

Climate church talk

Thank you for downloading our guide to talking about climate change at church. In this resource, we've written our top tips and example wordings for a short announcement and a full sermon for you to use in a Sunday service.

Whether you've only got time for a quick announcement, or you've got a whole sermon slot, you can help people understand the climate emergency and be inspired by God's love for creation and his heart for justice. We've also made some slides to go with these talks, which you can download on our website at:

tearfund.org/ActResources

Please email us at campaigns@tearfund.org at least two weeks before you speak at your church so we can pray for you and support you as you prepare.

Thank you for supporting the campaign and inviting others to get on board too!

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A short announcement

If you've only got time for a short announcement, here are our four top tips:

- 1 Make sure you get these key points across clearly:
 - Climate change is already hitting people in poverty the hardest.
 - God calls us to love our neighbours and speak up for them.
 - You can make a difference by signing the declaration and by praying.
- 2 If you're meeting online, make sure you share the action link in the chat or video description: tearfund.org/reboot
- 3 Make sure you give people plenty of time to take action on the website. Perhaps wear a watch so you can give them at least a whole minute to find the place to sign and fill in their details.
- 4 If you usually have a time of corporate prayer in your service, you could tie things together by sharing the story of Orbisa with the person leading prayers that week. We also have lots of other prayer resources on our website, which might be useful: tearfund.org/PrayForClimate

Here's how we might give an announcement, to help you write yours:

Good morning. I would love to quickly introduce you to Orbisa. This is her on the screen. She's 35 and lives in Ethiopia with her children. She and her family work hard rearing goats and cattle to make a living, but in the past few years nine of her ten cows and nearly half of her goats have all died. That's because the rains aren't coming when they used to, and droughts in the region are getting more severe. As the climate changes, it's pushing Orbisa's family deeper into poverty.

In the Bible, Jesus tells us the most important commandments are to love God, and to love our neighbours. Tackling the climate crisis is vital to both of these – honouring God by protecting his creation and loving our global neighbours who are hit first and worst by what is now a climate emergency.

This year is critical, with the UK hosting both the G7 summit in Cornwall in June and the UN climate talks in Glasgow in November. For the sake of people like Orbisa, this year has to be one where the world speeds up its response to climate change. Tearfund has joined with The Climate Coalition to call on the UK Government to lead the world by ensuring our recovery from the coronavirus pandemic is one that is greener and fairer and puts us on track to tackle climate change.

In the chat/description there should be a link (tearfund.org/reboot).

In this Reboot campaign, Tearfund is calling for greater support for people in poverty who are most vulnerable to climate change, and for more investment in renewable energy around the world. We really are at a turning point in history, and the decisions we make now will affect our economy, society and the climate for decades to come.

If you have a look through, you'll see there's a place for you to add your name to The Climate Coalition's declaration by writing your name and address.

When we speak up together we can make a real difference. We can stand alongside Orbisa and call on the government to take action. Can I give you a moment to do that now, and then I'll pray?

[Pause for 60 seconds]

Father God, we thank you that you are a God of justice.

Thank you that you know Orbisa and her family, and all those already impacted by climate change.

Jesus, we are sorry for the ways we've damaged your creation.

Help us make changes in our own lives to love our global neighbours well.

Holy Spirit, would you stir the hearts of members of our government,

Guide them in all their decision-making, and inspire them to protect the most vulnerable?

Amen.

A sermon/main talk

Speaking in a sermon slot is a big deal. It's the main time in the week when your community comes together to learn about God and what it means to follow him. We want to honour that time, and offer you some great teaching content to help your community go deeper in their relationship with Jesus as you speak to them about climate change.

In the last couple of years, hundreds of churches all around the UK have included climate change in their talks. It's a vital topic for Christians to engage with, and it can help us learn more about discipleship, worship, God's justice and much more.

Our top tip for planning a good talk on climate change would be to structure your talk in these four clear sections:

1 God's love of creation

Drawing on biblical passages such as those we've suggested to help people see God's delight in all he's made – its value and beauty.

2 How we've damaged creation, and how this is impacting people in poverty

Explaining the urgency of the climate crisis, and how that impacts people around the world – all made in the image of God.

3 The hope we find in Jesus

As Christians, we know the end of the story. We have a deep and unshakeable hope because of what Jesus has done for us, and what he continues to do in the world.

4 An invitation to respond

Our first response should be to fix our eyes on God and to pray. But we can't stop there. In the face of a crisis like this, we need to be brave and use our voice. When we speak up together, governments and businesses can change.

Below is an example of a talk you might like to adapt, based on a talk a Tearfund supporter gave to their own church. We've provided four readings for you to reflect on as you prepare. Although we'd suggest only using the top two as readings during the service, you could reference the other two yourself as you speak. Please do adapt the talk for your church, but we hope the template below is a helpful example. We've also suggested two places in the talk where you might want to use a video instead of covering those parts yourself.

Main readings:

Psalm 104:1,10–26

Mark 4:1–10, 13–20

Optional readings:

Romans 8:19–21

Esther 4:12–16

God's love of creation

Good morning,

Our readings from Psalm 104 and Mark 4 vary in many ways: their purpose, their setting, and when they were written, are all noticeably different. But they also have a lot in common.

Both passages demonstrate an intimate knowledge of creation.

The psalmist describes the beauty of creation, declaring, 'O Lord, what a variety of things you have made! In wisdom you have made them all.' The author understood how creation works. They knew where the birds nest, and where the mountain goats live, the great skill of a lion as it hunts its prey, and the vast array of creatures living in the water.

They knew creation intimately: they must have spent time observing and learning how all things fit together, and they were inspired to worship as a result! In verse 31 of the psalm, just after the part we've heard this morning, it says God rejoices in his creation. The beauty and variety of all he's made brings God joy!

Similarly, in our New Testament passage from Mark, Jesus demonstrates his own detailed understanding of creation.

He describes the issues that can hinder the growth of crops: he knows how drought can cause plants to wither, or how rocky ground prevents the development of roots. Even though he was a carpenter by trade, he knew the importance of nutritious soil for a bountiful harvest. Jesus has an intimate knowledge of the workings of creation.

This shouldn't be a surprise to us; the Bible tells us how all things were created for Jesus and by Jesus. In him, all things hold together: he's Lord of all creation. It's not a surprise that Jesus considers it important to observe the creation around us.

But Jesus shows us something else too. He teaches us that not only does he have an intimate relationship with creation, but that also we can learn about our heavenly Father through it. Whether it's through the relentlessness of weeds, the character of birds or the power of a mustard seed, time and again, Jesus points to the Father and the way he works through creation.

We live in a busy world and often fail to take time to observe creation, but as the writer of Proverbs advises, 'Go to the ant... consider its ways.'

From the psalms to the gospels, we see the ways creation can reveal more of God's character and inspire us to worship, and we see how God delights and finds joy in all he's made!

How we've damaged creation, and how that is impacting people in poverty

But when we look at the world today, we can see the many ways that we've damaged this beautiful gift God has given us. The ways that we live and work and consume have pushed creation to breaking point.

[If you want to refer to the Romans 8 reading:]

In our reading from Paul's letter to the church in Rome, we heard how creation is in bondage to decay, trapped in frustration and crying out for liberation.

Whether it's plastic pollution littering seas and the poorest communities, or species going extinct at record rates, or the climate crisis making droughts, floods and storms more frequent and severe, we've misused and damaged this beautiful gift from God. We're feeling some of the effects in the UK, but the impacts are hitting people in poverty the hardest.

It's hard to grasp what that really means: it's big and abstract.

So let me quickly introduce you to Orbisa.

If you'd like to use a video:

You can watch and download the video of Orbisa on our website: tearfund.org/Reboot and if you have any issues, just let us know at campaigns@tearfund.org

If you're telling her story:

This is her on the screen. She's a 35-year-old mother who lives in the Afar region of Ethiopia. A few years ago, Orbisa could rely on the rains: now, because of the changing climate, they are far less predictable. So she walks up to ten hours a day, every day, to find water for her family to drink. Her livelihood depends on selling livestock – but drought has killed nine of her ten cows. She's lost nearly half her goats too. Let's pause for a second... The stark reality is that Orbisa is paying the price for emissions which have mostly been generated by developed nations like ours. [pause]

This is what she said to Tearfund: 'We used to get rain every four to five months; the area was very fertile and green. But it hasn't rained for six months and I don't know when it will rain next. I feel worried whenever I think about the future.'

Around the world, millions of people like Orbisa are being pushed back into poverty because of climate change. In 2016, world hunger started to increase for the first time in a decade and has continued to increase every year since. And that's because of climate change and conflict, with climate change exacerbating the risk of conflict.

The science is clear: the climate crisis is being caused by us, especially us in developed nations, and the impacts are accelerating. We are running out of time to prevent the worst effects. We have to act fast and change the way we live, and governments have to be much more ambitious. But right now, we have a unique window of opportunity. This year, the UK is hosting both the G7 in Cornwall in June and the UN climate talks in Glasgow in November. How the government chooses to rebuild after the coronavirus pandemic will not only shape our own economy, but also influence other nations as we host these talks. This is a crucial moment for our leaders to take climate change seriously.

In the Bible, Jesus tells us the most important commandments are to love God, and to love our neighbours. Tackling the climate crisis is vital to both of these – honouring God by protecting his creation and loving our global neighbours who are hit first and worst by what is now a climate emergency.

The hope we find in Jesus

Colossians 1:19–20 says this:

‘For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him [Jesus], and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.’

‘To reconcile to himself all things, things on earth and things in heaven...’ Our world is broken, but God is at work reconciling and restoring.

If you would like to use the animation:

In this section, you might like to use our animation about the brokenness in the world and God’s mission to bring restoration and reconciliation, or you can continue with the script below. You can watch and download the animation here: <https://vimeo.com/451780056/841556a0a7>

If you would like to explain this part:

To me, this says I need a much bigger view of Jesus. He didn’t come just to reconcile me with my Father in heaven, but to reconcile and restore ALL things – in heaven and on earth! That’s far more than just us. Jesus came to begin the restoration of the world to how God intended it to be. To make all things new.

Jesus values creation, shows us how it reveals the love of the Father, and brings restoration and healing – uniting everything back with God.

We can have hope. Because of Jesus’ death on the cross, all things can be made new; everything sin has broken and corrupted is being restored and reconciled to God. And what’s more, we can be part of it. Jesus invites us to participate in his mission in this world.

The world is crying out, but God is at work and we’re invited to join him in a ministry of reconciliation – reconciling people to their Father, but also reconciling people to the creation we’ve been given to care for, and seeing it restored. This is the fullness of the gospel, not a side issue.

An invitation to respond

So how can we respond?

To answer that question, let's turn to Esther in the Old Testament. In the face of a crisis, she responds with faith and courage.

In the book of Esther, the Persian king makes plans to wipe out the Jews, but Esther's uncle, Mordecai, warns her about the plan. Esther's response to the news of the threat to her people is remarkable. She tells Mordecai to gather people together to pray and fast. While they do so, she will approach the king and ask him to reconsider – even though she knows that it is against the law and she could lose her life.

In chapter four she says to Mordecai: 'Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.'

Esther teaches us that following Jesus requires us to speak up against injustice, even when it's costly to ourselves – and that we should act from a foundation of prayer.

So I want to invite you this morning to commit to both of these things: to prayer and to action, so that we can address the huge injustice of climate change, and its impact on the poorest people around the world.

In the chat/description there should be a link to Tearfund's website. *[Or you could just read out the url: tearfund.org/reboot]*

The UK is hosting both the G7 leaders in Cornwall this summer, and the UN's climate talks in Glasgow in November. So Tearfund has joined with The Climate Coalition to call on the UK Government to ensure our recovery from the coronavirus pandemic is one that puts us on track to tackle climate change.

In this campaign, Tearfund is calling for greater support for people living in poverty who are most vulnerable to climate change, and for more investment in renewable energy around the world. We are at a turning point in history, and the decisions we make now will affect our economy, society and the climate for decades to come.

If you have a look through, you'll see there's a place for you to add your voice to The Climate Coalition's declaration by writing your name and address.

When we speak up together, we can make a real difference; we can stand alongside Orbisa and call on the government to take action. I'll give you a moment to do that now.

[Pause for 60 seconds]

As part of this campaign Tearfund is inviting us to pray about the climate crisis too. As we contemplate the scale of the climate crisis, it's important that we keep our eyes fixed on God. He is the God of justice and restoration, who cares for the poor and is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine.

I'll put another link in the chat/there should be a second link in the description, which takes you to some of their prayer resources, including an opportunity to sign up for weekly prayer points to be sent to you by text message. *[Or just read out the url: tearfund.org/PrayForClimate]*

Let's stand alongside Orbisa, and all of those impacted by climate change around the world, in our prayers and by taking action.

Let's pray:

Father God,

We thank you that you are a God of justice.

Thank you that you know Orbisa and her family, and all those already impacted by climate change.

Jesus, we are sorry for the ways we've damaged your creation.

Help us make changes in our own lives to love our global neighbours well.

Holy Spirit, would you stir the hearts of our government,

Guide them in all their decision-making, and inspire them to protect the most vulnerable?

Amen.

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