

Prayers for COP21 in Paris

together, we reflect, sing, act and pray for climate justice

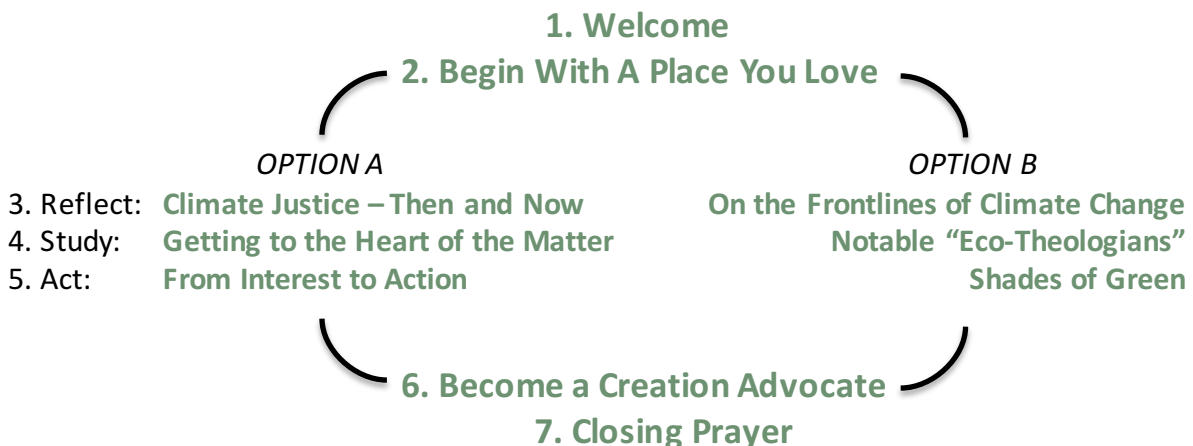


Climate Justice Bible Study

[originally published in September 2014]

As people of faith, we must actively respond to God's call to care for creation. Drawing on *Living Ecological Justice: A Biblical Response to the Environmental Crisis* (CPJ, 2013), this study looks at biblical and theological perspectives on creation, explore the role of individuals, churches, and governments in climate justice, and offer concrete tools that will assist communities of faith live into the Christian call to creation advocacy and care.

You are invited to work through seven activities, following option A or B for parts 3, 4, and 5. This should take approximately two hours. Alternatively, you can mix up the activities or break the study into two parts, working through the activities in both options. However you proceed, enjoy!



You Will Need:

- Chairs arranged in a circle
- Flipchart, masking tape, and markers
- Readers (you may wish to identify volunteers ahead of time)
- “From Interest to Action” worksheets (one copy for each participant), p. 10
- “Shades of Green” list (either written on a flipchart or printed from PDF on 11x17 paper)*
- Three sets of small stickers (e.g. yellow dots, blue dots, red dots – approximately 5 per colour for each participant)
- *(Optional) Videos: “Towards a New Climate Deal,” “Begin With A Place You Love,” “From Interest to Action;” and a laptop, projector, and screen**

*Video and PDF materials referred to are available at www.cpj.ca/workshop

Please note: instructions are printed in grey; text that is to be read aloud is in *black italics*.

Welcome:

Welcome participants and explain that this study will look at biblical and theological perspectives on creation, explore the role of individuals, churches, and governments in caring and advocating for creation, and offer concrete tools that will assist communities of faith to move from interest to action, deliberately living into the Christian call to creation advocacy and care.

Begin With A Place You Love:

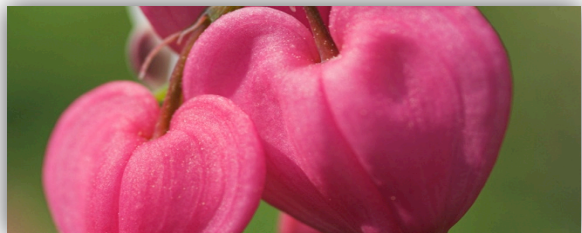
Invite participants to sit quietly. Read the following meditation aloud (or use the [video guide](#)):

Think of a place and time where you felt a strong connection with and/or love of nature. Where were you? What did it look like? What did it feel like? What did it smell like?

As you continue to reflect on the experience of this place and time, consider what contributed to the love you were feeling.

Was it the air, the trees, the earth, the view?

Close your eyes and take a moment to reflect in silence. Try to hold on to this feeling as you move through the remaining activities.



After a few moments, invite participants to go around the circle and briefly introduce themselves, giving their name, the place they were thinking about, and their interest in this study. (Please allow 1-2 minutes per participant).

Have one of the participants read “Climate Justice – Then and Now” aloud.

Climate Justice – Then and Now

a reflection by Joy Kennedy

An honest seeker of truth, Jeremiah listened deeply to God. He read the signs, reached evidence-based conclusions and made scientific projections – and then he went public. Faithful prophetic vision propelled him to proclaim what he knew. Jeremiah’s family tried to silence him. The king denied everything in Jeremiah’s written report and recklessly burned it to suppress it; he wanted him muzzled, even killed. Later, uneasy, he secretly questioned the prophet and let him go. The ruler and his coterie tried their utmost to maintain the myth of growth and exploitation of the land and people. Fortunately Jeremiah kept a copy of the fact-filled report for posterity.

What was this terrible message? Utter destruction of the land-based natural resource economy. Financial calamity. Complete social disintegration.

And, the need to abandon their arrogant, idol-worshipping, greedy ways. They had not practiced God’s covenantal Jubilee principles – righting relationships and resting the land – but had disobeyed built up a false economy of overconsumption and debt. There would be droughts and floods and other disasters. Everyone would be forced from their stratified business-as-usual society, exiled and enslaved. The catastrophe would affect all the surrounding region – eventually going global – and the poorest would, as usual, suffer the most.

Jeremiah realized this was a systemic problem. He knew that the ultimate decision was made far above ordinary people. Still, there was individual responsibility, so he settled his personal property affairs.

Some people got it and began to distrust the regime; some fled to Babylon’s safety as refugees; the very poorest were left behind to survive as best they could on the depleted land. The king and his retinue were killed or imprisoned. The land was laid waste. Generations later the people repented and gradually returned – hopefully to live in a new and sustainable way that honoured the covenant with all Creation.

It didn’t last.

Fast forward to October 2011. Over 60 leaders of Canadian faith communities issued the Canadian Interfaith Call for Leadership and Action on Climate Change, expressing their profound ethical concern and united conviction that the growing crisis of climate change must draw upon moral and spiritual resources. “We recognize that at its root the unprecedented human contribution to climate change is symptomatic of a spiritual deficit: excessive self-interest, destructive competition, and greed have given rise to unsustainable patterns of production and consumption. Humanity’s relationship with the environment has become distorted by actions that compromise the welfare of future generations of life.” ([2011 declaration](#)). (see also the [2015 church statement](#)).

In November 2012, the Canadian Council of Churches' Commission on Justice and Peace wrote to the Environment Minister imploring Canada to make a much more serious commitment to climate justice, including a credible plan, a financial commitment to assist the poorest and most affected countries to adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate change, and a sustainable national energy plan. "We have a moral imperative to act," the churches said.

Scientists prophesy the gathering doom. But some in positions of power blithely proclaim that all is well; that growth and techno-fixes to the fossil-fuel-based economy will forestall any adverse effects of global warming.

Some preach a gospel of prosperity in the face of growing unease. Many are fearful and are changing their ways. Yet unless the rulers decide to transform the foundations of the world economy, the powerful forces at work in the atmosphere and the ocean will repeat the sad story of our ancient ancestors and we will again be alienated from the land.

With strong leadership, we can put the long-term interest of humanity and the planet ahead of economic concerns. Religious organizations – and all other societal actors – can play important roles in promoting ethical consumption, sustainable lifestyles, and daily practices to promote a future of security, prosperity, and justice – for humankind, and the whole of creation.

There may yet be time.

For Discussion:

Post these discussion questions on a flipchart.

- How would you characterize the present situation and the approaching future?
- What can be done to address climate and ocean change effectively?
- What work does this inspire you to do in your context?

Divide participants into three groups and assign one question to each group. Invite participants to take some time (10-20 minutes) to discuss their question in their small group.

Reconvene in plenary and ask each group to report back (for a total of 5-10 minutes). You may wish to allow some additional time for the full group to add their responses to the final question.

Joy Kennedy has worked in Poverty, Wealth and Ecological Justice for The United Church of Canada, KAIROS, and the Commission on Justice and Peace of the Canadian Council of Churches. She is involved in the Canadian Interfaith Conversation, the World Council of Churches and many justice networks. She is on the boards of the Climate Action Network and Green Communities Canada.

Getting to the Heart of the Matter:

Post the discussion questions on a flipchart. Identify two readers, one to read Jeremiah 12:1–2, 10–13, and the other to read from the *Canadian Interfaith Call for Leadership and Action on Climate Change*. The questions and both passages are included below. Before you invite them to read, introduce this activity:

Environmental decline and climate chaos raise questions that go to the heart of the Christian faith. As you listen to the following readings, think about these questions:

- *How do we relate to God as both the origin and end of all things?*
- *How do we balance our energy and material consumption with the needs of the poor, future generations, and other species?*
- *How realistic are our expectations that we can sort it out with technology? How do we sustain hope in the midst of fear and denial?*
- *How can we encourage global cooperation, challenge unsustainable economic systems, and change our lifestyles?*

1. Reading from Jeremiah 12:1–2, 10–13:

You will be in the right, O Lord, when I lay charges against you; but let me put my case to you. Why does the way of the guilty prosper? Why do all who are treacherous thrive? You plant them, and they take root; they grow and bring forth fruit; you are near in their mouths yet far from their hearts.

Many shepherds have destroyed my vineyard, they have trampled down my portion, they have made my pleasant portion a desolate wilderness. They have made it a desolation; desolate, it mourns to me. The whole land is made desolate, but no one lays it to heart. Upon all the bare heights in the desert spoilers have come; for the sword of the Lord devours from one end of the land to the other; no one shall be safe. They have sown wheat and have reaped thorns, they have tired themselves out but profit nothing. They shall be ashamed of their harvests because of the fierce anger of the Lord.

2. An excerpt from the Canadian Interfaith Call for Leadership and Action on Climate Change:

Our faith traditions and sacred texts call upon us all – individuals, civil society, businesses, industry, and governments – to consider the spiritual dimensions of the crisis of ocean and climate change; to take stock of our collective behaviour; to transform cultures of consumerism and waste into cultures of sustainability; and to respect the balance between economic activity and environmental stewardship.

... our everyday choices about food, transportation, clothing and entertainment are all practical expressions of what we value. At the same time, disconnections between our professed beliefs and our daily actions indicate our need for personal and collective awareness and transformation. We need to seek coherence between our beliefs and our actions, so that our lives and consumption habits reflect our relationship with the rest of humanity and the Earth itself.

... Climate change is a planetary crisis that knows no borders. Some countries are far more adversely affected by climate change than others as they experience major changes in weather patterns. They know the impact of rising seas and erosion of lands, leading to drought or flooding. These countries are most often among the poorest and least equipped to respond.

Invite participants to take a few minutes to share their reflections, first in pairs, then as a group.

Adapted from Operation Noah, *Climate Change and the Purposes of God*, 2012. Used with permission.



From Interest to Action:

Read the following story aloud, or watch the [“From Interest to Action” video](#).

A concerned Edmonton citizen heard about the Canadian Interfaith Call for Leadership and Action on Climate Change and wanted to engage his congregation in understanding this historic document.

He gathered a small group of friends in the congregation. Together they decided that several goals needed to be reached: (1) Make fellow congregants aware of the existence of the Call, and then to reflect upon its contents. (2) Ensure that decision-makers both in the church and in government were aware of this congregation’s views on climate change. (3) Engage even more congregants in effective creation advocacy.

To ensure that members of the congregation knew about the Call, copies were made available after Sunday services and included in the parish bulletin. A member of the congregation was able to speak to the contents of the Call during a service. Congregants were invited to sign the petition, prepared by CPJ and circulated across Canada, in support of the Call. A table at the church was staffed for several Sundays and time was available during coffee hour so that members of the congregation could discuss the Call.

Eighty signatures were collected on the petition and sent to the local Member of Parliament. She was pleased to table the petition in the House of Commons. A note was sent to the national church headquarters, thanking the church leader for taking this stance, and informing him of the congregation’s activity in support of actions on climate change.

The MP sent the congregation the government’s response to their petition. She thanked them for their initiative. This response was reported back to the congregants, and posted on the congregational website, so that signatories were aware of the results of their action.

Make copies of the worksheet on page 10. Participants may work individually or in small groups – this will be informed by whether or not your group is all from the same faith community. Let them know that useful information related to these questions can be found on their denominational website. Once participants have had some time to consider the worksheet questions, share the list of action items below (on a flipchart or by watching the end of the video). Ask participants what they would add to the list. Invite participants to commit to one “take away” action. If your group meets regularly, plan a follow-up discussion about what was done.

Ideas for Engagement:

Request a sermon on climate justice. • Propose to your minister or priest and church council that the church’s prayers reflect creation advocacy and care themes. • Write a letter on creation care and advocacy and send it to your local newspaper and/or the religious magazine for your denomination. • Ask your minister or priest to raise creation advocacy and care as an issue in the local ministerial or ministers’ group. • Write to the leader of your church with recommendations on climate advocacy; be clear that you would like a response.

INTEREST TO ACTION WORKSHEET

Do you know what your denomination or congregation has said on climate justice?

Is your denominational policy or position reflected in the worship and action of your faith community? If so, how?

Did your church community sign the Call? If not, why not?

What was done in your local faith community to use the Call?

How could you work with others to make sure your local church is operating according to national directives, and push your church, both locally and nationally, to become a stronger advocate for creation?

Have one of the participants read “On the Frontlines of Climate Change” aloud.

On the Frontlines of Climate Change

a reflection by Carol Thiessen

In 2009, a massive cyclone swept through Mohammed Mujibur Rahman’s village in southern Bangladesh, causing massive flooding and mudslides. Hundreds of people lost their lives across the south, and hundreds of thousands more lost their homes.

Mohammed escaped with his life. But his house was washed away and his two-acre rice field was inundated with seawater. Unable to grow crops because of the increased salinity, he was forced to sell his field. His life became a daily struggle to feed himself and his family.

“Now the total weather has changed,” Mohammed said through an interpreter. “When I was young there were storms, but they were not so strong. I cannot even think about what will happen in the future.”

Rahman’s story is played out across Bangladesh – a country on the front-lines of climate change. Some 150 million people are packed into the small low-lying country, criss-crossed by mighty rivers that regularly flood as they surge towards the Indian Ocean. It’s hard to tell where earth ends and sea begins.

Bangladesh has made huge strides in fighting poverty in recent decades, but this is threatened by climate change – even though its people bear almost no responsibility for it. The UN places Bangladesh’s greenhouse gas emissions, which lead to climate change, at 0.3 metric tonnes per capita, compared to 18 metric tonnes per capita in Canada.

Those who have done the least to cause climate change suffer the most from it, in the form of increased droughts, stronger storms, sea level rise, and the spread of diseases. Those of us whose lifestyles are adding to global greenhouse gas emissions are better equipped to address its impacts. There is little justice in the now inevitable march of climate change.

This should be viscerally distressing for all of us who seek to live out our faith. Distress, however, should not lead to despair. As followers of Christ, there are ways to respond:

- 1. Examine our lifestyles. The choices we make can impact those living thousands of miles away from us. How do we respect them in our decision-making? Even though we don’t know them, as seekers of justice we should listen to their voices.*
- 2. Encourage our communities and our churches to take action. The actions that foster ecological sustainability in our churches or neighbourhoods are not merely local – they have global implications, too. We can begin with “greening” our places of worship, and also work towards reducing our individual and community carbon footprint.*

3. *Urge all levels of government to address climate change in Canada by reducing greenhouse gas emissions. To mitigate the extent of climate change, governments should also put a price on carbon emissions. This will encourage a reduction in the burning of fossil fuels by applying the “polluter pays” principle. Revenues could be used to promote renewables, and safeguard the livelihoods of the poorest people in Canada and around the world.*
4. *Urge the federal government to support people in developing countries to adapt to the environmental changes they’re already experiencing. Developed countries have agreed to mobilize up to \$100 billion per year by 2020 to help developing countries adapt to and slow climate change. Canada has the resources, and the historic responsibility, to make a generous contribution. Half of our money should go to meet immediate adaptation needs.*

Climate change is a matter of life and death for many. Mohammad Mujibur Rahman and millions of others are vulnerable to the damage that has already been done to the earth’s environment and what is to come. Action is imperative: as individuals, as communities, and as a nation. Mohammad has no choice but to adapt in the face of climate change. What will you do to support him?

For Discussion:

Post these discussion questions on a flipchart.

- How do you understand “mitigation” and “adaptation”? Why are both important?
- How might you include those a world away from you in your decision-making?

Take some time (anywhere from 10 to 30 minutes) to discuss. You may wish to share the brief definitions below with the group.

According to the United Nations Environment Program,
mitigation is about “moving towards a low-carbon society.”
Adaptation is “building resilience to climate change.”

Carol Thiessen is a senior policy advisor for the Canadian Foodgrains Bank, a partnership of 15 Canadian churches and church-based agencies working together to end global hunger. She served on the board of Citizens for Public Justice from 2011-2014.

Reflections from Notable “Eco-Theologians”

Divide into small groups. Share these instructions:

Silently and prayerfully read the following set of quotations three times. Following the first reading, everyone is asked to identify one word that stood out for them and share it with no additional commentary. Following the second reading, everyone is asked to identify one phrase that speaks to them. Following the third reading, open the discussion. Everyone is asked to begin by sharing if/how they feel called to action.

“God brought forth things into being in order that divine goodness might be communicated to creatures and be represented by them. And because the divine goodness could not be adequately represented by one creature alone, God produced many and diverse creatures that what was wanting in one in the representation of divine goodness might be supplied by another. For goodness, which in God is simple and uniform, in creatures is manifold and divided. Thus the universe participates in divine goodness more perfectly and represents it better, than any single creature whatever.”

St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 1.

“We all strive for safety, prosperity, comfort, long life, and dullness. The deer strives with his supple legs, the cowman with trap and poison, the statesman [sic] with pen, the most of us with machines, votes, and dollars, but it all comes to the same thing: peace in our time. A measure of success in this is all well enough, and perhaps is a requisite to objective thinking, but too much safety seems to yield only danger in the long run.”

Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac: And Sketches Here and There*, 1948.

“Climate change, quite simply, is the issue of the twenty-first century. It is not one issue among many, but, like the canary in the mine, it is warning us that the way we are living on our planet is causing us to head for disaster. We must change. All of the other issues we care about – social justice, peace, prosperity, freedom – cannot occur unless our planet is healthy. It is the unifying issue of our time.”

Sallie McFague, *A New Climate for Theology: God, the World, and Global Warming*, 2008.

“The Vocation of being a “protector” ... means protecting all creation, the beauty of the created world, as the Book of Genesis tells us and as St. Francis of Assisi showed us. It means respecting each of God’s creatures and respecting the environment in which we live. It means protecting people, showing loving concern for each and every person, especially children, the elderly, those in need, who are often the last we think about. ... In the end, everything has been entrusted to our protection, and all of us are responsible for it. Be protectors of God’s gifts!”

Pope Francis: *Inauguration Homily*.

Shades of Green

Print and post the four lists* of “green activities” on the wall of your workshop space.

- Purchase fruits and vegetables seasonally.
- Use a composter for food waste.
- Grow some of your own food.
- Use a rainbarrel to collect water for your garden.
- Turn off the water while brushing your teeth or washing your car.
- Hang your clothes to dry.
- Purchase second-hand clothing for yourself or your children.
- Cycle, take public transit, or carpool to get around.
- Install a solar panel (or other green energy source) in your home.
- Join the [Climate Fast](#).

(1)

- Set up and maintain a notice board for greening information and announcements.
- Replace Styrofoam cups and plates with ceramic or glass ones.
- Install low-flow toilets.
- Adjust the central heating/cooling system by a couple of degrees.
- Conduct a green audit of your sacred space; implement the recommended changes.
- Set up bike racks on your church property.
- Host a speaker on creation care and climate change.
- Finance the greening of local community outreach initiatives.
- Organize people in your congregation to join the Climate Fast.
- Become a drop-off hub for Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) deliveries.
- Include prayers for creation as a regular part of worship.

(2)

- Buy solar shares.
- Divest from fossil fuel companies.
- Support your denomination’s stated position on climate change; ensure it is reflected in regular congregational activities.
- Invest in carbon offsets.
- Support the *Canadian Interfaith Call for Leadership and Action on Climate Change*.
- Communicate in your denomination why there is a Climate Fast and why your congregation is participating.

(3)

#pray4COP21

- Urge your community and government to take action to reduce carbon emissions.
- Write a congregational letter to your MP on climate change; request more emphasis on energy conservation and renewable energy.
- Write a letter to your church leader requesting more creation advocacy emphasis on energy conservation, renewable energy sources, and action on climate change.
- Financially support faith-based groups working to promote ecological justice.
- Invest your retirement savings in ethical instruments and the greenest energy options.
- Develop a community-wide planning and budgeting process based on green principles (e.g., looking at life-cycle costing).
- Invite your local political representatives to congregational discussions on creation advocacy and care.
- Organize an all-candidates meeting on climate change policies and solutions.
- Communicate to church and political leaders why you are participating as a congregation in the Climate Fast movement.

(4)

Ask these questions:

1. *How are you engaged individually in climate justice?*
2. *How is your local church engaged in climate justice?*
3. *How is your national church engaged in climate justice?*

Invite participants to place a sticker (one colour for each question) on each of the activities they are engaged in individually, locally, and nationally.

Once everyone has finished placing their stickers and returned to the circle, share the following:

Personal or local greening (e.g. the activities on the light and medium green lists) is important as it gives us and creation valuable time to take on the necessary “dark green” (creation advocacy) activities that will ultimately change the course of the Earth’s environment.

As a group, discuss:

How do we move towards the darker shades of green? How would you engage your congregation in creation advocacy?

*Workshop-ready lists are available for download and printing at www.cpj.ca/workshop.

Become a Creation Advocate

Share the following information about climate change.

Climate change is considered by many as the issue of the twenty-first century. Canada urgently needs a credible climate change action plan to reach the federal government's stated target of reducing GHG emissions to 17 per cent below the 2005 level by 2020.

Key elements of this plan should be:

- A price on carbon. This can be a carbon tax or a cap-and-trade system. Many experts agree putting a price on carbon is one of the most effective ways to lower GHG emissions. Carbon pricing puts a tax on the burning of fossil fuels like heating oil, natural gas, coal, gasoline, and diesel fuels. Based on the "polluter pays" principle, carbon pricing requires those who pollute to pay monetarily for the damages caused to the natural environment. Carbon pricing internalizes many of the environmental and societal costs related to the production and consumption of carbon-intensive goods and services often ignored by current prices.*
- An end to over \$1 billion annual federal subsidies and special tax breaks to the Canadian fossil fuel industry.*
- A national energy plan that ensures a sustainable and healthy future for Canada, including spending on preserving water resources and migratory bird habitats, and establishing new national parks.*
- Increased investments in cleaner energy alternatives like wind, solar, geothermal (energy produced by extracting heat stored beneath the surface of the Earth), and hydroelectric power.*

In addition to these mitigation measures, Canada has a moral obligation – as a major contributor to GHG emissions – to support the adaptation efforts of those in the far North and the global South who are facing the most significant impacts of climate change today. This financing should be delivered to developing countries as new grants (rather than loans).

Invite participants to work as a group to develop an advocacy plan using [CPI's Advocacy Toolkit](#) as a guide. Work together to put your plan into action – you may begin during this study, but will want to follow up in the weeks and months ahead.

Closing Prayer

Share this prayer with your group. You may wish to have one person read it, or to invite everyone to read it as a group.

*O God, by your Holy Spirit give us eyes to see your glory in all the earth, and grace to manifest your glory in every sphere of our own influence. May we see and reflect and extend your glory. Help us trust your promises for the future as fully as we celebrate your past acts and the resurrection of Jesus, the guarantee and firstfruit of your kingdom in fullness. May your will be done on earth, as in heaven. **Amen.***

Howard Snyder, *The Earth is full of holy glory*, 2013. Reprinted with permission of the author.



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