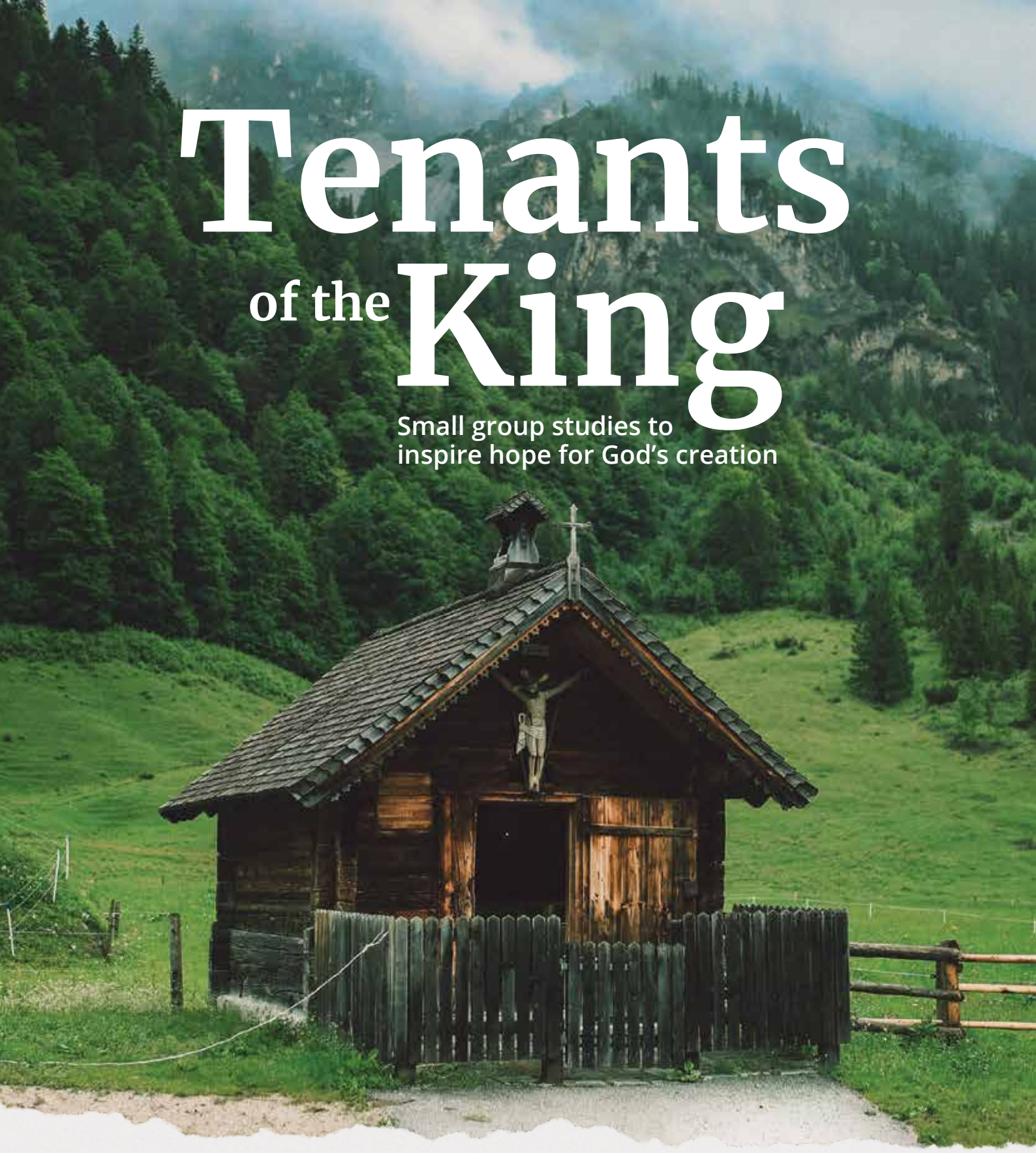


Tenants of the King

Small group studies to inspire hope for God's creation

Notes for Group Leaders 2022

OPERATION NOAH

Faith-motivated. Science-informed. Hope-inspired.

UPDATED LEADERS' NOTES FOR 2022

Since writing *Tenants of the King* in 2018 the climate and ecological crisis has become even more urgent. We have updated the resource both to reflect the deepening emergency and to highlight the greater opportunity for the church's mission at this time.

TIPS FOR YOUR GROUP

The *Tenants of the King* study guide is designed to help you and your church to have an honest conversation about God's purpose for creation and his church. Whether you've hosted groups before or not, this resource offers plenty of reflections and ideas to help you and your group get the most out of your time together.

DON'T WORRY! Leading a small group study can seem daunting, but it's not just for experts! As group leader, you can help promote a balanced discussion as you explore God's word together.

BE CONVERSATIONAL. As group leader, you don't have to teach your group. As you study the scriptures and other materials together, help others to actively reflect on questions in their own way. Leave room for differences of opinion.

INCLUDE EVERYONE. In any study group, some people feel more confident about sharing their thoughts out loud. Others may prefer not to speak very much. Help everyone to share as they are comfortable, and reassure them that their contributions are valued.

ALWAYS PRAY. When hosting a study, try to pray for each member of your group during the week. Ask God for wisdom and inspiration as you come together to study his word.

READ AHEAD. It will often help a group study if leaders have read the materials before the start of a session. Take time to familiarise yourself with the focus of each session before it begins. This will help you to keep discussion flowing.

SET UP. In addition to this study guide, your group study will probably need a few other tools as well: Bibles, pens and paper, a computer for displaying videos, and a kettle for teas and coffees! Whatever you need, try to get it ready before your study begins.

ZOOM. See our blog on running *Tenants* on Zoom:
www.operationnoah.org/news-events/news-blog/running-tenants-of-the-king-online/

WRITE DOWN. Encourage your group to write down what they are learning.

BE FLEXIBLE. Study groups come in all shapes and sizes. So if you can't play the video, or your group runs late, don't worry! You might even want an extra week or two to study more slowly. Feel free to use different Bible translations.

GET ACTIVE! Like the Bible itself, a good study group should be 'living and active'! For each session, this study introduces plenty of **Ideas for Action** – ways your group can live out the scriptural truths they are exploring.

BE INSPIRED. Make sure to check out additional sections of the study guide, including **Common Questions** and **Find Out More** sections, which will help you to keep momentum once your study is completed.

These *Notes for Group Leaders* share some extra insights to accompany each of your four study sessions, including Bible cross-references and accessible commentary. You can use these to enhance your study, and if you like what you're reading, make sure to share it with your group.

SESSION CONTENTS

Each of the four sessions of this study guide contains a set of activities for your group, which can take between 60 and 90 minutes to complete. If it helps your group, don't be afraid to go a little slower.



ICEBREAKER. A simple opening activity to help your group to feel at home and start a conversation. 5-10 minutes.

READ. Time to take your Bibles and look at the passage for this session. Pray for God to speak by his word, and read it aloud together. If you prefer, you may want to read it in the context of a whole chapter, or briefly introduce the book where it appears. 5 minutes.



WATCH. A short topical video interview with a church leader. This will help introduce your session's theme and a point of view on it. If you can, try to watch the video together before your main discussion begins. 5 minutes.



DISCUSS. A series of questions are provided to help you reflect on the Bible together. Allow plenty of time for your group to talk through the passage and what it might be teaching you. To aid your discussion, *Notes for Group Leaders* provide plenty of insights for each discussion question. 25-30 minutes.

REFLECT AND PRAY. After discussion, allow some time and space for your group to prayerfully reflect on the lessons of the session. 10-15 minutes.



OVER TO YOU. A few simple ideas are shared at the end of each session, to help your study group live out the truths of scripture this week. At home and in your church, think about how you can put these ideas into action.

SESSION 1 – MY PROPERTY?

Why did God create the world? Where's creation going? Which parts of creation matter to him? In this opening session, we begin considering the big picture of God's creation, and our identity as tenants in his land.

PREPARATION. Make sure everyone in your group has access to a copy or download of the *Tenants* booklet, with some way of taking notes, such as pen and paper. If helpful, you may want to set up a shared noticeboard to track what you are learning.

ICEBREAKER. This question helps us to think about what we value in our shared world. As group leader, help your group to reflect on specific things that matter to them (e.g. good weather, scenery, food and healthcare). What is common to their answers? How is God's creation connected to what we value, and what we need in order to thrive?

READ. Try to bring enough Bibles for everyone in your group. This resource uses the New International Version (NIV), but other translations such as the ESV, NRSV or *The Message* may also be helpful. A Bible concordance (e.g. Strong's), or commentaries (e.g. *The Bible Speaks Today* series) may also be useful. These can be found in most online bookshops.

WATCH. In this video, author and theologian Bishop Graham Tomlin considers the purpose of creation. Watch the video together. How might you respond if asked the same questions?

DISCUSS. Consider together the questions in the main study guide booklet based on Colossians 1 and the video with Bishop Graham Tomlin.

QUESTION 1 – WHAT IS MEANT BY 'THE IMAGE OF GOD'?

In classical societies, people were less likely to distinguish between an image and the thing it represented. For the first-century audience of this letter then, calling Jesus Christ the 'image of the invisible God' was a bold claim. Earlier generations in Israel were unable even to look upon God (Exodus 33:20).

Jesus is not only presented as bearing some likeness to God, as all humans do (Genesis 1:27). As the writer of the book of Hebrews puts it, Jesus is the 'exact imprint' of his heavenly Father (Hebrews 1:3). In Jesus then, we witness God himself walking in the midst of his creation, with his character, power and priorities displayed for all to see.

QUESTION 2 – THIS PASSAGE INDICATES THAT ALL THINGS WERE CREATED BY CHRIST, FOR CHRIST. DOES THIS AFFECT OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE PHYSICAL WORLD?

Because all things were created through Christ, and for Christ, it is fitting that we care for and respect what he has created: people, animals, plants and planet alike. In Revelation 5:13, it is not only humans, but the whole created order which is seen worshipping God for his salvation:

Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying: 'To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power, for ever and ever!'

'If the world is created by Jesus and for Jesus,' writes Nicky Gumbel, 'we should treat it with honour, dignity, respect – there is something sacred about it.' Because the earth is God's land, it is right that we delight in it, without drifting into worship of it. We pray for God's kingdom 'on earth, as it is in heaven', knowing that the same God who once pronounced his creation 'very good', will one day renew it for his glory.

QUESTION 3 – WHAT DOES CHRIST HOLD TOGETHER? HOW IS HE DOING THIS?

This passage is clear that Jesus Christ holds all things together. Not just some things, but everything! All good things that we can think of, he sustains. What a jaw-dropping thought! We're told here that all things 'hold together' in Jesus. The root verb, 'hold together' used here means 'to continue', 'to endure' or 'to exist'. When something no longer holds together, it decays or ceases to be.

'Christ and his people are viewed together as a living entity: Christ is the head, supplying life and exercising control and direction; his people are his body, individually his limbs and organs, under his control, obeying his direction, performing his work. And the life which animates the whole is his risen life, which he shares with his people.'

F. F. BRUCE[1]

SESSION 1 – MY PROPERTY?

Take a look at 1 Corinthians 12:27 and Ephesians 2:10. In these passages, Christians are reminded that we are each members of Christ's body, the church. We are prepared in advance by God himself, to do good. As members of Jesus' body, we have a God-given part to play in advancing his kingdom, and preserving his creation.

QUESTION 4 – CONSIDER THE ORIGINAL AUDIENCE OF THIS PASSAGE. HOW MIGHT THEY HAVE SEEN THE RELATIONSHIP OF 'EARTH' AND 'HEAVEN'?

Popular ideas of 'heaven and earth' today often imagine a moral distinction between the two. A bad, present and 'material' earth is seen in opposition to a good, future, 'spiritual' heaven. Though this distinction was popular with some ancient philosophers like Plato, the Bible offers a very different perspective. Both heaven and earth are precious parts of the created order which God has called 'very good' (Genesis 1:31).

'We've been taught that … earthly reality exists only as a shade of the ideal. Therefore, our vision, dreams and theology have been based in saving souls and escaping the earth instead of its reconciliation and restoration.'

MITCH HESCOX[2]

As Bishop James Jones points out, distinctions between a bad earth and a good heaven can oversimplify Christian witness. They reduce our mission to 'providing converts with an escape route from the earth'. In Colossians 1, and throughout the Bible, we see a much higher view of both heaven and earth.

'In the ancient world heaven was not perceived as some distant outpost that had no impact on human life on earth … God did not simply start things off and then withdraw from his creation; Christ continues to sustain the whole universe.'

DAVID GARLAND[3]

QUESTION 5 – ACCORDING TO THIS PASSAGE, WHAT IS JESUS RECONCILING TO HIMSELF?

For its original readers at Colossae, this passage was a valuable reminder to believers that Jesus' salvation did not need to be improved upon. Importantly though, this passage insists that salvation is not simply limited to human beings. Somehow, 'all things' are affected by Jesus' reconciling work.

The author of Colossians is careful to highlight this point. In this brief passage alone, the phrase 'all things' is repeated five times. The noun, 'all things', used here can also be found in Revelation 21:5, where Jesus proclaims, 'Behold! I am making all things new!' This 'newness' (*kainos*) speaks not of something thrown out for a replacement, but something made 'new in quality, fresh in development' (Strong's).

Bible scholar F. F. Bruce reflects that Jesus' reconciling work 'is applied particularly to redeemed humanity, but here its universal reference comes first into view. In reconciliation as in creation the work of Christ has a cosmic significance.'[4]

'The scope of this reconciliation is universal. It takes in the whole created order.'

DICK LUCAS[5]

QUESTION 6 – IN THE VIDEO, REV. DR GRAHAM TOMLIN REFLECTS THAT GOD INTENDS CREATION TO REFLECT HIS OWN GLORY. DO YOU AGREE? WHERE DO YOU SEE GOD'S GLORY REFLECTED IN OUR WORLD?

People can feel uncomfortable with the idea that nature is for God's glory. In a world where nature has been worshipped in place of God, respect for creation can often sound like misplaced worship of created things, which the Bible plainly opposes (see Romans 1:25). Throughout scripture and church history, however, images of creation have often helped to communicate God's glory. In the book of Job, God repeatedly points to his creation to remind Job of his glory and goodness. Rather than distancing us from God, a respect for his creation and time spent enjoying the natural world can bring us even closer to him.

'Nature never taught me that there exists a God of glory … I had to learn that in other ways. But nature gave the word glory a meaning for me.'

C. S. LEWIS[6]

REFLECT AND PRAY. At this point, you may wish to give your group a few minutes to reflect individually on the themes discussed. Allow some time to write down reflections before coming together for prayer.

SESSION 1 – MY PROPERTY?



OVER TO YOU...

Help your group explore ways you can live out this scriptural truth in the week to come. If it helps, spare a few minutes at the start of your next meeting to discuss how you got on!

RETHINK THANKFULNESS

You can mention here that the earth's resources are running out due to greed and over-consumption. How can we use less of the earth's bounty, so that others have enough and the earth is not consumed? Find out the carbon footprint of various foods here: www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-46459714

WRITE A PSALM

A lament psalm could reflect both our individual and corporate sin for the damage we have done to God's good creation. It could also express anger at the structures that ignore the plight of the poor and the earth.

WITNESS WALK

Remind yourselves that everything belongs to God – you are tending God's garden!

CLIMATE SUNDAYS

The Climate Sunday initiative is calling on all local churches across Great Britain and Ireland to hold a climate-focused service on any Sunday through Creationtide – September / October. At this service, congregations are encouraged to make a commitment to greater action to address climate change in their own place of worship and community and to use their voice to tell politicians we want a cleaner, greener, fairer future. www.climatesunday.org

SESSION 2 – ICEBREAKER QUIZ

QUESTION 1 – HOW MUCH HAS THE AVERAGE TEMPERATURE INCREASED OVER THE PAST CENTURY?

ANSWER: 1.2°C.[a] That might not sound like a lot, but it has a big impact. And temperature increases are accelerating rapidly. The earth is hotter than it has been for 12,000 years, with the five warmest years on record all occurring since 2015.[b] Today, scientists maintain that total increases must be kept below 1.5°C to prevent uncontrollable global heating.

QUESTION 2 – WHAT IS THE CARBON FOOTPRINT OF A RETURN FLIGHT TO NEW YORK?

ANSWER: 1.8 tonnes. 200 return trips to Paris on the Eurostar have the same carbon footprint as one return trip to New York.[c]

QUESTION 3 – HOW MUCH CARBON DIOXIDE (CO_2) DOES THE AVERAGE UK ADULT RELEASE INTO EARTH'S ATMOSPHERE EACH YEAR?

ANSWER: Around 8.1 tonnes.[d] That's the weight of two very large hippopotamuses. The burning of fossil fuels (oil, gas and coal), which creates carbon emissions, is the main culprit causing global warming today. Carbon in the atmosphere intensifies the greenhouse effect, causing our atmosphere to trap more solar heat. This has a wide range of destabilising and damaging effects on the ability of the earth to sustain life for people (especially the world's poorest) and wildlife.

QUESTION 4 – WHICH FAMOUS CHRISTIAN REFORMER HELPED TO ESTABLISH THE ROYAL SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS (RSPCA)?

ANSWER: William Wilberforce. Famous for his role in the movement to abolish slavery, Wilberforce was passionate about the wellbeing of all creatures. In 1824, Wilberforce joined several other clergymen and MPs at the founding meeting of the RSPCA, an organisation now replicated around the world.

QUESTION 5 – ORDER THE FOLLOWING IN TERMS OF GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS.

1. In season strawberries
2. Out of season strawberries
3. A cheeseburger
4. A pack of local, seasonal asparagus
5. A pack of airfreighted asparagus from Peru
6. A banana
7. A leg of lamb
8. A bottle of wine

ANSWER: Greenhouse gas emissions in CO_2: 80g – a banana; 125g – local, seasonal asparagus; 150g – in season strawberries; 1040g – a bottle of wine (NB this drops to only 400g if in a carton with few road miles); 1.8kg – out of season strawberries; 2.5kg – a 4oz cheeseburger; 3.5kg – pack of asparagus airfreighted from Peru; 38kg – a 2kg leg of lamb.[e]

QUESTION 6 – 'SINCE 2008, 10 MILLION PEOPLE HAVE BEEN DISPLACED EACH YEAR BY NATURAL DISASTERS.' TRUE OR FALSE?

ANSWER: False. The true number of 'climate refugees' displaced each year is 20 million, equivalent to around one third of the UK's population. This will escalate as large parts of the world become too hot and dry to be habitable.[f]

QUESTION 7 – WHAT THREE THINGS DO YOUNG CHRISTIANS (16-24) WANT THE CHURCH TO ACT ON AS A MATTER OF URGENCY (FEB 2021)?

ANSWER: 1. Discrimination, 2. The climate crisis, 3. Poverty.[g]

QUESTION 8 – ORDER THE FOLLOWING IN TERMS OF GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS.

1. Insulating your loft
2. Return trip to Glasgow by plane
3. Return trip to Glasgow by train
4. Return trip to Glasgow by banana-powered bike
5. Leaving a low energy light on for a year

ANSWER: Greenhouse gas emissions in CO_2: 53kg return to Glasgow by bike (the emissions of the bananas that you needed to eat to give you the energy); 90kg – leaving a low energy light on for a year; 120kg – return to Glasgow by train; 350kg – embedded energy of roof insulation BUT the insulation saves 350kg of emissions in just 6 months. Over 40 years it will save 35 tonnes of emissions; 500kg – return flight to Glasgow.[h]

References...

a. www.carbonbrief.org/state-of-the-climate-2020-ties-as-warmest-year-on-record
b. www.climate.gov/news-features/understanding-climate/climate-change-global-temperature
c. www.climatestewards.org/offset/
d. www.climatestewards.org/resources/duplo-footprint/
e. *How Bad Are Bananas? The Carbon Footprint of Everything*, by Mike Berners-Lee
f. www.unhcr.org/uk/environment-disasters-and-climate-change.html
g. www.weare.tearfund.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Burning-Down-The-House-Youthscape-and-Tearfund.pdf
h. *How Bad Are Bananas? The Carbon Footprint of Everything*, by Mike Berners-Lee

SESSION 2 – CREATION GROANS

If God created a good world, what went wrong? Has God given up on creation? In this second study, we reflect on our broken world, and God's plan to do something about it.

PREPARATION. Same as week one. Think about preparing materials for today's icebreaker quiz. Perhaps you can bring along a prize for the winners!

ICEBREAKER. This quiz will test your group's knowledge of some of the problems facing creation today. See page 8 for quiz questions and answers. Before you start, form into teams of two or three. Read questions aloud for your group, with time for teams to discuss answers. At the end, ask each team to mark their answers as you announce the correct ones. Allow a moment to think on the facts being revealed. Do they surprise you?

READ. Same as week one. Try to bring enough Bibles for everyone in your group. During discussions, you may want to keep these to hand so you can look at other related passages.

WATCH. In this video, Mark Melluish (until recently the Assistant National Leader of the New Wine network) considers what's gone wrong with God's creation. Watch together.

DISCUSS. Consider together the questions in the main study guide booklet based on Romans 8 and the video.

QUESTION 1 – WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE GROANS OF CREATION AND OUR IDENTITY AS CHRISTIANS?

From its beginning, the Bible describes people as closely connected to all of God's creation. In the book of Genesis, priestly words are used to describe the responsibility given to Adam: 'tend the earth and preserve it' (Genesis 2:15). Soon after, however, the earth shares in the terrible consequences of Adam's wrongdoing, and a harmonious relationship with creation is ruined.

Thankfully, this is not where the story ends. Just as Adam's sin brings a curse on creation, Christ's kingdom and church promise a far-reaching restoration of it.

In Romans 8, the apostle Paul reminds his readers of this great promise. As we await 'adoption' into God's household, all of creation waits too, because its redemption is closely connected with ours. In the words of Bible scholar Douglas Moo, 'the "revelation of the sons of God" that creation keenly anticipates is the "unveiling" of the true nature of Christians'.[7] As God works in us, creation itself finds release from its suffering.

'The future glory is beyond our imagination. What we do know is that God's material creation will be redeemed and glorified, because God's children will be redeemed and glorified.'

JOHN STOTT[8]

QUESTION 2 – WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO SAY CREATION IS 'FRUSTRATED'?

In the book of Genesis, God declares all of his creation 'very good' (see Genesis 1:31). Yet like humanity, the former glory and purpose of creation have been 'frustrated'. As Tim Keller reflects, 'the word frustration here, *mataiotés*, is the same one translated as "vanity" in the book of Ecclesiastes … It means nature is alienated, both from us who were meant to live in harmony with nature … and from itself. It is not as beautiful or great as it was meant to be.'[9]

People will often speak of being 'frustrated' when a desired plan unravels. In the same way, creation is frustrated when it is prevented from properly reflecting God's glory.

QUESTION 3 – READ HOSEA 4:1-3. HOW DOES THE PASSAGE CONNECT HUMAN ACTIONS WITH CREATION?

In Hosea 4, and many other Old Testament passages, a close connection is made between the sin of God's people and the 'frustration' of the earth. In Hosea, the prophet laments how the people have become faithless, loveless, violent and godless. Humans, animals and land alike suffer as a result (verse 3). The prophet Isaiah similarly describes a land which has become 'polluted by its inhabitants' (Isaiah 24:4).

Today, we continue to see a connection between human sin and a polluted earth. In everything from modern-day slavery to poisonous plastics in our oceans, the selfish and short-term behaviour of individuals and societies still leaves lasting scars on God's creation.

SESSION 2 – CREATION GROANS

'The ultimate test of a moral society is the kind of world it leaves to its children.'

DIETRICH BONHOEFFER[10]

QUESTION 4 – HOW DOES GOD LIBERATE CREATION FROM 'BONDAGE TO DECAY'?

The writer of Romans, Paul the apostle, knew very well what it was like to be in prison, in 'bondage'. Yet he also knew what it was to be set free (Acts 16:26). Here, he points to a similar liberation as creation shares in the freedom of the children of God (verse 21). Like a mother in the pains of childbirth, the sufferings of creation will be replaced with great joy when God's children are revealed (verse 18).

'Paul makes clear that the creation's liberation from corruption is tied to the destiny of redeemed humanity. As its submission to corruption and futility resulted from humanity's fall, so its liberation is tied to the final redemption of the children of God – when they enter upon their glorious freedom.'

C. J. KRUSE[11]

While we await a future renewal of all things (Matthew 19:28), Christians can be confident that God is already at work in us today to bless his creation (verse 30).

'Creation is good, but it is not God. It is beautiful, but its beauty is at present transient. It is in pain, but that pain is taken to the very heart of God and becomes part of the pain of new birth.'

TOM WRIGHT[12]

QUESTION 5 – IS IT DIFFICULT TO BELIEVE GOD IS REDEEMING YOUR BODY?

Faced with the pains and frustrations of life today, we may be tempted at times to think God has given up on his creation, and on us. Yet the Bible insists that God is always at work in his church, transforming us into a 'dwelling' which will bless all nations, and in which he himself lives (Ephesians 2:21).

Preachers often speak of the 'now and not yet' of Christian faith. Our lives already belong to God, but he isn't done with us yet! We continue to be 'transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory' (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Like Jesus himself, the church is described in the Bible as 'a kind of firstfruits of all he created' (James 1:18). This analogy pictures early ripe fruits from a farmer's harvest, which hold within them the promise of future abundance and restoration. In the same way, little by little, the Holy Spirit's work in us offers an exciting foretaste of God's future promises.

'The idea of creation "being set free" strongly suggests that the ultimate destiny of creation is not annihilation but transformation.'

DOUGLAS MOO[13]

QUESTIONS 6 AND 7 – WHERE DO YOU SEE CREATION GROANING TODAY? HAVE YOU EVER EXPERIENCED ENVIRONMENTAL INJUSTICE?

Even in more prosperous societies, many of us will have experienced the realities of injustice which often go hand in hand with environmental degradation: a new incinerator polluting our air; a new road upsetting the quiet and safety of our neighbourhood; even a bag of rubbish dumped in our garden.

In other parts of the world, abuses of the land can be even more violating, threatening the homes, food supplies, and lives of people and animals alike. It is right for us to feel angry at such injustices – they grieve God's heart too.

The Bible tells us there is a place for grief – it's not something we need to run away from (Ecclesiastes 3:4). The same grief may even drive us to more dedicated prayer, renewed commitment to our neighbours, and a clearer perspective on our place in God's world.

'No more let sin and sorrows grow
Nor thorns infest the ground:
He comes to make his blessings flow
Far as the curse is found!'

ISAAC WATTS[14]

REFLECT AND PRAY. This question can help your group to consider how sin and salvation affect all aspects of God's creation, including people and planet. If appropriate, invite some of your group to share what they've written as you move together into a time of prayer. Depending on your group, you may wish to pray together to conclude your group study, or separately as part of your personal reflections.

SESSION 2 – CREATION GROANS



OVER TO YOU...

Think about the practical ways in which you can be part of cleaning up your neighbourhood and beyond, and make concrete commitments to get started.

USE YOUR LOAF!

14.5% of global emissions are due to the meat and dairy industry. What would creation-friendly church meals look like? Could the default be a veggie burger or veggie breakfast, with the real meat being an option people can ask for? www.greenchristian.org.uk/loaf

FLICK THE SWITCH

At switchit.green you can find out about, and switch, your energy provider (and bank). Of course the electricity that comes through the wires into your house is the same. But you are choosing to financially support clean, green energy, instead of damaging fossil fuels.

ECO CHURCH

The Bronze and Silver awards are fairly straightforward but Gold requires deeper change and links between head knowledge, heart knowledge and behavioural change. Go beyond it being a tick-box exercise and tap into the deeper motivation as Christians, which is to love our neighbours and protect what God has made.

CAR FAST

What would it take for us to commit to a permanent reduction in our car use?

SESSION 3 – DO NOT FEAR!

Is 'care for creation' a lost cause? Do my actions make a difference? In this third study, we consider how individual Christians can pioneer real hope as tenants of creation.

PREPARATION. For this session, make sure you have basic drawing materials (e.g. coloured pencils) to help everyone take part in the icebreaker activity.

ICEBREAKER. This activity is designed to help your group reflect on what we mean by 'the environment' and 'God's creation'. Of course this is a bit of a trick activity – they are the same thing! Compare your group's pictures, and those you might find through online search engines. You may find these images have little relationship to everyday life! Why is this? Does it affect how we respond to 'environmental issues'?

READ. Try to bring enough Bibles for everyone in your group. During discussions, you may want to keep these to hand so you can look at other related passages.

WATCH. In this video, Ruth Valerio, popular writer, theologian and Global Advocacy Director at Tearfund, considers some of the ways we respond to creation in crisis. Watch together.

DISCUSS. Consider together the questions in the main study guide booklet based on Matthew 14 and the video.

QUESTION 1 – AT THIS POINT IN HIS MINISTRY, WHAT HAS JESUS BEEN TEACHING HIS DISCIPLES ABOUT FAITH?

In Matthew's Gospel, the boat scene of chapter 14 takes place right after other key events in Jesus' ministry. Shortly after the death of John the Baptist, Jesus mourns. His solitude is soon interrupted as a great crowd follows him into the wilderness. Yet rather than escaping the crowds, Jesus is moved with compassion for them, and heals their sick.

Faced with this intimidating crowd, Jesus now invites his disciples to act: 'You give them something to eat' (verse 16). That's a tall order in the middle of the wilderness! But the disciples are obedient. Sharing what little food they find – five loaves of bread and two fishes – the disciples give thanks. And miraculously, thousands are fed (verse 21).

'Many Jews expected the Messiah to appear in the spring at the Passover season, when he would repeat the miracle of feeding Israel by manna as had occurred through Moses. But the miracle also has a lesson for the disciples. They see the size of the need and the smallness of the human resources available. They must learn to see as Jesus sees, who "recognizes the size of the need and the greatness of God's resources available".'

M. J. WILKINS[15]

Throughout these scenes, it seems the disciples are getting a crash course in trusting God, regardless of how hopeless their situation appears. It's a lesson that will serve them well in future years of persecution. As they enter the boat, their faith is tested once again.

'He takes the resources, pitifully inadequate, provided by his disciples. He multiplies them over and over again, and there is more left over at the end than there was at the beginning. Such is the power of the Messiah. And that is good news.'

MICHAEL GREEN[16]

QUESTION 2 – AT WHAT OTHER TIMES HAVE THE DISCIPLES FACED A STORM? HOW DID JESUS RESPOND TO THEIR CONCERN?

Turn together to Matthew 8, verses 23-27. Here we see that the disciples have already faced a faith-stretching storm on Lake Galilee. Caught in this first storm, the disciples had panicked, while Jesus slept soundly in the boat. When his disciples woke him, Jesus challenged them for their disbelief, and brought the storm to a standstill (verse 26).

The disciples are stunned: 'What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!' (verse 27). Jesus is not content for his disciples to look on in amazement. He wants them to learn to trust God, and depend on him.

'It is a challenge for all of us to look clearly at Jesus as the divine-human Messiah, to allow him to amaze us … to humble ourselves and call on him at our time of need, as self-sufficient as we might think we are.'

M. J. WILKINS[17]

SESSION 3 – DO NOT FEAR!

QUESTION 3 – WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM PETER'S RESPONSE TO JESUS, AND THE STORM?

In Matthew 14, the disciples are again terrified when faced with a stormy sea. Once again, Jesus is calm where they are afraid, and walks on the water to meet them (verse 26). Seeing Jesus on the water, Peter hopes to respond with active faith, and asks to join Jesus on the water (verse 28).

Among the disciples, Peter shows great courage. Yet for all this courage, Peter's faith doesn't keep him afloat for long. As he begins to walk on the water, Peter sees the waves. Fearing them again, he soon begins to sink (verse 30).

Peter's lesson can be both encouraging, and challenging. It reminds us that if we are easily discouraged by the outward appearance of things, we're in good company! But just as Peter discovered, there is no telling what God might do when we look to him, and step out in faith.

'Jesus thus directs Peter to understand more clearly who he is and then act upon it. Faith is not like a commodity of which Peter needs more. Rather, faith is consistent trust in Jesus to accomplish what Peter is called to do.'

M. J. WILKINS[18]

QUESTION 4 – WHY DOES JESUS CHALLENGE PETER?

Jesus' question to Peter is one he might ask of all his disciples: 'You of little faith, why did you doubt?' (verse 31). It is Peter's paralysing disbelief which Jesus seems to challenge here. Faced with a frightening storm, Peter has panicked, becoming more aware of the turbulent waters around him than of the God who controls them.

In the same way, we may feel overwhelmed at times by an environment which appears 'out of control'. Like Peter, we have every reason to trust in God, walking decisively with him at the very moments when we might feel most powerless. As the disciples had discovered in their first storm, 'even the winds and the waves obey him' (Matthew 8:27).

'Jesus will enable the trusting disciple to do the impossible, and walk on the water to go towards him. But they have to trust the Son of God, who alone controls the storms of life and enables his followers to counteract the forces of gravity that would otherwise overwhelm them.'

MICHAEL GREEN[19]

QUESTIONS 5 AND 6 – HOW CAN CHRISTIAN FAITH INFLUENCE OUR RESPONSE TO AN ENVIRONMENT IN CRISIS? HAVE YOU EVER FELT 'LIKE A RABBIT CAUGHT IN THE HEADLIGHTS' AMID TODAY'S ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS? WHY DO YOU THINK THIS IS?

When studying populations of the twenty-first century, many sociologists have remarked that we are the most anxious generation in living memory! It's not surprising. We are daily reminded of the unpredictable threats our society faces: pandemics; poverty; terrorism; economic decline; and, of course, an unstable climate.

The familiar analogy of a rabbit caught in a car's headlights speaks of the paralysing helplessness that we can often feel today. We see a big problem like 'climate change', hurtling towards us. But it can feel too big, too far away, or too late to do anything in response.

As Christians, we can be confident that God, not the storm around us, has the final say in our lives. Just as Peter and the disciples learned, trust in God can inspire us to take confident action. We can be his co-workers, helping God to restore the creation that he loves, in the name of Jesus! As we move boldly towards him, and the needs of our neighbours, we too may witness miracles in our midst.

REFLECT AND PRAY. This reflection will encourage your group to think about simple actions they can take to respond to creation in crisis. If you're stuck for ideas, take a look at the Ideas for Action section in your booklet. Pray together for a more courageous faith.

SESSION 3 – DO NOT FEAR!



OVER TO YOU...

LEARN ABOUT YOUR FOOTPRINT

Carbon calculators: www.climatestewards.org, www.sw-consulting.co.uk/carbon-calculator or www.giki.earth. Really encourage people to do their own carbon calculators and then to spend some time in prayer about the results.

SWISH SOCIALS

Even if you can't organise these, do support second-hand shops in your area – and it is always more important to buy from them, not just donate to them, to 'close the circle' of recycling.

INVEST WELL

Operation Noah's Bright Now campaign is the place to go for information on how to divest your church www.brightnow.org.uk. Also, this website is a useful resource for switching your bank accounts and pension provider: www.switchit.green

SHARE AND REPAIR

Support your local repair café: www.repaircafe.org

SESSION 4 – SPEAK UP

Do Christians have a role to speak truth to those in power? In this final session, we consider a biblical case for churches to go public in protecting God's creation.

PREPARATION. This is the final session of the *Tenants* study. At this point, we hope it has helped your study group to grow together as disciples of Jesus, and to find new ways of applying the principles and promises of scripture in everyday life. To mark your final session together, why not take a group photograph and share it with us? We'd love to hear how you got on.

Find us on Twitter at **@OperationNoah #TenantsStudy**

ICEBREAKER. Ask each member of your group to share about a 'church hero' (or perhaps someone who is speaking prophetically on the environmental crisis) who has inspired them, and why. Whether it's someone famous or not, talk about the characteristics these people show. Why do you find their lives inspiring?

READ. Try to bring enough Bibles for everyone in your group. During discussions, you may want to keep these to hand so you can look at other related passages.

WATCH. In this final video, Justin Thacker, Academic Director of Cliff College and former head of Theology at Evangelical Alliance, considers the collective, public role churches can play in preserving God's creation.

DISCUSS. Consider together the questions in the main study guide booklet, based on Romans 13 and the video. Be mindful that politics can be a sensitive and divisive issue, so try not to take political sides. Consider together how the Bible invites us to respond to all sorts of political leaders and institutions.

'How can Paul claim that governments punish evil and reward good when he (and we) know of so many counterexamples – of states, such as Nazi Germany, that punished good people and rewarded evil? Is Paul describing the state as it is supposed to function under God, not necessarily how it always does?'

DOUGLAS MOO[20]

QUESTION 1 – IS IT EASY TO BELIEVE THERE IS 'NO AUTHORITY EXCEPT THAT WHICH GOD HAS ESTABLISHED'?

The use of the word 'politics' causes red warning lights to flash in the minds of many Christians. Our churches have always engaged in humanitarian work, especially in medical and educational programmes. But we often avoid political activity and therefore may miss the opportunities to question why humanitarian aid is needed. So, for example, food banks are often supported heavily by churches, but questions need to be asked of our politicians around why a culture as wealthy as ours needs food banks. Is there something we can do to challenge the system which keeps some people dependent on them?

Whether in ancient societies like the Roman Empire, or modern societies like our own, we are repeatedly reminded of how power gets misused. 'Party politics' often looks like an unhelpful shouting match between enemies. No wonder then that in a recent survey, almost two in three people see politicians as 'merely out for themselves'.[21] If God endorses these authorities, many of us struggle to see why.

'Historically, the most terrible things: war, genocide and slavery, have resulted not from disobedience, but from obedience.'

HOWARD ZINN[22]

SESSION 4 – SPEAK UP

QUESTION 2 – WHAT ROLE DOES GOD GIVE TO POLITICAL AUTHORITIES? HOW MIGHT THIS AFFECT GOD'S CREATION?

In Romans chapter 13, we are told about several tasks which God has given to political leaders. These include maintaining justice and law (verses 4-5), and collecting public funds through taxes (verse 6). These are not the most exciting activities! Yet such activities are important for the preservation of whole societies, and the environment we share. For example, taxes can help fund nature reserves. Government investment can promote sustainable farming and renewable energy. New laws can promote better building standards, or protect land, air and water from pollution. Practical measures like these help establish the public justice which God's people are often called to uphold throughout the Bible.

'This is what the LORD says: Do what is just and right. Rescue from the hand of the oppressor the one who has been robbed. Do no wrong or violence to the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place.' (Jeremiah 22:3)

In its original setting, Romans 13 used the word 'diakonoi' to describe political leaders. This roughly translates as 'servants': the same word is often used to describe church workers! It is even echoed in Jesus' description of himself: 'the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve' (Matthew 20:28). In a pulpit or in Parliament then, service of others should mark the actions of all our leaders.

The Climate and Ecological Emergency (CEE) Bill is a great example of what a political authority could be doing now to preserve creation and protect lives. It sets out the legislation necessary for the UK to play our part in preventing climate breakdown and preserving nature. Protecting creation is a mission God offers to governments should they choose to accept it.

QUESTION 3 – WHAT IS MEANT BY 'SUBMISSION' IN THIS PASSAGE? DOES IT COMPROMISE OUR OBEDIENCE TO GOD? AT WHAT POINT MIGHT OBEDIENCE TO GOD REQUIRE DISOBEDIENCE TO THE STATE?

The 'submit' to authorities in this chapter is not what we may think on first reading; it doesn't mean 'go along with corrupt laws or oppressive regimes'. Instead, it means living counter-culturally and taking our responsibilities to follow God's laws seriously. So, if we stand up to a corrupt law, 'submit' means submitting ourselves to the consequences of breaking that law, be that a fine, arrest, prison or in extreme circumstances, death. Paul, Peter and others chose to disobey laws that went against God's commands, but they still 'submitted' to those in charge by accepting the legal consequences of what they had done. The Greek word *hupotasso,* translated as 'submit' means to arrange things in an 'orderly manner underneath'. They could have used the Greek word *hupokouo* which means 'obey', but they didn't.

In the Bible, Christians are called to submit not only to God, or our spiritual leaders, but also to one another. In this passage too, we are also called to submit to leaders outside the church. This submission is never total. Instead, it is 'a matter of conscience' (verse 5), shaped by our understanding that God is in control.

Turn to Mark 12, verses 13-17. Here, Jesus gives his disciples the memorable instruction to 'Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's.' Jesus seems to insist that obedience to rulers doesn't have to undermine obedience to God. Their rule, after all, is only a faint shadow of his. The Caesars of Rome commanded an empire which stretched across Europe, Africa and Asia over hundreds of years, but we trust in a God whose rule is infinitely greater: 'his kingdom endures from generation to generation' (Daniel 4:34).

Even as we submit to political leaders, our first obedience always belongs to God. Conscious of him, we need not fear working with, or confronting, our leaders.

'We are to submit right up to the point where obedience to the state would entail disobedience to God.'

JOHN STOTT[23]

'When a government wilfully abrogates its responsibility to protect its citizens from harm and to secure the future for generations to come, it has failed in its most essential duty of stewardship. The "social contract" has been broken, and it is therefore not only our right, but our moral duty to bypass the government's inaction and flagrant dereliction of duty, and to rebel to defend life itself.'

ROWAN WILLIAMS AND 93 OTHER ACADEMICS[24]

SESSION 4 – SPEAK UP

Is there a place for Christians to engage in local and/or national politics in order to promote creation care?

QUESTION 4 – IS THERE A PLACE FOR CHRISTIANS TO ENGAGE IN LOCAL AND/OR NATIONAL POLITICS IN ORDER TO PROMOTE CREATION CARE?

In modern societies, 'politics' has often been defined narrowly to describe the science of government. Yet in its original meaning, the word 'politics' describes something much bigger, encompassing the life of the city *(polis)* and the responsibilities of citizens *(polites).* It touches the whole of our life in society.

Christian social concern has always shared this commitment to serving in all aspects of social life. Churches have long combined a care for people's immediate needs – such as food and shelter – with attention to the deeper causes that underlie them.

You could say that everything we do is political! Every pound we spend is sending a message about our values and what we think is important – added up together this will be noticed by the market and by government.

This one beautiful earth cannot remain viable for the abundant life for which God created it by individual lifestyle choices alone. Transformational change is needed, which means government action. We have a job to do.

'Those [three urgent prophetic] tasks of the church … are to tell the truth in a society that lives in illusion, to grieve loss in a society that practices denial, and to express hope in a society that lives in despair.'

WALTER BRUEGGEMANN[25]

QUESTION 5 – JUSTIN SAYS CHRISTIANS SHOULD SEE CLIMATE JUSTICE FOR OUR GLOBAL NEIGHBOURS AS A PRIORITY. DO YOU AGREE?

The old saying, 'charity begins at home' cannot be found in the Bible. Scripture certainly calls us to the care of those nearest to us, but this is not all. As we see in Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10, Christian care should extend even to those who have no connection with our daily lives – even our supposed enemies. Similarly in Proverbs 31, verses 8-9, God's people are called to use their unique voice for all those in need:

'Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.'

Today's climate crisis will affect people we'll never meet. Yet just as we plead for these people in prayer, conversations with our leaders can be part of the fruition of our prayer. By engaging with our public leaders, we lend a voice not only to those in need, but to the whole creation to which God has entrusted us.

REFLECT AND PRAY. Pray that your MP would submit to the God of righteousness and truth.

'The church must be reminded that it is not the master or the servant of the state, but rather the conscience of the state. It must be the guide and the critic of the state, and never its tool.'

MARTIN LUTHER KING[26]

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SESSION 4 – SPEAK UP



OVER TO YOU...

Being a blessing to our community and national leaders means that we must politely but firmly hold them to account. If we can persuade them to take steps to safeguard the future then we will have truly blessed them.

GET TO KNOW YOUR MP

Hope for the Future can be found at www.hftf.org.uk/

INVITE YOUR MP TO CHURCH

Hope for the Future can help you engage with your MP. They will help ensure that a trip to your church is not just a political win for them, but is also a time when they take your concerns on board. Go to www.operationnoah.org/campaigns-we-support to find the latest things to talk about with your MP.

JOIN A NATIONAL CAMPAIGN

Go to www.operationnoah.org/campaigns-we-support to find the latest campaigns and activities to join in with. These will include signing petitions, giving a much-needed Christian voice to secular initiatives and joining prayer vigils.

A FINAL WORD TO GROUP LEADERS

Thank you! If you've been leading a *Tenants* study group, we hope you have found this helpful and encouraging. If you have questions or feedback on this resource, or wish to know about other ways of helping your church respond to today's climate crisis, please let us know by contacting admin@operationnoah.org.

If you want to know more about our resources, newsletter or supporting our work financially, please visit www.operationnoah.org.



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