

‘What does the Bible say about climate change?’



Methodist Relief &
Development Fund

MRDF Study Pack 2008

Leader's Notes

Thank you for exploring what the Bible says about climate change with MRDF. We hope that your group finds this series of studies useful and thought-provoking. These notes are to be used alongside the Study Pack booklet.

Tips for using this pack

- Adapt any of the material to suit your group's needs. It is designed so that you can pick and choose from a variety of questions and activities
- Everyone in the group, including yourself, will need a copy of the booklet (phone 020 7467 5132 for free copies or download from www.mrdf.org.uk)
- Prepare materials for each week in advance so that everything is ready in time. In some weeks people will need to bring items with them to the session
- Involve other group members before and during the sessions in reading, praying or preparing materials
- Read through the Bible passage, Leader's Notes and discussion questions in the booklet before the meeting and pray for your group as you prepare to study together.

Each session follows a similar outline and should last no more than 90 minutes:

- ▶ **Discussion starter:** a short warm-up activity to start people thinking about the topic
- || **Bible reading and discussion questions:** not every discussion question is answered in the notes, as many depend on the group's experience and opinions. However, there are some suggestions and guidance
- ▶▶ **Action:** a practical response to what has been learnt or discussed. The actions in weeks 2-5 each highlight a different area – home, transport, climate change campaigning and waste – suggesting something that people can do during the week between each meeting. At the start of each meeting, share a meal or a drink together and discuss your progress. How hard or easy were the actions from the week before? What can you learn from each other? This should be a time of encouragement and recommitment, not of making people feel guilty if they haven't taken action in the previous week!
- † ● **Extra:** activities, prayers, examples from MRDF partners or UK churches, illustrations or quotes to stimulate thought and discussion.
- ! **Remember!** Each week there may be things that you need to bring to the session and to follow up on from the previous week.

Don't worry if you are not an expert in climate science! This pack does not attempt to explain the science behind climate change. There are many other materials that do this, see **Further Resources** (booklet p.17). MRDF accepts the international scientific consensus of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change that climate change is happening and is primarily caused by human activity. That knowledge is important in that it leads us to ask what we can do in response, and so every week we suggest specific actions for your group to take.

Week one

Main focus

Climate change is an issue of justice and our response has to involve commitment and sacrifice.

Equipment needed

- Creation Challenge film clip (download from www.creationchallenge.org.uk or contact MRDF to order on DVD) and DVD player

► Discussion starter

If you are meeting at a different time of year, ask about the previous Lent. Encourage your group to talk about the social or spiritual benefits of giving things up.

■ || Bible reading and discussion questions

1. Fasting was used to express grief, repentance or to search for God's guidance. Here, the people's worship is inconsistent with the way they conduct their lives.
2. The prophet condemns fasting that is temporary (v5), tolerates injustice (v3), is tokenistic and tries to manipulate God into answering prayers (v3). True fasting, by contrast, involves self-sacrifice, a concern for the poor and oppressed and a commitment to justice.
3. Jesus seems to regard fasting as a normal part of worship; it must be carried out genuinely to please God, not to impress others.
4. If possible, watch the first part of the Creation Challenge film clip together (from the start to 2'13") before discussing this question.
5. Think about fasting as deliberately choosing to go without something, rather than simply going without food. Encourage people to reflect on the need to change our lifestyles to reduce energy use in order to tackle climate change. This may include personal sacrifices of time, money or comfort.
6. "Climate change is perhaps the biggest global injustice. It is the richest people in the world who have produced and are still producing most of the greenhouse gases causing climate change. Yet it is poor people in poor countries – those who contribute little or nothing to the problem – who will suffer the most severe consequences."

(World Development Movement Climate Calendar report, 2007).

● Activity

What does the group already think about climate change?

- 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 then to discuss with the person nearest them why they feel that way.
- Alternatively, ask people to make a note of their position on the lines in their booklets.
- The statements listed in the booklet were used in a 2007 Government survey (report on <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2007/aug/15/ethicaliving>). The percentage of people who agreed with each statement is recorded below.

- a) 25%
- b) 25%
- c) 67%
- d) 17%

►► Action

These are the answers to the **How climate friendly are you?** questionnaire (booklet p.16) that your group will each complete at the end of this week's session or at home during the week. Check everyone's scores at the start of next week's session.

- 1) a=3, b=1, c=0 (can only select one).
- 2) a=1, b=1, c=1 (can tick as many as apply).
- 3) a=3, b=2, c=0 (can only select one).
- 4) a=3, b=1, c=0 (can only select one).
- 5) a=3, b=2, c=0 (can only select one).
- 6) a=3, b=2, c=0 (can only select one).
- 7) a=0, b=2, c=3 (can only select one).
- 8) a=1, b=1, c=1 (can tick as many as apply).

Maximum score for each question is 3, so the overall possible maximum score is 24.

Week two

Main focus

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.

Equipment needed

- Bring slips of paper and pens.

► Discussion starter

- Start by scoring and discussing the questionnaire results. How did people feel about answering these questions? More detailed carbon footprint questionnaires are available; see **Further Resources** (booklet p.17). Encourage people to measure their carbon emissions in this way because knowing our current emissions helps us discover where we need to change.
- Starting with yourself, encourage everyone in the group to share brief answers to the questions about the natural world in the booklet (for example, a beautiful view or litter in a local park) and to write their answers on slips of paper.

■ || Bible reading and discussion questions

This creation story can inspire us to protect our environment and tackle climate change. To avoid a discussion about evolution or the mechanics of creation, focus on what the passage can teach us about life today.

The poetic language suggests that this passage could have been used in communal worship in ancient Israel. Assign a different reader to each section that begins 'And God said', and ask the whole group to read the refrains 'And God saw that it was good' and 'And there was evening and there was morning ...'

1. These might include: lavish, orderly, diverse, good, integrated and many more.
4. Explore the characteristics of God implied in this passage: for example, creativity or responsibility, and consider: "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)

5. 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 gases (such as CO2) which contribute to climate change.
6. Compare this with 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.

† Prayer

In your prayers of thanksgiving and concern, name some of the things that were written on slips of paper at the start of the session.

Close with Psalm 104:31-35.

! Remember

Remind your group to bring their diaries or calendars next week.

Week three

Main focus

Importance of Sabbath rest for the earth and for human society, how increased use of fossil fuels is causing climate change.

Equipment needed

- Your diary/calendar.

■ ■ Bible reading and discussion questions

2. The Sabbath is for the land itself, but both rich and poor have access to the produce of the land during the year of rest, as do the animals. The land belongs to God and is for all members of society (including the poor and future generations). Squeezing every last drop out of the land shows a lack of reliance on God to provide for our needs and can destroy its productivity in the future.
- 3&4. For example, consider working and travel patterns, intensive farming (which uses fossil fuel-based fertilisers and pesticides) and the increased availability and desirability of new consumer goods.
6. After discussion, read **Fair Miles and Air Miles** (booklet p.18) from MRDF partner the Fairtrade Foundation.
7. Jesus criticised the way the Sabbath was used, not the Sabbath itself, and reclaimed it as a time for healing and wholeness.
8. The Sabbath is an opportunity to stop and reflect on how we honour God throughout the week, not just on that one day.

▶▶ Action

- This is not going to be an easy action for some, but can be helped by a whole group or church taking action together
- Also distribute action cards from the World Development Movement on aviation (enclosed with the study pack) for people to sign during your meeting.

Week four

Main focus

The responsibility for climate change lies primarily with the world's richest countries as the greatest emitters of carbon dioxide (CO₂). Poorer countries suffer most and are least able to protect themselves against the impacts of climate change.

Equipment needed

- Action sheet: **The personal and the political** from www.mrdf.org.uk – in advance of the meeting, cut up the sheet and stick the statistics in the left column in appropriate places around the room (e.g. the one about switching off your TV on the TV or by a plug socket, the one about light bulbs by a lamp or light switch etc.) and bring the information in the right hand column with you
- The latest information about the Climate Change Bill from www.mrdf.org.uk
- Pens, paper and envelopes
- The name and address of your MP.

▶ Discussion starter

Ask for a volunteer for a 'Who wants to be a millionaire?' style quiz. They will be asked five questions, each with a choice of four answers. If they get stuck they can use one of three lifelines:

- Ask the audience (throw the question open to the whole group to discuss or vote)
- Phone a friend (choose one member of the group to ask)
- 50:50 (you remove two of the incorrect answers)

If a question is answered wrongly, a new volunteer takes over for the remaining questions.

The correct answers are in bold type below.

1. Which of these countries is the biggest emitter of carbon dioxide (CO₂) per head of population?

China, **UK**, Sweden, Bangladesh

2. On average, how much more CO₂ does one Briton emit than one Bangladeshi?

Twice as much, 10 times more, 22 times more, **35 times more**

3. CO2 emissions are a major factor in causing climate change. Largely because of the thermal expansion of ocean water and accelerated melting of glaciers caused by higher temperatures, sea level is likely to rise by how much by 2100?
2cm, 10cm, **50cm**, 75cm
4. How many people in Bangladesh currently live in areas less than 1m above sea level?
1 million, 3 million, **7 million**, 10 million
5. The total amount of international aid dedicated in 2007 to helping the world's poorest countries adapt to climate change is equivalent to the amount that:
6. MRDF believes that poorer countries should be encouraged to develop using greener technologies and helped to adapt to the impacts of climate change, but countries who have developed and prospered by using fossil fuels should bear a greater responsibility to cut emissions.
7. There is no place for greed in God's kingdom, not even 'a hint of' it. Greed is compared to idolatry, the most strongly and frequently condemned sin throughout the Bible. Thankfulness to God for what we have, awareness of God's deep love for us and imitating Christ's sacrificial life of love help us to avoid greed.

The UK spends on flood defences in three days, UK children receive from the 'tooth fairy' each year, Coca Cola spends on UK advertising in six months, The Westbury Hotel in London's Bond Street spent on redecoration last year (a trick question, all four of these answers are correct).

At the end, discuss your reactions. Although it is right to be concerned about rising emissions from industrialising countries like China, the UK still has more to do to become a global leader in cutting emissions and in assisting poor countries to develop in ways which minimise carbon emissions.

Many of the statistics used in the quiz come from the World Development Movement's Climate Calendar report (which can be downloaded from <http://www.wdm.org.uk/resources/reports/climate/climatecalendarreport08012007.pdf>) or from Kevin Watkins' introduction to the UN Human Development Report 2007 (which can be downloaded from <http://hdr.undp.org/en/>)

■ || Bible reading and discussion questions

2. No relationships are mentioned – neither employees who helped the rich man gather in the harvest nor family and friends with whom he might share his abundance. Yet, even though he does not acknowledge God or others, God still is concerned with his actions and his life.
3. This parable concerns a rich man, but is told in the context of teaching to the disciples who, although not poor, would not have been particularly rich. Greed is something not only for the very rich to be cautious of, but for all disciples of Jesus.

▶▶ Action

- In the quiz, asking the audience or phoning a friend made answering the questions easier. In the same way, acting on one's own to tackle climate change is not enough. The actions elsewhere in this pack focus on individual and group actions to cut energy use, but this week we focus on the role that the Government can play.
- Ask people to find the actions from **The personal and the political** action sheet that you have stuck around the room and to read them to the whole group one by one – after each action, read the corresponding potential government action
- Ask people for their reactions and explain that by lobbying the Government we could make the personal actions that we take much more effective
- Visit www.mrdf.org.uk to find out the latest on the UK's Climate Change Bill which commits the government to new targets for CO2 reduction; there will be suggestions for issues to raise in letters to your local MP.

! Remember

Remind the group to keep their discarded packaging during the week instead of throwing it away, and bring what they have collected to the next session.

Week five

Main focus

Human beings have wasted and selfishly exploited God's gift of the natural world, but it is possible to repent and change our attitudes.

Equipment needed

- Cards with words: reduce, reuse, recycle, rethink, recharge, refill, repair, refuse (photocopy the template below)
- Information about local recycling facilities (www.recyclenow.com or contact your local council)
- Discarded packaging from the last week
- Writing paper, envelopes and pens
- There is a contemporary re-telling of the Bible reading on www.mrdf.org.uk, please use this instead of your usual version of the Bible.

■ || Bible reading and discussion questions

Use contemporary re-telling of the Bible reading from www.mrdf.org.uk.

2. Some people may feel like the older son, regularly recycling or using public transport, but receiving little recognition or encouragement. Discuss how we can affirm action being taken as well as encourage, rather than condemn, others who seem to be doing less.
4. Do we value creation because of what we can get out of it or for its own sake, because it is created by God?
5. The first step is to recognise wrong action, then to turn around and commit to a different way of living.

▶▶ Action

- Give a set of cards to each pair or three. Each small group must arrange the cards in order that they think is most important for saving energy.
- Discuss the results as a whole group and take the actions in the booklet. Rethinking is the most important as it influences our whole attitude to consumption and waste. Reducing our consumption saves the most energy, followed by reusing.

reduce	reuse	recycle	rethink
recharge	refill	repair	refuse

Week six

Main focus

Establishing a continuing commitment to action using the Biblical idea of a covenant.

Equipment needed

- Creation Challenge film clip (download from www.creationchallenge.org.uk or order on DVD from MRDF) and DVD player.

► Discussion starter

Watch the second part of the Creation Challenge film clip (2'14" to end) or discuss the question in the booklet.

■ || Bible reading and discussion questions

This passage describes the making of a covenant between God and the people of Israel. Covenants were a common form of agreement between secular rulers or groups of people and followed certain formal patterns. This covenant comes at a crucial stage in Israel's history when it is on the verge of becoming a nation in its own land.

There are fewer discussion questions in this session than in some previous weeks to give more time to discuss the group's next steps to put what they have learnt into action.

1. God chooses to make an agreement, not just with the rulers or heads of families but with those who have a lower status – women, children and foreigners in the land. It is important for each one of them, however seemingly insignificant, to hear and agree to the words of the covenant. Responsibility for obedience is shared by the whole community. The covenant is also with those not present – its impact will be felt by future generations.
2. The people commit to keeping God's commands – some of which we studied in week three – summarised in v.20 and in so doing blessing will come to the land. The natural world itself (heaven and earth) is a witness to the covenant, showing the way in which it will feel the effects of human actions for good or ill.

4. The first covenant between God and humanity is made with Noah, his family and all of the natural world after the flood. Other opportunities occur at the times of Moses, David and the prophets. Jesus offers us a new covenant, marked by his freely given sacrifice.
5. Loving God and listening to His voice help us to keep our covenant with God.

† Prayer

Take time over reading the covenant prayer and making the links with a Christian response to climate change. Encourage the group to come up with examples, related to your discussions in previous weeks, of being 'put to doing', of 'yielding all things' or any other relevant parts of the prayer.

Your donations to MRDF can help people in the world's poorest communities:

- Recover after emergencies like droughts and floods
- Learn new ways to farm that protect the environment
- Benefit from campaigning and education in the UK about climate change.

Thank you!

Turn over for feedback form ►

Feedback form

Thank you for using this Study Pack.

Please fill in this form to help us improve future MRDF publications.

How did you hear about the Study Pack?

- MRDF website or e-newsletter
 - Word of mouth
 - At an event
 - From another organisation or publication (please specify)
-

How many people were in your group?

- Fewer than 5
- 5-10
- 10-20
- 20+

What kind of group did you use the Pack with?

- House group
 - Women's group
 - Youth group
 - Lent group
 - Other (please specify)
-

Have you used an MRDF Study Pack before?

- Yes No

Have you used any other MRDF resources before? If so, which ones?

What did you like most about the Study Pack?

What did you like least about the Study Pack?

What actions will your group be taking in response?

Name _____

Address _____

E-mail address _____

Name of church _____

I/we would like to make a donation of £ _____
(cheques payable to MRDF)

giftaid it

- Tick here to gift aid an individual donation (gift aid envelopes are available from MRDF for members of your group to use). I pay income tax/capital gains tax equivalent to the amount MRDF will be reclaiming on my donation. Please reclaim the tax on all donations I have made in the last six years and all donations I make hereafter.
- I would like to receive news from MRDF monthly by e-mail/quarterly by post (delete as applicable)
- I would like to find out about becoming an MRDF Co-ordinator for my Church/Circuit

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Methodist Relief &
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MRDF makes **small miracles** possible for people living in the world's poorest communities.

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