

Christianity, Climate Change and Sustainable Living

Five Bible studies



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Christianity, Climate Change and Sustainable Living Bible Studies

introduction

Those who have followed the work of Tearfund and the Jubilee Centre will not be surprised to see us exploring together a Christian response to the environmental challenges that we all face in the 21st century.

Since 1983 the Jubilee Centre has conducted research into a biblical vision for society and how that vision might inform our response to a wide range of contemporary concerns. This has taken us into Sunday trading, credit and debt, international peace-building, criminal justice, care for the elderly, asylum and immigration, and numerous other fields. Wherever possible, we have partnered with like-minded organisations, believing that we are more effective and have greater influence when we cooperate with others. Our goal has always been the big picture – a rival to the ‘isms’ of our age. In 2005 we drew together the conclusions of our work to date in *Jubilee Manifesto: A framework, agenda and strategy for Christian social reform*, edited by Michael Schluter and John Ashcroft (IVP).

Our contention is that our well-being, both individually and collectively, is an essentially relational issue. Relationships is the big idea.

Applied to the question of climate change, these studies explore the relational roots to the whole debate about the environment. If perfect love of God and neighbour is the pinnacle of the good life (Matthew 22:34-40), then disordered relationship – both with God and others – is the root of every evil. Our failure to love God means we fail to care for the things God cares about, including the earth. As physical creatures, we possess an intimate solidarity with the earth; our well-being is tied to its. Failure to care for creation, therefore, is also symptomatic of a breakdown of love for our neighbours, whether they be near or far, in space or in time.

But ours is a message of hope: the cross and the empty tomb announce that we *can* live a rich relational life.

As we think relationally, some things begin to matter more and others less. Family time, local community life and a shared day off, for example, assume a new urgency, and our former habits of gratuitous consumption start to look rather shallow. In short, our argument is that relational priorities and environmental priorities are pulling in the same direction. Societies that actively pursue relational well-being will tread more lightly upon the earth.

The social vision that we find in these studies possesses an elegant unity, which we at the Jubilee Centre have come to expect of biblical wisdom. We are delighted to be partnering with Tearfund, whose passion for the local church, for justice and for transforming lives is well-known and without whose perspective these studies would not be what they are. We commend the studies to Christians and non-Christians alike as a uniquely holistic response to the questions of how and why we should care for the environment.

Dr John Hayward
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God and creation

aim

To consider God's attitude to the created world, and how this should affect our own attitudes.

ingredients

- Photos of the natural world or some natural objects (stones, plants, flowers, etc)
- Bibles

icebreaker

This question is intended to get people talking, to help the group get to know each other better, and to introduce the topic of the study.

Go round the group and ask everyone to answer the following question:

What thing that you've created (made, written, sewn, built, painted, drawn) are you most proud of? Describe it, and say why you're proud of it.

praise & prayer

This study is all about God's creation, and the aim of this section is to focus on and appreciate the goodness of what God has made (Genesis 1:31).

Put your photos/objects in the centre of the room, and ask each member of your group to pick out one (or think of another natural object or event of which they have direct experience). Take turns to describe what it is about that object or event that gives you a sense of wonder at what God has made.

Spend some time praying together, thanking God for who he is and for what he has created.

study

The aim of this study is to consider God's attitude to creation and to think about how that affects the way we live and the way we relate to the earth.

Read Genesis 1:1-25.

You might like to allocate this reading to six different people in the group, to give a sense of the six days: verses 1-5 = day 1, verses 6-8 = day 2, verses 9-13 = day 3, verses 14-19 = day 4, verses 20-23 = day 5, verses 24-25 = day 6

- Why do you think Genesis describes the creation of the world in such detail?
- What does this passage tell us about the nature of non-human creation?
- What does this passage tell us about what God is like?
- What is the purpose of creation? Who was the earth created for?

Read Psalm 65.

- List the ways this psalm describes God's relationship with human and non-human creation. Do any of the descriptions in this passage surprise you?
- Compare God's attitude to non-human creation in this psalm with his attitude to human beings elsewhere in the Bible (eg Job 38-39; Psalm 8; Matthew 10:29-31; Luke 12:24). What are the similarities? What are the differences?

God, creation, and us

- If we are called to be like God, what do these passages tell us about how we should relate to creation?
- What might this mean in our lives, particularly given that we live in a society where the majority of people don't encounter much of 'nature' in their everyday lives?

"One has to ask [Christians] if they can imagine the pain of the parents who lovingly create a home for their children and one night return to find it wrecked by a teenage party, or simply treated as a hotel with a fridge to be raided and a place to dump dirty clothes; or of Michelangelo completing the Sistine Chapel ceiling and sharing all his learning, experience and skill with his children, then offering them the use of his paints for their own artistic expression – and finding that they have used them to scrawl ugly graffiti across his masterpiece."

Stephen Rand in *The care of creation: focusing concern and action*

challenge

This section aims to help your group to apply what they've discussed to their own lives.

Reflect on the way in which all our lives are dependent on the environment.

- In what ways has our society insulated us from this dependence?
- If there is a shortage of rain what are the impacts on us?
- What might the impacts be if you were a subsistence farmer in West Africa?

Luther is supposed to have remarked: 'If I knew Jesus would return tomorrow, I would plant a tree today.'

Encourage people to think of one thing they could do differently this week to reflect God's care for creation better in their own lives. They could consider how they might help cultivate, sustain or preserve the world around them. Agree to check up on each other to make sure that you do what you have said you will do.

summary

Genesis tells us that when God created the world he didn't make it instantly, with the snap of a finger or a single word, but that he crafted it bit by bit, declaring it 'good' at every stage of its development. This good creation was abundant and diverse, with plants, trees, birds, fish, and animals 'of every kind'.

But this initial careful work of God was not the end of his involvement. Throughout the Bible, he is depicted as intimately involved with sustaining his creation at every moment. He knows about every sparrow that falls to the ground; the rain, mist, lightning and wind appear at his word; everything holds together in him. The language of Psalm 65 is the language of love, of God lavishing his goodness on a beloved creation; and the earth responds with praise.

The created world is God's masterpiece: he crafted it lovingly to reflect his character; he continually sustains it and works for its fruitfulness and abundance. God's attitude to creation indicates that it is precious and wonderful, independent of any utility it possesses for us. To love God and to be like him is to care for the things that he cares for. This alone ought to be enough to motivate us to take responsibility for the world around us.

These are the main ideas that this study is intended to draw out; but it's important to make space for the people in your group to engage with scripture for themselves. If you push people too hard towards the answers you think they should find, you'll stifle the discussion and it will become a teaching session rather than a study. The different people in your group will notice different things in the text, and may be able to contribute ideas that you haven't thought of. Don't be frightened of difficult questions or new ideas – these can be some of the most exciting elements of studying the Bible together.

You can read more about the theme of this study in *Christianity, climate change and sustainable living* by Nick Spencer and Robert White (SPCK, 2007) pp78-81.

the image of God

aim

To think about what it means to be human, and how God intended us to treat creation.

ingredients

- Paper and pens
- Envelopes, stamps, and the address of your local councillors and MP
- Bibles

icebreaker

This question is intended to get people talking, to help the group get to know each other better, and to introduce the topic of the study.

Give everyone a piece of paper and a pen, and allow five minutes for them to draw self-portraits. When they're done, go round the group looking at their self-portraits, and ask each person about what they've drawn. What have they included and why? What have they missed out, and why? What can the group tell about each person from what they have drawn? If anyone feels uncomfortable doing this, they could describe someone in their family or someone else outside the group.

praise & prayer

This study is all about what it means for us to be like God, and the aim of this section is to think about the ways we can see God in the people around us, and to praise God for those things (it's also a good opportunity to encourage one another!).

Go round the group again, and, this time, ask the group to talk about the ways in which each person reflects God. Use people's own self-portraits as a basis for discussion, but feel free to mention any other things about the group members that reflect

who God is. Spend some time praying together, thanking God for one another.

study

The aim of this study is to consider what it means to be made in the image of God, and how this should affect the way we treat the earth.

Read Genesis 1:26-2:15.

- Keeping to the evidence you find in this passage, discuss what you think it means to be made in the image of God.
- What do you think it means to have rule (or 'dominion') over the earth (see also Genesis 2:15)? Note: the Hebrew word for 'to work' (or 'to till'), *abad*, can also be translated, 'to serve', and the word for 'to take care of' (or 'to keep'), *shamar*, can also mean 'to preserve, protect'.

"Man has been endowed with reason, with the power to create, so that he can add to what he's been given. But up to now he hasn't been a creator, only a destroyer. Forests keep disappearing, rivers dry up, wild life's become extinct, the climate's ruined and the land grows poorer and uglier every day."

Anton Chekhov, *Uncle Vanya*, 1897

Now read Ezekiel 34.

- What characteristics of God's rule are evident from this passage?
- If our call to 'have dominion' is part of what it means for us to be made in the image of God, how does this picture of God's rule affect how we rule over the earth?

the image of God

Biblical scholars suggest three different ways of understanding what it means for humans to be made 'in the image of God':

substance: this is the idea that something intrinsic and unique to humans is the image of God in them. Some things that have been suggested are: reason, moral awareness, creativity and a deep concern for justice.

relational: this is the idea that what makes humans uniquely 'in the image of God' is their ability to have relationships with one another and with God. Genesis 1:27, 'male and female he created them', indicates that the image of God is about relationships.

functional: this is the idea that the image of God is about humanity's call to 'have dominion' over the earth, and so the image of God is about its role within creation, reflecting the lordship of God.

It's possible to see all three of these views as reflecting different aspects of the image of God – feel free to discuss which you think most closely reflects what the passage in Genesis actually says.

The language of being 'in the image of God' is found in other societies around Israel at the time Genesis was written, usually used of kings, who were thought to be God's representatives on earth. In some cultures, the king would have to give an annual account of his rule, and would only be allowed to continue to represent God if he had ruled well.

The language of the image of God in Genesis is unusual because it makes humanity as a whole God's representative on earth. Together, we have authority to rule the earth, and we should do so in a way that honours God.

challenge

This section aims to help your group to apply what they've discussed to their own lives.

Ask people how they got on with last week's challenge to reflect God's care for creation in their lives.

This week's challenge: because humanity as a whole is called to represent God's rule on earth, we need to take responsibility for our collective as well as our individual actions to care for the earth. In Britain we live in a democracy, which means that we elect people to represent our concerns in local and national government. Encourage the group to identify specific policy proposals relating to sustainability and the environment that affect them – these might include congestion charging, housing development or energy generation schemes. Consider which communities might suffer as a consequence of these proposals – locally, nationally or internationally. Take some time to write to your politicians. Ask them how they respond to your concerns and encourage them to consider taking action on some of the environmental issues which you think are most important.

summary

Genesis makes it quite clear that part of the role that God created us to play in the world is to rule over creation. But this call to 'have dominion' over the earth isn't a licence to exploit the earth or to treat it any way we like.

Because our authority over the earth is part of the image of God in us, it requires us to ask the question: what does God's rule look like, and how can we reflect God in our treatment of the earth? As we see in Ezekiel 34, God is the shepherd king who promises to take care of the weak and the broken. Psalm 10 says that God takes care of the meek and does justice for the orphan and the oppressed, and in Philippians 2, Paul exhorts us to: 'have the same attitude of mind Christ Jesus had who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant.'

The God in whose image we are made, and whose rule we are called to imitate and to represent on earth, isn't a selfish tyrant but a servant ruler who loves us. Too often our concept of power and authority is based on our experience of sinful human rule; the story of Jesus calls us to re-evaluate our understanding in the light of the God whose power is most fully expressed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, who came 'not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many' (Matthew 20:28).

You can read more about the theme of this study in *Christianity, climate change and sustainable living* by Nick Spencer and Robert White (SPCK 2007) pp 81-86.

sin, the earth, and the promise of redemption

aim

To consider the effects of sin on our relationship with the earth, and the implications of God's promised redemption for our attitude to creation.

ingredients

- A packet of flower seeds
- Bibles

icebreaker

This question is intended to get people talking, to help the group get to know each other better, and to introduce the topic of the study.

Go round the group and ask everyone to answer the following question:

What is your best and worst experience of the natural world?

praise & prayer

This study is all about our interaction with creation, and this reflection is to set the context for the study.

Allow your group a few minutes to read the following poem twice through in silence. Then read it aloud a final time, slowly. Spend a moment talking about what struck you. Then pray, thanking God that he has not given up on his world.

God's grandeur

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil

Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs—
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

– Gerard Manley Hopkins

study

The aim of this study is to consider how creation is affected by sin and the fall, and what God's promises for redemption have to say about the future of the earth.

Read Genesis 3.

- What effect does Adam and Eve's sin have on creation?
- Why does human sin have an impact on the earth?
- The passage suggests that the earth is damaged by human sin; where can we see this effect in the world today?

Read Romans 8:18-24.

- What might it mean that the earth 'groans'?
- What does the promised redemption mean for creation?

Read Revelation 21:1-5 and 21:22–22:7.

- In this description of the new heaven and the new earth, what is similar to the description of the Garden of Eden, and what is different?

'Heaven is important, but it's not the end of the world!'

N T Wright, sermon given 23 September 2006 'The Road to New Creation'

- Do you see any similarities between what humans will do in this picture of the new earth and what Genesis says human beings were created to do (as discussed in Study 2)?
- What might 'glory and honour' be (Revelation 21:26)?
- What other similarities and differences do you observe between our earth and this picture in Revelation?
- How do you think this picture of the new heaven and new earth should affect our attitude to creation today?

Humans and the earth

In Genesis 2, there is no one to till the ground, so God forms man (*adam*) from the ground (*adamah*) and asks him to till and to keep it. This Hebrew wordplay (*adam/adamah*) expresses our solidarity with the earth; we are connected to it and dependent upon it for life.

For this reason Psalm 139:13-15 can parallel the 'womb of the earth' with 'a mother's womb'. Humans are both physical and spiritual and the two ought not to be separated. To care for creation, then, is to care for a system that we are part of; in caring for the earth, we care for ourselves.

The original harmony between humans and the earth was ruptured by the fall. But even here, the essential solidarity between *adam* and *adamah* is reiterated. The earth becomes difficult to farm, cursed because of human disobedience. We suffer when creation suffers, and it is our sin that causes creation's suffering. Most dramatically, God announces that humanity will revert to the earth upon death, a tragic reversal of the original act of creation: 'for dust you are, and to dust you will return.' (Genesis 3:19)

challenge

This section aims to help your group to apply what they've discussed to their own lives.

Give every member of your group a few seeds to plant. Ask everyone to:

- Plant some in your garden, flowerpot or window box as a reminder that 'creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God' (Romans 8:21).
- Or do some 'guerrilla gardening' – find a patch of bare earth in your neighbourhood and plant seeds there as a symbol of hope.
- Or do something of your choosing that will make your local environment more beautiful, in your garden or a public space.

As you plant your seeds, pray for those whose harvests have failed because the rain didn't come, or whose crops were washed away in a downpour. Ask God to help you consider where the food that you buy comes from. Are there changes you could make to your consumption habits that would positively impact your neighbours in other countries?

Agree to check back next week to see whether people have planted their seeds (or the task of their choosing) as an act of worship and hope.

summary

This study aims to help your group engage with the importance of creation in God's story of redemption. All too often creation is seen simply as the stage on which the drama of human salvation is worked out, or as something inherently sinful and needing transformation. Even the language we use, 'the environment', implies that the earth exists only as a space for us to live in, with no value in its own right.

The Bible paints a very different picture: of a God who cares for a

creation which is 'good'(as we saw in Study 1); of care for creation not as a side issue but as an important part of the role God intended us to play (as we saw in Study 2); of an earth which isn't incidental to the story of humanity, but is bound up with it, being broken and cursed by our sin, and 'eagerly awaiting' the redemption which will come only when we too are redeemed.

The promise of salvation is that we, and the earth which we are part of and which is part of us, will be redeemed together; together made new. In Christ, 'all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven' are being reconciled to God (Colossians 1:20).

You can read more about the theme of this study in *Christianity, climate change and sustainable living* by Nick Spencer and Robert White (SPCK, 2007) pp 89-97.

loving our neighbour

aim

To think about the impact of environmental issues on others, and to consider ways in which we can love our neighbour by caring for the earth.

ingredients

- A big sheet of paper
- Some fair trade food that's suitable for sharing
- Bibles

icebreaker

This question is intended to get people talking, to help the group get to know each other better, and to introduce the topic of the study.

Ask everybody in your group to answer the following question:

What were the last three things that you bought, and where did you buy them from? What factors affected your decision to buy those particular items?

As people answer, write a list of the items they bought on the sheet of paper. When everyone has answered, discuss the following questions:

Which people have been affected (positively and negatively) by our decision to spend money on these things?

What effect do you think the production, transport, and sale of the items we have bought had on the environment?

How might these environmental impacts affect different people around the world?

praise & prayer

This question is intended to help people to focus on God and to thank him for the good things that he has made.

Bring out some fair trade food products that are good for sharing (eg cake and biscuits). Discuss, if you haven't already, its ingredients and all the people involved in the process of making, transporting, and selling the food to you. See how many fair trade schemes† members in the group are aware of. Spend time thinking about all of these people. Pray for them and give thanks to God for them and for the earth's resources involved in making this food available to you.

Then, pass the food around and eat it. Enjoy the fruit of so many people's labours!

† Examples include the Fairtrade Foundation, Kingdom Coffee, C.A.F.E., Rainforest Alliance, Utz Certified, Green & Blacks, Red Tractor, Spirit Of Nature, Kuyichi clothes

study

Read Luke 10:25-37.

- Who is your neighbour?
- In a global society, the everyday decisions we make affect more people than ever before, and in the news we're constantly confronted by the needs of thousands of people around the world. How do we love our neighbour in this context, where we can't possibly meet every need we encounter?
- Our previous studies have emphasised the importance of caring for the earth. How do we balance this call with the call to love our neighbour?
- The issue of climate change is an increasingly urgent one, threatening the lives and livelihoods of the world's poorest people. What could you do differently that would enable you to express love for neighbour more fully in relation to this issue?
- What other benefits might there be for our relationships if we order our lives so that we consume less?

global relationships

Hopefully your evaluation of the ways you've spent your money recently will have shown that even the smallest decisions we make have an impact on huge numbers of people around the world.

The more connected we are to people around the world, the greater our responsibility for our global 'neighbours'. The good news, though, is that we increasingly have the power to use even our small decisions in ways that have a global impact.

It's tempting to separate out concern for the environment from concern for social justice, or for preaching the gospel to all nations, but in fact all of those things are connected by the fundamental fact of human relationships – all people are dependent on the earth, on each other, and on God for everything they need to live. Our role in all of the relationships that we are involved in is to demonstrate, live, and proclaim the gospel; to be God's agents of redemption on the earth; to model a new humanity.

What does this look like? Jesus summarises God's will like this: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' (Matthew 22:37) As in the parable of the Good Samaritan, we are called to love our 'neighbours' by taking care of their bodies as well as their souls, which requires us to take care of the earth, with which we are all interconnected.

Environmental destruction has consequences for people both around the world (it is the poorest and most vulnerable who are most at risk from environmental devastation) and down the generations: the call to love our neighbour extends to our children and grandchildren, and on into the future.

Caring for the environment is part of our call to 'bring salvation to the ends of the earth' (Acts 13:47) because we need to live out the good news of God's redemption – the promise that we can become the sort of humans that God always intended us to be – at the same time as we proclaim it.

(continued...)

In addition, the call to work towards God's promised future ought to spur us on anew to evangelism as the essential component of mission. If right rule of the earth requires a renewed relationship of love with God the King, then we cannot ever ignore the need to draw others to him through repentance and faith in Christ, as we work toward the redemption of all things.

challenge

This section aims to help your group to apply what they've discussed to their own lives.

Encourage people to think of one thing they could do differently this week to reduce their carbon emissions. Agree to check up on each other to make sure that you do what you have said you will do.

Use the Tearfund booklet For Tomorrow Too or the Jubilee Centre-World Vision booklet Global Poverty, Global Warming for inspiration (these can be downloaded from www.tearfund.org/climate and www.jubilee-centre.org respectively).

summary

This study is intended to help your group engage with the relational importance of caring for the earth. Two of the foundational Christian beliefs – that God is love, and that God is Trinity – point us towards a theme that occurs throughout the Bible: the supreme importance of love, and therefore the idea that it is relationships, above all, which matter.

The two greatest commandments are that we love God and love one another; the mark of those who know God is (or ought to be) the way that they love one another. Jesus, the lynchpin of history and the fullest revelation of God's nature to us, lived, died and rose as an expression of God's great love for us. Above all else, we were created for relationships with God and with one another.

But these relationships don't happen in a vacuum between entirely spiritual beings. We are both bodies and souls, physical and spiritual, and we relate to each other and to God not only spiritually and emotionally but also through the physical world.

Even in the new heavens and the new earth we won't become disembodied spirits, but instead will have bodies, albeit bodies transformed and glorified.

How we treat the physical world is important because we are physical, and to love one another we need to take care of one another's physical needs. Our treatment of the earth has consequences for relationships because we depend on the earth for everything we need for physical life.

You can read more about the theme of this study in *Christianity, climate change and sustainable living* by Nick Spencer and Robert White (SPCK, 2007) pp 86-89 and pp 167-185.

a model of sustainable living

aim

To think about what it means to live in a way that is truly sustainable, with particular attention to how our relationships affect the environment.

ingredients

- Bibles
- Pens
- Paper

icebreaker

This question is intended to get people talking, to help the group get to know each other better, and to introduce the topic of the study.

Ask everybody in your group to name one way in which they think that the world is getting better, and one way in which they think it is getting worse.

praise & prayer

This activity is intended to help the group to focus in on God and to thank him for the rest and redemption he brings.

Give everyone a pen and paper. Read out Isaiah 60:1-4 and Revelation 22:3-5, and ask the members of your group to write their own prayer (or psalm) of thanksgiving that God will be his people's light in the redeemed creation. Once everyone has finished, invite the group to read out what they've written.

Israel as a model of a sustainable society

Our current levels of consumption are unsustainable, and have serious consequences for the earth, and for other people around the world, and in the future. We need to live differently if we are to live sustainably, but what would a sustainable society look like?

The laws given to Israel in the Old Testament provide a model of a sustainable society – the legislation of Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy paints a picture of a nation set up to live in right relationship with God, with one another and with the earth.

When our relationships with God and others are 'disordered' the earth too suffers. We cannot be concerned for the earth without also addressing the *relational causes* of environmental degradation.

study

The aim of this study is to learn from how we might live in a way that is truly sustainable by looking at lessons from how early Israel was organised as a society.

Read Leviticus 25:8-24.

- What impact do you think this legislation had on relationship in the families and communities it affected? What attitudes was it intended to encourage?
- In what ways do you think the Jubilee was good for family and community relationships *as well as* being good for the environment?
- How are broken family and community relationships negatively affecting the environment today? What might the principles of the Jubilee look like in our situation?

Read Exodus 20:8-10 and Leviticus 25:1-7.

- What impact do you think this legislation had on relationship in the families and communities it affected? What attitudes was it intended to encourage?
- In what ways do you think the Sabbath was good for relationship with God, for family and community relationships and for the environment?

- How does our increasingly 24/7 society affect the environment? How do you think the principles of the Sabbath might be followed today?

Jubilee and Sabbath in the New Testament

Jesus begins his ministry (Luke 4:14-21) by quoting Isaiah 61, which picks up on the language of Leviticus 25. His emphasis on the forgiveness of sins (eg Matthew 6:12) similarly uses Jubilee language to describe the good news he preaches. This is the purpose of Jesus' ministry – to make real in the fullest sense the 'liberty' promised in the Jubilee, which was for the benefit of the land as well as the people.

In addition, Jesus becomes involved in controversy over the Sabbath in all four Gospels, as he does things that the Pharisees considered to be work. When challenged, Jesus makes it clear that the pedantic approach to the Sabbath which even objects to people being healed is missing the point: 'The Sabbath was made for people, not people for the Sabbath' (Mark 2:27). Jesus doesn't reject the principle of the Sabbath, but instead draws attention to its underlying purpose – to do good to those who observe it.

Hebrews also draws on the language of the Sabbath, and uses it as an image of God's promised salvation (Hebrews 4). The Sabbath is not seen in the New Testament as a burden but as a blessing, and as a picture of society redeemed.

challenge

This section aims to help your group to apply what they've discussed to their own lives.

Ask each person the following questions:

- What have you learnt from these five studies? How have you changed your opinions and beliefs about the issues you have looked at?
- What are you going to do differently as a result?
- How are you going to ensure that the changes you make are lasting?

summary

The reality is that many of the things we do as a society which damage the earth are related to other elements of our human sinfulness. If we look at the issue of climate change we see that there are three main areas (transport, household energy use, and habits of consumption) in which we as individuals contribute to climate change, and in all of these areas we see the effects of human sin.

We travel further to work than ever before, and do so increasingly alone in our own cars. This affects not only the climate, but also our relationships with those around us. American sociologist Robert Putnam estimates that for every ten minutes of additional commuting time, there is a corresponding 10% decrease in our social interactions. Carbon emissions from home energy use have risen most significantly because of the increase in single-occupancy homes. As a trend, this is bad for our relationships with other people and our involvement with community as well as for the environment, as we each consume ever more energy.

The most significant proportion of our household carbon emissions comes from our habits of consumption, which in many areas (eg communication, recreation, clothing and footwear) has tripled over the past few decades. Our lives have become more about owning 'stuff', as we buy in to the belief that more things will make us happier and as we struggle to forge our identity by the things we own. Our desire for cheap goods all too often overrides our desire for justice for the poor, or any consideration of the effect of our lifestyles on the environment.

We need to work for a society that is truly sustainable, where relationships with God, with others and with the earth are as they should be. It is for this reason that the laws given to Israel are a helpful model for us today: they were intended to legislate for a society that enabled both people and the earth to flourish. The Sabbath and Jubilee laws illustrate the broad concern of the laws of the Old Testament, and provide a model which can be useful for us today in forming a vision of a sustainable society.

You can read more about the theme of this study in *Christianity, climate change and sustainable living* by Nick Spencer and Robert White (SPCK, 2007) pp 99-164.

About Jubilee Centre

www.jubilee-centre.org

The Jubilee Centre seeks to demonstrate the continued relevance of biblical principles to the challenges facing society today. We believe the Bible presents a coherent social vision, based on right relationships, that provides an alternative to contemporary political ideologies.

We have applied this relational agenda to areas as diverse as the economy, criminal justice, care for the elderly, asylum and immigration, and sexual ethics. Our publications include the ground-breaking 'Jubilee Manifesto' and the quarterly 'Cambridge Papers', an influential collection of peer-reviewed studies. We maintain an extensive blog and archive of our resources on our website, most of which can be downloaded for free. We are only able to do this because of the sacrificial giving of many generous supporters, for which we are truly very grateful.

If you have benefitted from these studies and would like to make a donation towards our work, please visit our website or write to us at Jubilee House, 3 Hooper Street, Cambridge CB1 2NZ.

About Tearfund

www.tearfund.org

We are Christians passionate about the local church bringing justice and transforming lives – overcoming global poverty. And so our ten-year vision is to see 50 million people released from material and spiritual poverty through a worldwide network of 100,000 local churches.