

Christianity and climate change: a film series



Accompanying discussion
questions and further actions

tearfund

Study One:

What the Bible says about the natural world

Q 'What is your understanding from the Bible of how God views the natural world?'

Question by Elaine Duncan,
Chief Executive of Scottish Bible Society



Discussion questions

1. 'The physical does matter to God.' To what extent is that true and how does God show this?
2. God commissioned humanity in Genesis 1:28: 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.' What is your understanding of the word *radah* (translated as 'rule') in this verse?
3. Do we tend to think of creation as something 'other' than us? If so, what damage can this way of thinking cause?
4. What can we ourselves do to move from being egocentric (considering humans to be at the 'top of the pile' with the rest of nature beneath) or ecocentric (considering humans to be no more important than or different from every other living thing), to being theocentric (considering humans to have a special role to care for and protect all living things)?
5. Read **Leviticus 25:1–7**. What do these verses tell us about sustainable stewardship of creation, and how does that relate to our care for other people?



Action to take

Pray! Tearfund has lots of [resources to help you pray](#) and we are asking supporters to commit to praying for the climate crisis for the next year.



More from Katharine

If you want to hear more from Katharine on the issues raised in Study One, you can go to her Global Weirding series on Youtube and listen to: ['Religion has nothing to say about climate change, right?'](#)

Study Two:

Climate change is a poverty issue

Q 'How is climate change affecting the developing world where organisations like Tearfund work?'

Question by Rev Canon Dave Richards,
Rector of Ps and Gs Church, Edinburgh



Discussion questions

1. We often think of climate change as a distant issue that affects polar bears or future generations, but in reality it is here now, affecting us in ways that matter to all of us. How are we being affected by climate change within the UK? What infrastructure do we have in place to protect us from extreme weather events?
2. Katharine uses the example of a camel who 'is malnourished, underfed, in poor health and already overloaded'. How useful is this image for considering poverty?
3. Katharine compares climate change to a hole in a bucket: if we don't patch that hole then the money we spend on other great needs, such as education or farming, will not take people out of poverty. What do you think about that?
4. '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.' Is this how you think of climate change or have you seen it as more of an environmental issue?



Action to take

Watch [Orbisa's story](#) and the effect of climate change on her and her family. If you feel that you want to give financially, or hear a church talk on how communities are struggling to survive due to climate change, then explore Tearfund's [Your Neighbour Is Thirsty campaign](#).



More from Katharine

If you want to hear more from Katharine on the issues raised in Study Two, you can listen to her here: ['Developing countries need fossil fuels to reach the standard of living we enjoy, right?'](#) and ['Is carbon dioxide really a pollutant?'](#)

Study Three:

How to persuade others to care about climate change

Q ‘Do you have any advice on how we help fellow Christians understand the importance of working to end climate change?’

Question by Dayna Mathie,
student at the University of Glasgow



Discussion questions

1. ‘We haven’t connected the dots between what we care about and how that’s being affected by climate change.’ What do you care deeply about? Can you make any connection to it and climate change?
2. We all depend on God’s creation – for the air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat. Yet, we often think that you have to be a certain type of person (‘an environmentalist’, ‘a tree hugger’) to care about the climate. What can you as an individual do to talk more about climate change, and some of the changes that you have made as a response?
3. Do you think that humans are very bad at recognising the risk or the threat posed by issues that we think are distant and far off? If you know that climate change is affecting people in Africa right now, do you think it doesn’t matter so much in the UK?
4. Do you think that the solutions to climate change sound worse than the impacts of climate change because they mean you will have to change how you live now?

5. Do you think we are sometimes in danger of not being passionate enough about a cause? What techniques could we employ to ensure that we are passionate enough about the subject without being offensive?



Action to take

You can make some **lifestyle changes** to reduce your carbon footprint and make it a part of how you live your life.



More from Katharine

If you want to hear more from Katharine on the issues raised in Study Three, you can listen to her talk on **‘Christians + Climate Change’**.

Study Four:

What we can do as a church?

Q 'What advice would you give churches that want to do something together to combat the effects of climate change?'

Question by Rev Canon Dave Richards,
Rector of Ps and Gs Church, Edinburgh



Discussion questions

1. Katharine Hayhoe says that the first thing every single one of us can do about climate change is to talk about it – why it matters and what we can do to fix it. Do you think it is important to talk about climate change in your church? Can you think of ways that this could be done?
2. What changes has your church already made, and what changes have you made as an individual, to reduce your carbon footprint? What else could you do at your church, to 'act in community' to help tackle climate change? Are there particular things that could be done to make your community aware that you are acting?
3. Have you found any resources (organisations, authors, podcasts etc) that you can share to help others to reduce their carbon footprint? Are there ways that your church could facilitate sharing of information and resources for sustainable living?
4. If you were to lead a church service on climate change, how would you do this?



Action to take

As a church, you could use the **Climate Emergency Toolkit** which will give your church or group a route map and resources to sound the alarm about the climate emergency and take urgent action.



More from Katharine

If you want to hear more from Katharine on the issues raised in Study Four, you can listen to her here: **'I'm just one person, what can I do?'**

Study Five:

Speaking to other Christians about climate change

Q 'What are the ways in which we can engage in the climate change debate and gently point people to Jesus?'

Question by Elaine Duncan,
Chief Executive of Scottish Bible Society



Discussion questions

1. Katharine says we should not engage with the issue of climate change out of guilt because as Christians we believe we are freed from guilt. Did that make you realise that guilt plays a part in how you respond to climate change? How does the gospel alter this response?
2. Are there times when we have tried to make other people feel guilty? What was their reaction?
3. How would it look to have climate change conversations born out of love with a) other Christians and b) non-Christians?
4. How can we empower people to act? Are there other skills or tools that they may require?
5. Troubles help us learn not to give up because as Christians we have hope (Romans 5:3–5). How does that motivate you when it comes to the global issue of climate change?



Action to take

Will you commit to praying for a whole year for a breakthrough in the climate crisis? As we contemplate the climate crisis, it's important that we keep our eyes fixed on God. He is the God of justice and restoration, who cares for the poor and is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine. **Make the commitment** to pray for a year.



More from Katharine

If you want to hear more from Katharine on the issues raised in Study Five, you can listen to her here: **'If I just explain the facts, they'll get it, right?'**

Study Six:

Grateful for fossil fuels but time to move on

Q 'You are based in Texas, one of the centres of the oil industry, how do you engage with Christians who may take a very different view than you do regarding climate change?'

Question by Right Rev Dr Martin Fair,
Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland



Discussion questions

1. Do you feel negative about climate change campaigners? Do you think it is because the movement has been framed as an alternate type of religion which offends us as followers of Christ, as Katharine suggests?
2. Were you surprised that Katharine said she was grateful for fossil fuels and the role they played in ending slavery, increasing life expectancy and so on, when our consumption of them has done so much damage to the planet?
3. Can you think of ways that Christians can engage positively in campaigning on climate change?
4. Katharine says in the film that constructive conversations only happen when we connect over something that we share. Can you think of ways to connect with other Christians who do not feel the need to move away from fossil fuels?



Action to take

Will you join us in **calling on the UK government** to show global leadership in delivering a cleaner, greener, fairer recovery, which limits global warming to 1.5°C?



More from Katharine

If you want to hear more from Katharine on the issues raised in Study Six, you can listen to her here: **'The most important thing you can do to fight climate change: talk about it.'**

Study Seven:

Climate change is a threat multiplier

“Katharine, it goes without saying that these are very trying times we are living through. Some people might suggest that there are more important issues for us to be thinking about right now. So, how do we ensure that care for creation and climate change remain not only on the agenda, but high up the agenda?”

Question by Rt Rev Dr Martin Fair,
Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland



Discussion questions

1. Do you see the coronavirus pandemic and climate change as an equal threat to our health, the planet and those in poverty?
2. What biblical reasons can you think of as to why the church should act – which includes prayer and preaching – on climate change? (For reference, see: Psalm 24:1; Psalm 115:16; Psalm 145:9; Matthew 10:29–31; Psalm 72:12; Philippians 2:4.)
3. Why do you think tackling climate change is not a priority for many Christians and do you think you can do more to change that?
4. What do you imagine it is like for the poorest people in the world who are already facing the consequences of climate change on a daily basis?



Action to take

If you feel that you want to give financially, then please **donate to Tearfund** and **help people like Orbisa**. She has to walk up to ten hours a night in order to collect water for her family to drink due to the impact of climate change.



More from Katharine

If you want to hear more from Katharine on the issues raised in Study Seven, you can listen to: **‘I’m not a tree hugger’** And **‘What’s the big deal with a few degrees?’**

Study Eight:

There can be a better future

Q ‘What are some key changes you hope happen after lockdown procedures ease up in terms of climate change-related behaviour?’

Question by Dayna Mathie,
student at the University of Glasgow



Discussion questions

1. Have you found that it is possible to live a different way – a greener way – during lockdown and do you intend to continue some of these more climate-friendly ways of living post-pandemic?
2. Katharine says that when it comes to recovering from the pandemic and to fixing climate change, what we most lack is a vision of a better future. Were you challenged by this and in what ways?
3. Do you think the better future Katharine speaks of is possible eg cities full of trees and moist, clean air? What do you think it would take to get us to that point where we all live as good stewards of the land and care for each other?
4. What are the things that you value most in life? What are those values based on? Can you think of new ways to live differently that are more consistent with your values?



Action to take

We can all choose to live in a different way and to have a vision of a better future. Check out some of [these Tearfund resources](#) to get ideas for how you as a Christian and/or a church can play a role in building a better and greener world.



More from Katharine

If you want to hear more from Katharine on the issues raised in Study Eight, you can listen to: [The pandemic's effect on climate change.](#)

Study Nine:

It's not too late

F *'Given the trajectory in our use of greenhouse gases and the global rise in temperature, is it already too late to react? Will the temperature continue to rise no matter what we do?'*

'As a minister, many of my colleagues minister in communities that are deeply impacted by multiple deprivation due to the loss of traditional industries. Hundreds of thousands of Scots work in industries related to the oil sector, could you talk about how we can move towards a just transition to clean power, while mitigating the impact of that, on those who work in oil-related industries, both here in Scotland and across the world?'

Questions by Rev Neil MacMillan,

Moderator Designate of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland



Discussion questions

1. The Scottish Government has adopted an interim target to reduce emissions by 75 per cent by 2030. To give you an idea of what that would involve, do you think you could cut your personal emissions, and those of your church, by three-quarters in the next ten years? How would you achieve that?

2. Have you ever spoken to any politicians about climate change? If we are to see greater policy change and help those already being impacted, then politicians need to believe that it is a priority for voters. Only in this way can we help ensure that they do create green jobs, as well as shaping a better future for our children. Could you see yourself making it more of a political priority for yourself and raising it with your elected representatives?

3. Do you think of prayer as acting? As Christians we believe that prayer makes a difference. Have you prayed about poverty and climate? Is it a topic that is regularly prayed about at your church – or could you be the person who encourages that?

4. The oil and gas (also known as fossil fuels) sector is one of the most polluting globally yet it also employs many thousands of people in Scotland and the UK. What can the church do to promote a just transition away from fossil fuels, which doesn't leave anyone behind?

5. As Neil MacMillan says, many areas now have high levels of deprivation due to the decline of traditional industries. What will the decline of oil and gas potentially mean for places such as Aberdeen? What role, if any, do you think the church has in caring for people whose livelihoods are currently dependent on the oil and gas industry?

Continued...

Study Nine (continued): It's not too late



Action to take

As a church you could think about exploring this further by using the [Climate Emergency Toolkit](#). The pandemic has been hard for many and resulted in huge job losses, including those in the oil and gas industry. Pray for people who have lost their incomes and for new opportunities to come their way. Also [please pray for people in extreme poverty](#) around the world where the pandemic and climate change have made things even more difficult: we are so interconnected as a world and the need is great. You can also [give to Tearfund's work](#) if you feel you want to help financially.



More from Katharine

If you want to hear more from Katharine on the issues raised in Study Nine, you can listen to: [‘It’s too late to do anything about climate change’](#) and [‘Does messaging with fear really work?’](#) and [Fossil fuels](#).

Additional background:

What is the Paris Agreement?

Taken from Stop Climate Chaos Scotland website*

The Paris Agreement was drawn up at the United Nations climate talks in Paris in December 2015. The talks were a great success, or a bit of a failure, depending on whom you speak to. They can be seen as an important step on the way to getting action on climate change but it was a limited step and left serious omissions, doubts and concerns.

The good news: a massive group, nearly all of the world's nations (about 197 of them), committed to a detailed agreement to drive action on climate change. In particular, they agreed to hold 'the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°'. The recognition of the significance of 1.5° was, with hindsight, probably the most significant outcome especially as it came with the acknowledgement that to restrict warming to 1.5° would 'significantly reduce the risks and impacts of climate change'.

The bad news: the drive to reduce emissions depended on nationally determined contributions (NDCs); the NDCs offered were voluntary, far too low and left the planet heading towards 3° of warming. Given the urgency of the situation the action offered wasn't offered quickly enough and a proper review was put off to five-yearly intervals. Crucially the Paris Agreement did not do nearly enough for those who had done the least to cause the problem of climate change. The question of who pays for the damage already caused, and that will be caused in the future, remains an unresolved ongoing point of contention.

UK and Scottish Government targets

Both the Scottish and UK Governments have passed into law net-zero targets – where we balance the amount of greenhouse gases we produce with the amount of greenhouse gases we remove from the atmosphere. (The oceans and forests are natural 'carbon sinks'.) The Scottish Government's target is to be net-zero by 2045 and the UK Government's target is by 2050.

*Webpage accessed November 2020

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