



## TEACHING RESOURCE

*Our hope is that by engaging with Climate Sunday your corps or centre will be better equipped to address this critical issue. There is no specific date for Climate Sunday so these resources can be used on a Sunday of your choosing.*

*This resource can be used as the basis for a sermon, Bible study or small group session. The questions at the end can be used to support individual reflection and group discussion.*

### Key passage: Colossians 1:15-20

#### Teaching aims

- Draw the links between our mission and climate change
- Explore the biblical basis for creation care
- Inspire people to respond individually and collectively.

To explore this we're going to look at four things:

- God as creator,
- God as Christ,
- God as revealed through creation, and
- Our response to care for the world

#### Additional resource

Look at the **Ideas for Action** resource to identify ways that you as a corps or centre can respond individually and collectively to reduce your environmental impact and speak out on climate change.





## Introduction

We are living in a time of crisis for the natural world. Climate change is accelerating and creatures and plants are dying out at an alarming rate<sup>1</sup>. The increase in carbon emissions is causing temperatures to rise and increasing the number and intensity of extreme weather events<sup>2</sup>.

We have known this for a while, and although progress has been made in some areas, there is much more that needs to be done to limit climate change and protect wildlife. This is partly down to humanity's overconsumption of the world's finite resources. We are also generally more disconnected from the natural world and its rhythms than ever before.

As Christians, we follow a God who created this world and cares deeply for it. In this passage we see echoes of what Paul says in Ephesians 1:10 (NIV), that God's mission is '*to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.*'

The more we can grasp this, the more it can inform our missional activities. Then as disciples and the body of Christ it will help us bring a greater unity between God, ourselves, our communities and the wider creation.

## CREATOR

### 'God created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth' v 16 (NLT)

'We must always remember that we worship not only the God who is Saviour, but also the God who is Creator, who has created a material world that contains God's life-breath.'

– Ruth Valerio

- The Psalms in particular are full of praise for our creator God and his creation.
- '*The Lord is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made*' (Psalm 145:9 NIV). This is the God whose character humanity is to reflect.
- God didn't just become creator on a short-term contract for six days, before taking up his position as ruler to be worshipped and feared. It is an integral part of God's unchanging character and presence.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2019/05/nature-decline-unprecedented-report/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/weather/climate-change/effects-of-climate-change>





- *'God's voice in nature is ceaseless and enduring. God's speech is the invisible pulse which ceaselessly imparts vitality to all existence.'* – Rabbi Jonathan Wittenberg
- Our creator God built in a rhythm and a cycle into creation. It is not static, it is always growing and changing, feeding and being fed, dying and bringing new life.
- If we want to experience the fulness of God's love and grace, and help others experience it too, then we need to celebrate and reflect that our God is Creator, and he offers this compassion to all of creation.
- *'Then God said, "Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us"'* (Genesis 1:26 NLT). *The Message* describes it as *'reflecting our nature'*. If we are to take this seriously, how are we reflecting God's nature in the way that we take care of the world around us? How is this evident in our mission activities as disciples, and as a church?

'There is a need to rebuild our relationship with our planet so that we might rebuild our relationship with its creator.'

– Ruth Valerio

## CHRIST

### 'He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation' v15 (NLT)

'One of the early Christians said there are three dimensions to the cross – the vertical, which is about reconciliation with God; the horizontal, which is about reconciliation to other humans; and finally the cross is firmly planted into the earth, which calls us to reconcile with creation.'

– Shane Claiborne

- This passage shows Christ as the source, sustainer *and* saviour; who came to *reconcile and restore*; who is *holding all things together* (v17).
- Christ was rooted in creation from the beginning, and he embodied that when he came to Earth.





# Climate Sunday



- Jesus shows a deep attentiveness to the natural world. His parables reference fig trees, foxes and flowers. He urged the disciples to consider the birds and flowers (Matthew 6:25–34); and in the wilderness Jesus is described as being ‘with the wild animals’ (Mark 1:13).
- He didn’t seek to have dominion over the natural world. In fact, he modelled a different way of ruling to that which people expected. This isn’t just true of his kingship over humanity, but over all of creation.
- Are we as connected to nature in our modern, 21st-century lives as Jesus? As his followers, how are we following his example? How can we help to reconcile and restore our broken climate?
- We often think of what it means as Christians to ‘take up our cross and follow him’ – how might we also plant this cross firmly into the earth, and help to reconcile ourselves with creation too?

## CREATION

### ‘And through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things’ v20 (NRSVA)

‘The world communicates important messages about God to us ... creation is his first chosen means of telling us about himself.’

– Dave Bookless

- We see God revealed in creation in so many ways, both big and small, dramatic and subtle, *visible and invisible*. We see evidence of his beauty, creativity and diversity in the way these are shown through the variety of life *in earth and sky and sea*.
- In creation we see a blueprint of God’s harmonious plan for his Kingdom – where everything can find its place and is interdependent on those around it.
- We also see the way that our destructiveness can disrupt this harmony and put it off balance. This is at the root of the current climate crisis.
- Our plundering of the world’s resources is changing ecosystems, putting human and non-human life at risk.





- However, we see that God's plan is for all of this to be reconciled to him. We have this hope, but as reflections of his image we need to be helping to bring about this reconciliation.

## RESPONSE - CARE

### **'The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.' Genesis 2:15 (NIV)**

*'The whole creation is waiting in eager longing ... for God's children to be revealed: in other words, for the unveiling of those redeemed humans through whose stewardship creation will at last be brought back into that wise order for which it was made.'* – NT Wright

- Current trends are leading us towards 3-5 centigrade of warming by the end of this century.<sup>3</sup>
- At the UN Climate Conference in Paris in 2015 countries pledged to aim to limit warming to 1.5 centigrade – but commitments made to achieve this don't yet go far enough.
- The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) says achieving this requires 'rapid, far-reaching and unprecedented changes in all aspects of society.'<sup>4</sup>
- We need to be on track by 2030, or exceeding 1.5C will be all but inevitable.
- If we want to reconnect with God, not just as saviour but as creator, as the source and sustainer of *all things*, then we need to consider how we treat our natural world.
- We need to recapture a view of creation as a reflection of God's beauty and majesty.
- We need to find ways to re-root ourselves in God's character and reflect this in our actions as followers of Christ and as churches.

*'Christian mission cannot exclude our primal human mission, which was to exercise godly rule over creation by serving and keeping it (Genesis 1:26-28 combined with Genesis 2:15).'* – Chris Wright.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/science/key-findings>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ipcc.ch/2018/10/08/summary-for-policymakers-of-ipcc-special-report-on-global-warming-of-1-5c-approved-by-governments/>





## QUESTIONS

### For personal reflection and discussion

#### God's care for creation

- How often do you think of God as creator? What examples can you think of which highlight God's creativity? What does this tell us about God's character? How can we emulate this as people 'made in his image'?
- When have you experienced the presence of God in nature? What was it about the setting that revealed God? What was it you discovered about him in these moments?
- How can doing more to care for creation help us connect with God and deepen our relationship with him?
- What would a world where all things in heaven and earth are united under Christ look like?

#### Creation care and mission

- To what extent does the care of creation fit into your understanding of mission? Has this always been the case? If not, what changed?
- How much do you think non-Christians in your circles see climate change as something the Church cares about? How might this limit their understanding of God and the gospel?
- Why do you think tackling climate change is important for The Salvation Army? How does it fit with our values and beliefs?
- '*Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation*' (Mark 16:15 NRSVA) – how might we need to change our idea of evangelism to do this?

#### Your response

- How could you as a Christian/group/corps/centre take care of creation more seriously as part of your missional activities?





# Climate Sunday



- The Salvation Army has always striven to put people to work AND take care of them. It is the foundation of the Cabhorse Charter and our approach to tackling poverty here in the UK and around the world. How could we apply this same ethos to our care for creation?
- How is God's care for creation reflected in the way we approach our evangelism, discipleship, community engagement and social action? What might we need to do differently to incorporate this?

