

Week 1: Introduction

Before we begin this study on climate action, spend 3-5 minutes sharing why you decided to come to this study, your background related to climate justice or other environmentalism, and how you'd rate your understanding of climate science.

Scripture:

Genesis 2:15

The lord God then took the man and settled him in the garden of Eden, to cultivate and care for it.

Psalm 8

1. O Lord, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory above the heavens.
2. Out of the mouth of babies and infants,
you have established strength because of your foes,
to still the enemy and the avenger.
3. When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,
4. what is man that you are mindful of him,
and the son of man that you care for him?
5. Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings
and crowned him with glory and honor.
6. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under his feet,
7. all sheep and oxen,
and also the beasts of the field,
8. the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.
9. O Lord, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Prayer:

“Heavenly Father, we ask you to stir our hearts into action. As global temperatures increase, inspire us with ways, we can make a difference in our homes, church congregations, communities, and the world around us. We pray for your prompting where we can do more to love our neighbor. Amen.” (compassionuk.org)

Discussion:

1. The author starts the book finding out his brother became a vegetarian and being taken aback, immediately having visions of hemp bracelets and vegan pizzas. What visions spring to your mind when you think of environmentalists?
2. Have you ever felt a conflict between your identity as a Christian and other, perhaps more “liberal” beliefs you might have? If so, which meshes more closely with your understanding of Jesus’ teachings?
3. The author speaks of the theme of silence: Christians who “haven’t been told that their faith has anything to say about such questions” and those who have “looked out on a world ravaged by the impacts of climate change, at the inability of their seemingly oblivious faith community to do or say anything about it, and quietly wondered if they’re losing their mind.” (p. 3)

Why might churches stay away from such topics? In what ways do our churches remain silent? In what ways do we, or could we, refuse to be silent and let our voices be heard? Why is this important?

4. “For him [the author’s brother], becoming a vegetarian, joining the Sierra club’s mailing list, and memorizing the bus routes to and from his Christian college campus did not constitute a rejection of our Christian values but were an expression of them. He had not jettisoned his Christian identity, He was living more fully into it... Did my commitment to following Jesus actually permit me to care about things like species extinction, pollution, and climate change? More than that, did it require it?” (p.2)

What are your thoughts on this passage? How does commitment to following Jesus connect to caring about the environment?

5. The author asserts that “the church is uniquely equipped to respond to the climate crisis with hope and action.” (p. 6)

How do you see the church’s strengths in relation to climate resilience and justice? How are we equipped to respond with hope? How are we equipped to respond with action?

Challenge:

“Celebrate God’s creation in worship and discuss the climate crisis with others in your faith community. While some may see climate change as a ‘hot button’ issue to be avoided, we understand it to be a moral crisis demanding an urgent response.” (umcjustice.org)

Week 2: Chapters 1-3

Scripture:

Psalm 24: 1-2

1. The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it,
The world, and all who live in it;
2. For he founded it on the seas
And established it on the waters.

Matthew 22: 35-40

35 One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: 36 "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" 37 Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

Prayer:

"Violating the integrity of our relationship with creation is sinful. Our failure to serve as faithful caretakers of creation has local and global consequences. Our inability to share the abundance that [you have] entrusted to us has given rise to ecological crises and extreme poverty. Our unchecked consumption and unsustainable patterns of development have exacted a toll on creation and are increasing inequality of opportunity around the world.

"Confronted with the massive crisis of the deterioration of [your] creation and called to a ministry of reconciliation between God, humankind, and creation, we ask [your] forgiveness and commit ourselves to a new way of being that integrates environmental, economic, and social justice. As United Methodists we therefore are called to participate in [your] healing of creation through acts of personal, social, and civic righteousness. Proclaiming and modeling a new lifestyle rooted in stewardship and justice we work toward the day when all [your] children respect and share in the goodness of creation." (umcjustice.org)

Discussion:

The Land of Mountaintop Removal: <https://youtu.be/p5RcbPZXUZo>

1. How can we love our neighbors who are being poisoned, who are harmed by climate change, who are fighting for clean air and water and a safe and stable world?

2. How can we show love for those in the fossil fuel industry, whose very livelihoods are killing them?

3. How can we reduce our dependence on coal and other fossil fuels?

4. What stories have you heard or been led into believing about climate change? How do such stories impact climate action?

Our leaders will take care of it. We need to just trust them.	We need oil to maintain our way of life. There aren't any other options.	Climate change is unimportant or nonexistent.	The world is ours to use. It's physical, not spiritual; disposable.
God is destroying the world and we shouldn't try to stop it.	There's disagreement between scientists or between science and scripture.	Climate change matters, but has nothing to do with the church.	It's too far gone so there's no point in trying to stop it.

5. Choose one or more of the scriptures below (listed in the order they were mentioned in Chapter 3). How can this scripture inform our understanding of climate justice?

Genesis 1	Leviticus 25:4, 25:23	Colossians 1:15-20
Genesis 2:4-25	Psalms 8	John 3:16
Psalms 121	Psalms 19	Revelation 21:1-5
Philippians 2:6-8	Psalms 24	Hosea 4
Genesis 3:17-19	Psalms 65	Joel 1
Genesis 9:1-17	Psalms 104	Romans 8
Job 38-41	John 1:1-5	Ephesians 1

Challenge:

Choose two new steps you can take to work towards climate justice: one small step you can start today and one larger step you can aim for in the future.

An easy way to write to your elected officials:

<https://www.umcjustice.org/what-you-can-do/advocacy/take-action/support-climate-action>

Week 3: Chapters 4-5

Scripture:

Psalms 41:1 Blessed is the one who considers the poor! In the day of trouble the Lord delivers him;

Proverbs 22:16 Whoever oppresses the poor to increase his own wealth, or gives to the rich, will only come to poverty.

Prayer:

“O God, we pray for justice and fairness for those worst hit by our changing climate. We know people living in extreme poverty around the world are worst hit by the climate crisis but have done the least to contribute to it. They also have the fewest resources to implement change. We ask for your mercy O Lord and repent when our blind consumerism has led to the destruction of our common home. Amen.” (compassionuk.org)

Discussion:

1. The author touched on lots of ways environmental injustice is affecting the world (food insecurity due to changing weather patterns, pollution-induced asthma attacks, bankruptcy due to flooding, cancer (pg. 70), rising seas, extreme weather, death (pg. 72)). What ways have you personally been affected by environmental issues or seen them affect others?
2. These issues disproportionately affect the poor and vulnerable. Why is that, and why as Christians should we care?
3. These issues are just a small subset of numerous, interrelated environmental issues, many but not all of which relate to climate change. Create a climate collage (<https://climatefresk.org/>) to better understand climate science and show how the issues and their causes relate to one another.
4. If you were adding a new card to the collage, what would you add and where would you put it?
5. People often focus on a single issue to the exclusion of others. This could be evangelical Christians with abortion or an environmentalist focused on preserving a particular variety of bug or refusing plastic straws. How can this single-minded focus be detrimental to climate justice and caring for all of God's people as a whole?

Challenge

Research one charitable organization in the US or abroad. How does the organization respond to the issue of climate change? How do you predict climate change will affect the organization's mission in the future?

Week 4: Chapters 6-7

Scripture:

Matthew 13:34-35 (The Message)

All Jesus did that day was tell stories—a long storytelling afternoon. His storytelling fulfilled the prophecy: I will open my mouth and tell stories; I will bring out into the open things hidden since the world's first day.

Romans 12:12

Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.

Prayer:

God of Justice.

Your kingdom is one of love, joy and peace.

For this, we give you praise.

In this time of climate breakdown,
Temperature rises will act as a threat multiplier across the world,
As climate grief increases,
As once hoped for futures seem to be reduced to ash,
As mourning and grief increase.

In a world of climate grief,
Prepare your church for hope and joy,
That we would be those who speak truth in a culture of despair,

Prepare your church for hope and joy,
That we would be those who celebrate the gift of life,
With simplicity and gratitude.

Prepare your church for hope and joy,
That we would be those who are rooted and grounded in the hope and joy of Jesus.

Remove from us our idolatrous hearts which can wander down the paths of denial and despair.
Make us, in Christ, hope and joy-filled realists.
(Rev. Jon Swales, 2021)

Discussion:

1. What does telling your climate change story mean to you? What stories might you share?
2. Why is it important to tell your story about climate change?

3. Are there any people you are uniquely suited to reach? How can you talk to them about the climate?
4. The author listed lots of scientific advancements that help us fight climate change (p. 108-109). Were there any that stood out or surprised you?
5. How can we find hope in the midst of climate change?
6. How can we find joy in the midst of climate action?
7. The author connects our society of endless consumption and hyperconsumerism with choosing money over God, and simplicity with choosing God over money. What are ways you are tempted to put consumerism over love for God and others?
8. How can we prayerfully reduce our own consumption and the “liturgy” of shopping? Are there any things that work for you or that you’d like to try in the future?
9. Our values can be seen in what we say, what we do, and what we love. How can we align our actions with our and God’s values?

Challenge

This week, find a piece of “Climate Good News” to share: a news article or other story that brings you hope for the future of the planet.

Next week will be the last session of this growth group. We will be discussing the remaining chapters as well as the epilogue and appendices.

Week 5: Chapters 8-End

Scripture:

James 2:14-17

What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

2 Timothy 2:22-26

22 Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. **23** Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. **24** And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. **25** Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, **26** and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.

Prayer:

God of hope,
you sent Jesus so that all may have life,
life in all its fullness.
We see the thief of injustice kill, steal and destroy -
the loss and damage of the climate crisis,
the scandal of poverty.
Help us be part of your vision for all creation,
set your hope deep in our hearts,
that we may keep steady in solidarity,
remembering always our global neighbours.
May all live life in all its fullness.
Amen
(Christian Aid, 2022)

Discussion:

1. The author speaks of fossil fuels being "an accident of history" for good and ill. What else might have happened? How would the world be different?
2. Imagine the year 2066, as in the epilogue. What would be your vision for the future? What needs to happen now to get there?
3. How does abstaining from politics and remaining "neutral" support injustice?

Tasks:

1. Go through the list of spiritual disciplines one by one (pgs. 185-187) and/or the other sources about climate change contribution reduction (eg. <https://www.kimnicholas.com/uploads/2/5/7/6/25766487/fig1full.jpg>, <https://blogs.bath.ac.uk/climate-action/2022/04/13/climate-change-can-one-person-really-make-a-difference/>, <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg3/figures/summary-for-policymakers/figure-spm-7/>) .
Which actions have you tried or supported once? Which do you do or support consistently? Which have the biggest impact on climate change mitigation?
2. Use a laptop to visit www.footprintcalculator.org. What do you notice about the process of filling out the survey or your results?
3. Draft a letter to your representatives, an op-ed, or a letter to the editor about climate change.

Challenge:

“Prayerfully consider one or two new practices and try them out.”