

# main course

## u-turn: bible study on climate change

### AIM

To enable a biblical response to the facts of climate change.

### TIMING

Allow 60-90 minutes (the same material will tend to take longer with a larger group, less with a small group)

### PARTICIPANTS

This Bible Study will be enriched if children of primary age and upwards are included.

### INTRODUCTION

Climate change has become an important subject for all the world's people. It is therefore particularly important that those of us who live in the substantially richer Western countries spend some time thinking about it and acting on what we discover. It is with this need in mind that this Bible study is offered here.

### STRUCTURE

#### Part 1 (20-30 minutes)

#### Climate change – the West and the Rest

Brainstorm on what people know about climate change. This may be quite a lot, or not much, according to the group. Children and teenagers are likely to know quite a lot.

Here are some background facts about climate change. It is a good idea to see that these are included if they are not brought up spontaneously. However, it is also really important to listen to the group. Therefore in order to bring this information into the group the facilitators should first discuss how this might work. Having this information on small cards that could be given out to members of the group to read at an appropriate point is one way this might be done. But remember, the session is a discussion not a monologue from one person about what they know about climate change<sup>1</sup>:

- The earth is getting hotter, and it is predicted that temperatures will rise by between 2 and 6°C by the end of the century. This will cause more heat waves everywhere; more flooding in wet areas; more tropical cyclones; more drought in dry areas, the melting of the ice cap at the North Pole in summer and a rapid rise in sea levels.
- Scientists are clear that the reason for these changes is the concentration of greenhouse gases caused by human consumption of fuels (carbon emissions).
- Those countries which contribute most to the problem are least affected by the consequences and vice-versa; so the poorest countries, which use least fuel, are suffering most.

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<sup>1</sup> From: *Hope in God's Future: Christian Discipleship in the context of Climate Change*: A theological assessment of Climate Change: a joint project of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church.

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- Food production in Africa and elsewhere will become even more difficult.
- By the middle of the century there are likely to be as many as 20 million refugees (mostly to neighbouring countries) as a result of climate change
- Up to 70% of animal species may become extinct.
- The UK Government has committed itself to reducing carbon emissions by at least 80% by 2050; but even if this is achieved (and there is a long way to go) and even if other nations act in the same way parts of the world will still be uninhabitable and many plant and animal species will become extinct.
- Our fellow-Christians are suffering because of climate change. For example, the island of Tuvalu in the Pacific will soon disappear altogether. The Pacific Conference of Churches has called on *'our sisters and brothers in Christ throughout the world to act in solidarity with us to reduce the causes of human induced climate change. We issue this call especially to churches in the highly industrialised nations whose societies are historically responsible for the majority of polluting emissions. We further urge these countries to take responsibility for the ecological damage that they have caused by paying for the costs of adaptation to the anticipated impacts'*.

### Part 2 – 20 to 30 minutes

#### A story about change

Invite the group to tell, from memory, the story of Zacchaeus. Divide into small groups to do this. If you are already a small group, divide into pairs if people are comfortable with this. After a few minutes re-convene and have each small group or pair tell the story as they have remembered it. Enjoy the repetitions, contradictions and differences of emphasis that happen between the tellings. This is not about 'getting the right version' but about hearing the different voices and interpretations of the group. Each small group needs to own their own version. Remind participants not to interrupt when these are shared but to listen respectfully.

Then talk about

- What struck you most about this story today?
- What was it about Jesus that made Zacchaeus do his dramatic about-turn?
- What does this story tell us today about ourselves and God?

### Part 3 – 20 – 30 minutes

#### Making connections

Ask: *What sort of connections can we see between the story of Zacchaeus and our part in climate change?*

- What sort of conversion did Zacchaeus experience? What does conversion mean to us? Could it mean taking responsibility for our part in the destructiveness of climate change?
- What was the outcome of the story? And what practical steps do we need to take in the light of all we have talked about?

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- People of goodwill can be part of a greedy, sinful, society. Everyone is part of the things that go wrong as a result of the way society works. We need to be talking to Government as well as making changes in our personal lifestyles. How can we persuade our government to hold to its target of reducing carbon emissions and to do more?
- Who is involved in making personal changes to reduce their carbon footprint? How? Make sure that some positive stories of simple but effective action are told to end the session.

### Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, guest of sinners,  
You have come to seek and save the lost.  
Come to this house today.  
We welcome you. We know we need to change.  
We promise that we will not rest until justice is restored  
In our lives, in our nation, in our world  
And until this world becomes a safe place for everyone to live in.  
Thank you for choosing us. We love you!  
Your Kingdom come. your will be done  
Even here, on this troubled earth.

Amen.

### EVALUATION

Please try to answer these questions for yourself and for others who will use this material:

1. What was the most helpful thing?
2. What was the least helpful thing?
3. What would you like to try now?

### THE NEXT STEP

If you want more main courses please revisit the menu.

You may want to look at the following resources about climate change that are not on the Vision4life website:

*At the Water's Edge* Christian Aid Bible Study.

Operation Noah website. <http://www.operationnoah.org/>

*Hope in God's Future: Christian Discipleship in the context of Climate Change: A theological assessment of Climate Change: a joint project of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church.*

The Green Pages in each month's *Reform* magazine

### Acknowledgements

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