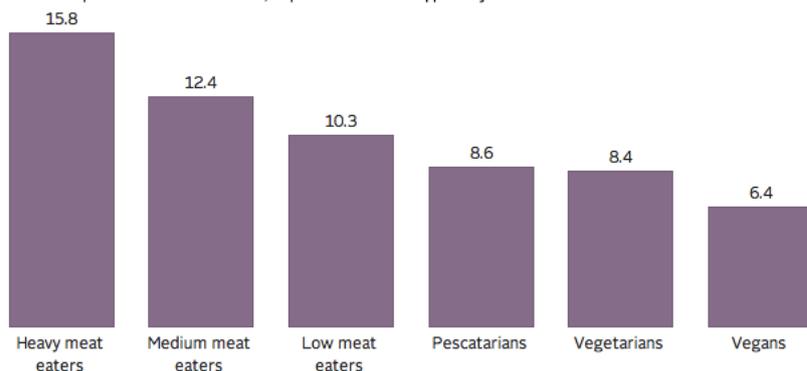
Appendix: Climate fact sheet

Reducing your personal carbon footprint

If everyone in the world lived like we do in the UK, we'd need far more than one planet to support us. Almost three Earths in fact (WWF). A quarter of the UK's emissions come from households. We can all take steps to reduce our personal contributions by making small changes to our lifestyles e.g. using energy saving light bulbs, walking and cycling for short journeys.

Reducing meat consumption

Carbon footprint of various UK diets, in pounds of CO₂-eq per day

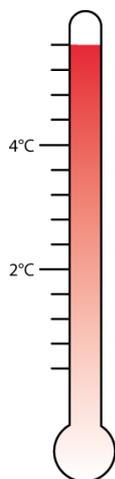


Source: Scarborough et al. (2014)



Setting national and international targets for reducing carbon and greenhouse gas emissions

The Climate Change Act established a legally binding target for the UK to reduce its emissions by at least 80% from 1990 levels by 2050. This target represents an appropriate UK contribution to global emission reductions consistent with limiting global temperature rise to as little as possible above 2°C (Committee on Climate Change).



Global warming beyond 4°C would see major increases in vulnerability across the world, with the adaptive capacity of many systems exceeded.

2-4°C warming would lead to worsening impacts at all scales, such as decreased global agricultural productivity and widespread biodiversity loss. If sustained, the ice sheets of Greenland and the West Antarctic could melt, leading to several metres of sea level rise over the course of the coming centuries.

Impact less than 2°C would exacerbate impacts already being observed. These include increases in human mortality, loss of glaciers and increases in extreme events. Other impacts would be triggered such as reduced food security in many poorer regions. Some systems might benefit, such as global agricultural productivity.

Global average temperature above pre-industrial levels thermometer
Source: Adapted from IPCC WG2 AR4.

Recycling

- Making bags from recycled polythene takes one third of the Sulphur Dioxide and half the Nitrous Oxide than making them from scratch.
- Making Aluminium cans from old ones uses one twelfth of the energy to make them from raw materials.
- For glass bottles, 315kg of CO₂ is saved per tonne of glass recycled after taking into account the transportation and processing.

Switching to renewable energy sources

Globally, every year we currently consume the equivalent of over 11 billion tonnes of oil in fossil fuels (*CIA World Factbook*). The UK now imports a large proportion of our fossil fuels from overseas as the reserves of oil and gas in the North Sea diminish. However, ambitious projections from green energy providers Ecotricity state that we could provide 50 per cent of the UK's energy needs from the wind. Up to one quarter of our electricity needs could currently be met by putting solar panels on our roofs (MacKay, *Sustainable Energy Without The Hot Air*, 2009).

The UK could also generate as much as 20 per cent of our energy using tidal power (HM Government, *The UK Renewable Energy Strategy*, Chapter 5: New Resources and Technology. 5.23) and up to 50% of the UK's domestic gas needs could come from Green Gas made in the UK from various sources, much of which is currently considered as waste.

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