

Let's Change the Climate Challenge

Church talk



Please feel free to adapt this talk to reflect your own journey, thoughts and style. Make it yours.

[Space for the speaker to introduce themselves]

Throughout this week, you've been looking at ways that we can care for creation and each other – and we've even had a tiny taste of how it might feel to live with the limited resources that many people around the world currently do.

I wonder what's been most challenging for you? [\[You could invite some participants to the front to share their experience of the week at this point, or share in your own experience of something you've changed in your own life.\]](#)

I hope that, as we've gone through this, you've found some of the tools we all need to help make a change – right where we are. I hope you've found that there's more in your hands than you think. Some of it would have been difficult, some might have seemed almost impossible – but there's always something we can do.

As we learn to care for creation more than our own convenience, and work towards living more sustainably, we will also be making a difference to the many people around the world for whom this isn't just a week-long challenge, but a daily reality.

Change is possible. Hope is real. Hope is alive.

To discover why that's true, we have to go back to the beginning. The very beginning. In Genesis chapter one, in the first few pages of the Bible, we're given the story of creation. What I want us to notice and pay particular attention to today is the phrase '**And God saw that it was good**'. Throughout this chapter it's repeated five times: in verses 9, 12, 18, 21 and 25. As God created the seas and sky, mountains and birds and bugs, God stopped and said it was good. God's creation, this planet that we call home, the whole cosmos... is good! Then at the end of this story, after God created us, humans, the chapter ends with verse 31: '**And God saw that it was very good**'. You, me, all of us here today, and indeed, all of humanity and creation – together, we are very good. We are made in God's image.

The trouble is that we're not often told that story. We're told the story of original sin. But sin doesn't come first – goodness does. The fall doesn't come first, the divine image does. God's story – our story, the story of everything – begins with original goodness. Original blessing. God didn't make a bad world; sin is a stain upon the fabric, it is not the fabric itself.

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Listen to how David describes creation in the Psalms:

‘The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.’

(Psalm 19:1-4)

This is a good world, a great world. A God-glorifying world. A world that shouts about his beauty, power and splendour through the magnificence of creation. So, what’s gone wrong?

The goodness of this world – the fruitfulness of it – depends upon relationships. God’s creation is relational: an interconnected network; a web of life. There are relationships between us and creation, us and each other, us and ourselves, and, of course, us and God. If these relationships thrive, we thrive, and all creation thrives.

But, that hasn’t been the case. Beginning with the fall, these relationships have been bruised and, indeed, broken. The delicate balance keeping all things in harmony has been tipped in favour of greed, selfishness, and pride. The human belief is that we can go it alone – that this world exists for our benefit, and not for the glory of God.

Many of us will know what happens when relationships get broken. People get hurt.

And the world is hurting. That much is clear. The climate crisis is the latest in a series of significant symptoms, pointing to how broken our relationships with creation and each other have become.

A recent report showed that, within the next 30 years, around 1 billion people could be forced from their homes by the climate emergency. That’s one in seven people around the world having to leave behind everything they’ve known and built: a planet of refugees.

When thinking about our broken world, let’s look at the description of our home in Romans 8:22, where God’s **‘whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right**

up to the present time.’ The climate crisis is causing storms to become more powerful, and floods and droughts to become more severe, destroying people’s crops, homes and communities. Even the air that we breathe is at risk. As much as 80 per cent of the world’s forest – the lungs of the earth – has been destroyed. Globally, average wildlife populations have dropped by over half in more than 40 years. That’s barely a generation. Lord, have mercy on us.

It’s not merely a crisis, but an injustice. Because the people who have done the least to cause the climate crisis – people living in poverty – are most at risk from its effects. As we’ve seen throughout this week, this isn’t a future problem. People’s lives are being impacted today. Now.

Inequality is everywhere.

Over the last week, we’ve been confronted by some devastating statistics about the number of people around the world without access to the most basic necessities – such as clean water and enough food. If we take a moment now to think back on some of these, what has shocked you the most? What spoke most clearly to you of the brokenness that these situations reveal in our world and in our relationships?

And, what can we do about it?

It can be overwhelming to try to get our heads around such a huge issue. Where do we start? It’s a giant, global problem, but it has very human faces. Individual stories of lives affected and of families struggling to survive. People with names, hopes, worries and dreams.

People like Loyara. Loyara is a mum. She lives in a small village in Burkina Faso where she farms her small plot of land to provide food for her family. Even though she and her husband both live with disabilities – Loyara doesn’t have much use of her left hand and foot – she works hard on her land to grow crops so they can eat.

But, it’s a struggle. And it’s been made significantly worse by the changing climate which, in recent years, has begun to have a disastrous effect on rainfall patterns. In West Africa, where Loyara and her family live, droughts have become more commonplace and with no rain, there is nothing to eat.

Loyara's story, tragically, is not unique. Millions of people in the most vulnerable communities around the world are facing the same fears as she does. The same worries about how they will provide for their children, as they are being pushed further back into poverty.

So, we've heard about the problem. But what about the remedy? Our God is a redeemer and there is a solution. It involves all of us.

As we heard a little earlier, God's original perfect purpose for all creation was for flourishing relationships between God, humanity, and wider creation. But, he also gave us power to make choices. In a fallen world, we as humanity have broken those relationships. All of them. And yet, God does not wash his hands of us and leave us abandoned to destruction. His power and plan speaks redemption after redemption. It says in Colossians 1:19-20: **'For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.'** The fullness of restoration was made complete in Jesus, but its outworking involves each of us as we look to Jesus and follow him – including in these areas of great need.

In 2 Corinthians 5, it says that Christ's love compels us to a ministry of reconciliation. We are called to join in with God's active, ongoing work towards the renewal of all things. We are called to be a change-making church because of our ultimate hope in God. We are called to work towards the restoration of all relationships: between God, humanity, and wider creation.

In other words, poverty isn't God's plan – you are. We are. We can all play our part. We can all be salt and light, joining this ministry of reconciliation and renewal of all things. We – together, as Jesus' disciples – can show the world the difference that love can make.

Though the climate crisis can seem overwhelming, let's take heart from the fact that we don't have to face it alone. We can face it as a global movement of Christ-followers, united in faith, hope and love.

Loyara has seen first-hand the difference that love can make. Loyara's life lit up when Tearfund's local church partner worked

alongside her community – empowering them to lift themselves out of poverty through training in sustainable farming. Alongside this training, Loyara was given some chickens and taught her how to look after them. So, now Loyara has chickens that will lay eggs – giving her another way to provide for her family.

One of the things that gave Loyara the most joy was in knowing she wasn't alone. She says: 'This help calls me to recognise God's help. I feel loved by those who have contributed to it. I pray that God helps me to succeed... and to be a blessing for my children and others.'

Hope is real. Hope is alive. Hope for Loyara to feed her family in a changing climate. Hope for all of us. And we can carry that hope in our hearts. I've heard it said that action is brought about by bringing together anger and hope. We have a righteous anger at the way that God's creation has been mistreated – at the way that people are suffering. And, we have hope. Hope in the redeeming love of Christ. Hope in the practical solutions that organisations, like Tearfund, are implementing through the local church.

We have anger. We have hope. And now, we take action.

Through the Let's Change the Climate Challenge that we've all done this week, we have seen how we can take everyday actions that can make a difference. As Christian climate scientist Katharine Hayhoe said:

'Climate change is not only an environmental issue. Climate change is a poverty issue. It's a hunger issue. It's an issue of inequality and injustice. It's a human issue. And that's why we care.'

Why not commit, today, to taking a few of these lifestyle changes forward beyond just this week? To making a difference through our lifestyle choices? Not only this, but also engaging in the spaces God has placed us in. Katharine Hayhoe went on to do one of the most famous climate TED talks of all time. The title?

'The most important thing you can do to fight climate change: talk about it.'

A lot of people say that one person can't make a difference – but we are not one person.

We are the church. And there are millions, billions of us, each placed by God with our own unique sphere of influence. If all of us make a commitment and use our influence, the change will be extraordinary. And, there's another commitment we can make together. It might seem like we can't do much from where we are to reach those families who are already suffering most because of the climate crisis. But, through supporting Tearfund, we can.

Millions of people are being pushed back into poverty. But, together, we can push back harder.

Thank you for the support that so many of you already give to Tearfund.

Just £16 a month, over a year, has the ability to help restore an entire community that has been devastated by the climate crisis.

The changes we are making in our own lives, such as the things we've done this week, can have a profound effect on future generations – on our children and our children's children. Sadly, for so many people, the damage is already done. We are asking you to step in today and help repair some of that damage.

Tearfund's worldwide network of partners and local churches is delivering practical solutions – from new farming techniques, to tree planting, to improved waste management and access to more reliable water sources – right where they're most needed. When you sign up to support this kind of work, Tearfund will send you some wonderful, hope-filled stories about more people, like Loyara, whose lives have already been transformed, and whose futures are looking brighter because of the support of people, just like you, making a whole world of difference.

We have seen the inequality that exists because of broken relationships. And, we have also seen that hope is very much alive. We have an opportunity to bring some healing back into the world; to be a part of God's good solution; to fulfil our calling as the church. Please will you consider giving today.

Thank you for listening and hearing. Thank you for caring enough to make a difference. And, if you do feel ready to give, you can do that right now. On your phone or via the card on your seat today, you can simply visit tearfund.org/change. Your action, at this moment, can start to make a crucial difference in the lives of some of the most vulnerable people on the planet.

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