

SESSION ONE

# "FOR THE LOVE OF"

A Christian Study of the Paris Agreement



## CLIMATE WITNESS PROJECT



## MATERIALS

- Newsprint/flip chart
- Markers
- Bibles
- Computer
- TV/projector

## INTRODUCTION (5 MINUTES)

Welcome the group to this faith-focused discussion on the issues arising from the Paris Climate Change Agreement, and open with prayer.

Share with the group that the earth belongs to the Lord and that he therefore has great concern for it. In the light of our concern for God's creation, we need to acknowledge what a vast majority of climate scientists report about climate change—namely, that climate change is occurring and is largely driven by human activity, and that unless the nations of the world take positive steps, there will be severe consequences, including:

- severe weather changes resulting in increased drought, more frequent flooding, and more severe storms;
- the melting of the polar ice caps;
- the enabling of diseases and viruses that have existed only in warm regions to move to more temperate zones;
- the destruction of species of animals and plants; and
- rising sea levels.

At this point, you may wish to ask how people feel their faith intersects with their concern for the earth. Had they thought of these things before? Do they think God cares about the earth itself—or only the people on it? You may wish to read from Genesis 1:21-31.

After a brief discussion, let participants know that these impacts are already being felt, as there have recently been more prolonged and extreme droughts, more torrential rains and flooding, readings that indicate warmer and more acidic ocean water, and consequent large-scale migrations of people and increases in food insecurity around the world.

Remind participants that people who are poor are the first to be hurt by these effects of climate change and that they have minimal resources to address the damages caused by it. This presents a dual dilemma for Christians: the degradation of the earth and the increased vulnerability of people living in poverty around the world. The Bible addresses both of these realities clearly. Ask for volunteers to look up Genesis 2:15 and Matthew 25:31-40.

Remind the group that Synod 2012 of the Christian Reformed Church in North America called congregations, classes, and denominational agencies to respond to the threat of climate change. The Climate Witness Project is a direct response to that call.

## SCRIPTURAL STUDY (10 MINUTES)

Have the volunteers who have looked up the Scripture passages read them aloud. Begin with Genesis 2:15, and discuss the insights that the following Hebrew-word study offers to our understanding of the passage. Then discuss the teaching of Matthew 25:31-40 and how it applies to the challenges of climate change today.

## Genesis 2:15

As you may already know, the Old Testament was written in Hebrew. Hebrew is a complex and poetic language, with deep symbolism and a broad range of meaning for many of its words. This often makes it difficult for translators to fully capture nuances of the language when translating it into English. Two examples of this challenge are in Genesis 2:15. The two operative verbs in this verse, *avad* and *shamar*, are translated in most versions as “work/till” and “keep/take care of,” as shown here in italics: “The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to *work* it and *take care of* it” (NIV). While these renderings are not necessarily wrong, they miss some of the depth of meaning conveyed in these Hebrew words.

The Hebrew word *avad* is found often in the Hebrew Scriptures, and it is most often used in the context of service. It reflects a relationship between two parties, wherein one party serves the other in exchange for food, shelter, and protection. This is precisely how it is used in another passage, Joshua 24:15: “As for me and my household, we will serve [*avad*] the Lord.” Joshua is declaring his service to the Lord in exchange for God’s covenant promises of love, provision, and protection. In Hebrew, *avad* refers to serving in the context of relationship.

The Hebrew word *shamar* is similarly nuanced. Also used throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, *shamar* most often reflects a committed state of guarding and protecting—that is, active protection against enemies and other threats.

In the context of Genesis 2:15, we can see that these Hebrew words have been carefully chosen to convey a particular kind of relationship between humans and the earth. As indicated by *avad*, humans are in a special relationship of service and reciprocity with the earth. Humans are also to *shamar* the earth—to actively and jealously protect it with the same tenacity that God protects his people.

## Matthew 25:31-40

Many people ask why Christians should care about responding to the needs of hungry people and others facing challenges around the world. In this passage, in which Jesus describes what is required of believers, we are clearly told that when we care for people in need, it is as if we are serving Jesus himself. Climate change often hurts people in poverty first, requiring those of us who call Jesus Lord to provide food, drink, and care in order to help people in poverty have an improved quality of life.

## SCREEN THE FILM (22 MINUTES)

View the film *For the Love Of* at <https://vimeo.com/163718465>. You will need a reliable Internet connection to stream the film. If that is not available, you can also download the video from the same site to your computer beforehand.

## QUESTIONS AFTER THE FILM (15 MINUTES)

After you show the film, discuss the following questions with the group. Write down the group’s answers on newsprint and bring it back for Session Two.

- Why do you think the four evangelical worship leaders went to Paris for the climate talks?
- In your opinion, what do you think the worship leaders were hoping the Paris talks would produce?
- “I don’t think that anyone cares what I have to say about the next life until they see that I care about this life.” What do you think of this quote from John Mark McMillan? How does this statement apply to climate change? How does this statement apply to your day-to-day faith as a follower of Jesus?

SESSION TWO

# "FOR THE LOVE OF"

A Christian Study of the Paris Agreement



## CLIMATE WITNESS PROJECT



## MATERIALS

- Newsprint/flip chart from Session One
- Handouts—one copy per person
- Write the Bible verses from Session One on a sheet of newsprint

## INTRODUCTION (10 MINUTES)

Open in prayer. If you sense the Spirit leading you to do so, concentrate on the Lord’s Prayer phrase “on earth as it is in heaven” and ask God that your wills may be shaped so that they will match his will. Ask God to shape the conversation during this study time so that your behaviors toward the earth and its people look more in line with God’s will all the time.

Review your discussion from Session One by going over the notes you wrote on newsprint during your discussion time. Review the Scripture passages from Session One.

## READ A SUMMARY OF THE PARIS AGREEMENT (10 MINUTES)

Ask the group to summarize the God-focused takeaways from the previous session. In light of those, distribute copies of the handout “The Paris Agreement: A Summary.” Read this document aloud as a group, perhaps with each person taking a paragraph/bullet point. When you are finished, discuss the following questions together.

## DISCUSS (30 MINUTES)

- Now that you have learned a bit more about the Paris Agreement, what strikes you as particularly redemptive or God-focused about it? At what points does it resonate with your faith?
- Do you think the worship leaders who went to Paris were pleased with the Paris Agreement? Why? What strikes you as a particularly important element of it?
- What do you still have questions about with regard to climate change? How might you go about finding answers to those questions?
- “We are the first generation to fully understand the dangers of climate change, and the last generation with time to do something about it.” How does this statement by Mary Robinson make you feel? If this is true, what might it mean for your life? For the life of your church?
- What is the Spirit calling you and your congregation to do as a result of this learning? Will you engage in deeper learning? Or perhaps in a conversation with a member of your congregation or family? Or in leading a study like this one for more people in your congregation? Or in writing a letter to your member of Congress? Or in reducing the use of energy in your home and congregation? Whatever your response may be—even if it’s unclear to you now—commit it to prayer and see how God will continue to guide you.

## CLOSING (5 MINUTES)

Thank everyone for their participation. Note that the sheet you distributed has resources for next steps on the back, including a URL to the Climate Witness Project’s webpages ([crcna.org/cwp](http://crcna.org/cwp)). Ask someone to close with prayer.

## The Paris Agreement: A Summary

What actually happened in Paris? Something quite remarkable: an agreement was struck between every nation of the world on a common way forward for addressing the threat of global climate change. This was no small task, and it stands as a testament to decades of diplomacy, negotiation, and grassroots organizing. Here's what the Agreement actually includes:

- **An ambitious, long-term temperature goal** of keeping global warming “well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels” and of pursuing efforts “to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.” The world has already seen a one-degree increase since 1880, making this goal more important than ever.
- **Pledges to reduce greenhouse gas emissions** from every nation of the world through nationally determined contributions (NDCs). These are essentially individualized pledges that each country has decided it can commit to, making the Paris Agreement more participatory and much less top-down than previous attempts at a global climate accord. These pledges alone, however, will not get us where we need to be in order to limit the global average temperature rise to 2°C. Currently, pledges will get us to somewhere between 2.7 and 3 degrees C above pre-industrial levels.
- **A long-term goal of zero net global greenhouse gas emissions** by the “end of the century.” Many scientists have warned that this goal must be reached by 2070, rather than the end of the century, in order to avoid the most catastrophic effects of climate change, but the deal does not specifically reference this date.
- **A five-year review cycle** that will bring the nations of the world together at regular intervals to assess their progress and to reassess the commitments needed in order to reach the long-term temperature and emissions goals. This is a critical piece of the Paris Agreement because it builds in opportunities to take stock of progress and to amend nationally determined commitments if targets are not being met. This is the Paris Agreement's built-in “course correction,” and it is set to begin in 2023.
- **A commitment from developed countries to mobilize \$100 billion by 2020**, and \$100 billion every year thereafter, to assist developing countries as they work to reduce their emissions and to adapt to the effects of climate change. It also leaves the door open to increase this commitment—something that most experts agree will be necessary moving forward.

Though not perfect, the Paris Agreement has sent a clear and decisive message to businesses, investors, people of faith, and those made vulnerable by a changing climate that the nations of the world intend to get serious about climate change. However, it is only the starting point, not the finish line, and much work remains in order to turn the important words of this agreement into even more important action.

## Resources for Next Steps

If you are ready to address the issue of climate change, the Climate Witness Project is here to help. The Climate Witness Project (CWP) has been working for over a year to walk alongside churches as they grow in their knowledge of climate change, as they take steps to decrease their greenhouse gas footprint by increasing their energy efficiency and using less energy, and as they raise their voice with their elected officials for a just and compassionate climate policy. So far, over 200 people from more than 35 congregations have become part of the CWP. Will you join them?

Head over to [crcna.org/cwp](http://crcna.org/cwp) to find out how your church can get plugged in, and to find lots of additional resources and opportunities. Here are some of the resources you'll find there:

### Learning Resources — [justice.crcna.org/resources-6](http://justice.crcna.org/resources-6)

- **Climate Conversation: Kenya videos and discussion guide**  
A video series exploring the impacts of climate change on farmers in Kenya, highlighting both the challenges and the hopeful solutions already being employed.
- **Climate Witness Project Op-Eds**  
A collection of 14 op-eds about climate change, the Paris Agreement, and Christian faith written by CRC participants in the Climate Witness Project.
- **What's Really Warming the World**  
An informative, interactive resource from Bloomberg exploring all of the likeliest explanations for current global warming. Human emissions of greenhouse gases are clearly seen to be the primary cause.
- **TED Talk: Katharine Hayhoe | What If Climate Change Is Real?**  
A clear and accessible talk from evangelical climate scientist Katherine Hayhoe. Explains the clear connection between concern for the climate and Christian faith. Great to share with a skeptical friend!

### Advocacy Opportunities — [justice.crcna.org/advocacy](http://justice.crcna.org/advocacy)

- **Biblical Advocacy 101**  
A resource from the Office of Social Justice exploring the biblical basis for Christian advocacy on issues like climate change.
- **Subscribe to Action Alerts and Updates**  
The Climate Witness Project sends out monthly newsletters, as well as periodic action alerts, related to creation care and climate concerns. Sign up to receive them in your inbox.

### Energy Stewardship — [justice.crcna.org/energy-stewardship](http://justice.crcna.org/energy-stewardship)

- **U.S. EPA Sure Energy Savers**  
A helpful list of first steps we can take to reduce energy use in our homes and church facilities.
- **Global Footprint Network | Footprint Calculator**  
A resource to help provide a baseline for your personal energy consumption and to offer ideas on how to reduce it.