

## Considering a YWAM response to climate change

October 31<sup>st</sup> 2023

In September 2023, a small group of YWAMers drawn from four continents across generations and from a range of ministry backgrounds gathered together at YWAM Harpenden to seek the Lord on a YWAM response to climate change. Our hope in gathering was to discern God's word to us as a movement.

We spent two days hearing from experts in various related fields. Each drew powerfully from both their expertise and a strong theological and Scriptural basis. Speakers included: Prof Katharine Hayhoe, a renowned climate scientist (video [here](#)); Prof Mike Morecroft, who gave us a rare insight into the rigour of the International Panel on Climate Change<sup>1</sup> process (video [here](#)); Dr Ben Richards, who laid a theological foundation for creation care; Liu Liu and Sarah Wiggins from Tearfund who both increased our awareness of the concrete consequences of climate change and prophetically encouraged us to expect God to do big things through YWAM; and Rev. Mitch Hiscox, President Emeritus of the Evangelical Environmental Network, who explained potential market-based steps to counter climate change (video [here](#)).

We entered discussions from a variety of different perspectives. Nevertheless, God led us towards a clear acknowledgement of the nature and causes of the current changes in global climate and their increasingly significant impact. We received deeper revelation of God's passion for all creation, our calling as a royal priesthood in relation to it, and the associated spiritual battle. We recognised the strategic significance of this issue for our mission and discerned a challenge to respond courageously in unity.

We hope and trust that the fruit of our deliberations, reflections and discernment will serve you, the wider YWAM movement, in responding to what can otherwise be a confusing and contentious issue.

We provide below a summary of our key theological reflections, a succinct distillation of the science, an overview of the relevance of this issue to our movement, and an initial list of recommendations for practice.

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<sup>1</sup> The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change informs governments about the state of knowledge of climate change. It does this by examining all the relevant scientific literature on the subject.

## Theological reflections

We recognise that the gospel is a multi-faceted diamond, which sheds more light when seen in different ways. The following narrative of salvation history helpfully incorporates our relationship with God's creation, and enables us to live with integrity as God's people:

- Royal priesthood over and for all creation: humans were made to enact God's loving rule over creation to bring about its flourishing for the glory of God.
- Human rebellion leading to the distortion of all creation: humans rebelled against the creator and abused our role, leading to distortion of our relationships with God, to ourselves, with each other, as well as the wider creation. Amongst other sins, this rebellion is demonstrated in greed, domination, and overconsumption.
- Reconciliation of all things: at the cross, God was reconciling all things to himself through Christ. He has entrusted to us as his body this ministry of reconciliation.
- The recreation of all things has begun: Jesus began the recreation of all things, supremely in his resurrection. He has commissioned his body to join him in this and will bring it to completion in the renewed heavens and earth.

It is critical that, by God's grace, we take up our royal priestly role with respect to all creation together. We need to ensure that our own interactions with creation have sufficient integrity that we can pray, speak and act in this role with authority, to the glory of God.

### **Cape Town Commitment extract**

We also commend to you the remarkably compact summary in the text of the Cape Town Commitment, from the 2010 Lausanne congress<sup>2</sup>:

We love the world of God's creation. This love is not mere sentimental affection for nature (which the Bible nowhere commands), still less is it pantheistic worship of nature (which the Bible expressly forbids). Rather it is the logical outworking of our love for God by caring for what belongs to him. 'The earth is the Lord's and everything in it.' The earth is the property of the God we claim to love and obey. We care for the earth, most simply, because it belongs to the one whom we call Lord.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://lausanne.org/content/ctc/ctcommitment#p1-7> - The Lausanne movement, started by Billy Graham in 1974 is all about world evangelisation, and the commitment made at the Third Congress included some very good material on creation care as a part of this focus.



The earth is created, sustained and redeemed by Christ. We cannot claim to love God while abusing what belongs to Christ by right of creation, redemption and inheritance. We care for the earth and responsibly use its abundant resources, not according to the rationale of the secular world, but for the Lord's sake. If Jesus is Lord of all the earth, we cannot separate our relationship to Christ from how we act in relation to the earth. For to proclaim the gospel that says 'Jesus is Lord' is to proclaim the gospel that includes the earth, since Christ's Lordship is over all creation. Creation care is thus a gospel issue within the Lordship of Christ.

Such love for God's creation demands that we repent of our part in the destruction, waste and pollution of the earth's resources and our collusion in the toxic idolatry of consumerism. Instead, we commit ourselves to urgent and prophetic ecological responsibility. We support Christians whose particular missional calling is to environmental advocacy and action, as well as those committed to godly fulfilment of the mandate to provide for human welfare and needs by exercising responsible dominion and stewardship. The Bible declares God's redemptive purpose for creation itself. Integral mission means discerning, proclaiming, and living out the biblical truth that the gospel is God's good news, through the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, for individual persons, and for society, and for creation. All three are broken and suffering because of sin; all three are included in the redeeming love and mission of God; all three must be part of the comprehensive mission of God's people.

## Distillation of the science of current changes in the climate

Scientists from many backgrounds and regions of the world, including a number of Bible-believing Christians, whose integrity we trust, have spent decades observing the created world. They have noted significant changes in the global climate. Overall, the Earth is getting dramatically warmer<sup>3</sup>, rainfall patterns are changing and weather events once considered extreme are becoming more common and increasingly severe in ways that seriously impact human societies.<sup>4</sup>

It has been known since the 1850s that carbon dioxide acts as a blanket insulating the Earth. In recent decades, the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has gone up by more than half as a result of burning fossil fuels for energy production. (Other gases also trap heat but CO<sub>2</sub> exhibits the most significant change). Out of thousands of specialists in the field of climate science, all but a tiny handful consider that this increase is responsible for essentially all of the warming we observe.<sup>5, 6 & 7</sup> Climate is influenced by volcanic eruptions, changes in solar activity, the Earth's orbital cycles etc.. However, these factors can be observed and their impacts calculated: based on these factors alone, we would expect to see a very gradual cooling at present.<sup>8, 9 & 10</sup>

Changes in the climate due to human activity serve as a threat multiplier, making a diverse range of existing problems such as poverty and health worse than they would be otherwise. Increasingly severe and frequent extreme weather events, erratic rainfall patterns, rising sea levels and high temperatures damage or destroy crops, ecosystems, livelihoods and homes, as well as directly affecting human health. These changes disproportionately affect the poor, who are not only more vulnerable but also less able to adapt to change, as well as being those who have historically contributed very little to climate change.

Scientific findings indicate that the negative impacts of warming significantly intensify with small increases in temperature. This means that the positive impact of any changes we make will be greater the sooner we make them.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/chapter/chapter-2/CC>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/downloads/report/IPCC\\_AR6\\_WGI\\_Chapter11.pdf](https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_WGI_Chapter11.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> <https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1748-9326/ac2966>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.carbonbrief.org/analysis-why-scientists-think-100-of-global-warming-is-due-to-humans/>

<sup>7</sup> Content of Prof K Hayhoe talk with our group 20 Sept 2023.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/chapter/chapter-7/#Earth%E2%80%99s>

<sup>9</sup> <https://skepticalscience.com/solar-activity-sunspots-global-warming.htm>

<sup>10</sup> Katharine Hayhoe explainer video here: [https://youtu.be/k5\\_zpjerQFo?si=fxF1eWvNjlgxWMQK](https://youtu.be/k5_zpjerQFo?si=fxF1eWvNjlgxWMQK)

There are many ways of reducing the negative impact of humans on God's creation (including humans). Most of these would also curb climate change. We can both reduce emissions and increase the rate at which harmful gases are taken out of the atmosphere. For example, we can embrace more energy-efficient technologies, change our consumption patterns, use alternative energy sources, change to regenerative agricultural systems and grow more trees. In many instances, these actions have additional benefits, such as reducing costs and promoting health.

We are aware of examples of the Holy Spirit and Scripture inspiring people to pursue innovative routes in these areas. We can also adapt to some of the climatic changes with wisdom and mutual support. For example, changing food production or our buildings to cope better with intense rainfall. As in all situations, we trust and have hope in God to lead us as a movement, and as the body of Christ globally, to fulfil our mandate to serve God's creation and lead it into a place of flourishing.

This is a summary of what we came to understand upon hearing evidence from fellow believers who have, as their life's calling, the privilege of studying God's glorious creation. In recognising the observations of rapid changes in weather patterns, and the evidenced link with human activities we do not approve of any particular set of political actions. All policies have problems, some more than others. This summary is not in any way an endorsement of political ideology or particular policies.

(Links to recordings of the presentation and questions that we had from Prof Katharine Hayhoe [here](#), and of Dr Mike Morecroft [here](#).)

## Why should YWAM care?

**Changes in the climate will have innumerable impacts. Many of these will affect areas that YWAM has been called to engage with - not least through our legacy words - including the following:**

### Unreached peoples

- Many of the most unreached or difficult to reach people groups (people within the 10/40 window) are among those most dramatically affected by climate change. Tackling climate issues may offer new common ground on which to engage with these peoples, particularly perhaps through Business As Mission.
- Over the next 10-20 years we will see a huge number of climate refugees, which will also include countless people from unreached groups.<sup>11</sup>

### OBT / OMT

- Climate change has an element of linguistic injustice as languages will be lost or scattered as people are forced to migrate due to more extreme weather events and other climate disasters. OBT programs will become harder to achieve as this scattering occurs.

### Gen Z

- Climate change (and more widely Creation Care) is a significant issue for Gen Z, both as an issue of justice and a cause of anxiety. Recognition of the importance of these issues and providing a Biblical understanding and biblically consistent response to them can provide hope and inspiration to this generation.
- If we want to see waves of young people released into mission, we have to engage with the issues that matter to them.<sup>12</sup>

### Mercy Ministry & Community Development

- Much of the progress that has been supported by YWAM's historic and ongoing mercy ministries could be undone by the effects of unchecked climate change.<sup>13</sup>
- The need for mercy ministry has increased and will continue to increase as weather and climate events get more extreme and more climate-related migration happens.

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<sup>11</sup> [https://www.ifrc.org/sites/default/files/2021-10/IFRC-Displacement-Climate-Report-2021\\_1.pdf](https://www.ifrc.org/sites/default/files/2021-10/IFRC-Displacement-Climate-Report-2021_1.pdf),  
<https://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2021/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.youthscape.co.uk/research/published-research/burning-down-the-house>

<sup>13</sup> <https://public.wmo.int/en/media/press-release/climate-change-undermines-nearly-all-sustainable-development-goals>

- With our wide geographic reach we are well positioned to make meaningful and attainable adaptations such as agricultural changes and flood damage avoidance. We can also promote mitigation steps such as energy efficiency which both help climate emissions and, if done well, can help communities develop - for example, through air quality improvements or access to cheaper/accessible power. There is a potential for new ministries to serve and empower local communities around the world in this way.

### **Children and future generations**

- Young and yet unborn generations matter to God. We have a responsibility to leave a good inheritance for them with a widespread livable climate, clean air and water and food systems which work to feed the whole world well.
- There are opportunities to involve children in mission through creation care programmes. For example, King's Kids have been planting trees in West Africa which has led to a transformation in the local community.

### **Reconciliation**

- Climate change accelerates political and geographical conflicts. Furthermore, armed conflicts themselves have negative environmental consequences.<sup>14</sup>
- Opinions about climate change and how to respond feature in significant social, international and political divisions. Christ came to reconcile all things to himself, and we want to join in with his ministry of reconciliation.

### **Healthcare**

- The impacts of climate change upon human health range from the direct effects of high heat and humidity, which can be fatal, to the spread of vector-borne diseases such as Dengue and Malaria into regions that were previously too cold for them. Exposure to high levels of heat in pregnancy has a measurable impact on birth weight, early births and stillbirths<sup>15</sup> but this can be effectively mitigated if action is taken.<sup>16</sup>
- YWAM ministries can play an important role in health education and treatment, and initiate adaptive changes, such as responding effectively to heat waves.

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<sup>14</sup>

<https://www.unhcr.org/media/no-39-harms-way-international-protection-context-nexus-dynamics-between-conflict-or-violence>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.science.org/content/article/how-much-heat-dangerous-during-pregnancy>

<sup>16</sup> [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(22\)01540-9/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(22)01540-9/fulltext)

### **Training and innovation**

- A better understanding of our mandate as royal priests to care for the whole of creation will equip people to effectively serve the Kingdom in all spheres of society.
- There are already instances of the UofN fostering an environment in which creative, Spirit-inspired solutions can be developed. We can build on and multiply this, training up future leaders in driving solutions to climate change within the economic and technology sphere.

### **YWAM operations**

- The way we steward our campuses and make decisions about travel have intrinsic importance as we seek to value what God values. They are also critical to enabling us to speak with integrity as we engage missionally in relation to climate change in any of the above areas.

### **Coastal cities and islands**

- God has often emphasised port cities and islands in YWAM's journey. Our outreach teams can acknowledge that many of these are already affected by small changes in sea level, but some will be massively or existentially impacted in coming decades, depending on the rate of climate change.<sup>17</sup> & <sup>18</sup>

This is only an initial summary. We have left out many details and examples for brevity and there is much more that we will need to explore together as we journey forwards with God.

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<sup>17</sup> <https://www.ipcc.ch/srocc/>

<sup>18</sup> <https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/observations/scientists-have-been-underestimating-the-pace-of-climate-change/>



## Recommendations

### Individuals

- Pray! There are huge spiritual battles surrounding these issues (arguably none of which are entirely new). Let's pray for God's kingdom to come, and for him to lead us as to our involvement.
- Take one or two individual steps. For great guidance on ideas visit <https://count-us-in.com/steps>.
- Get informed by reading trustworthy information. The YWAM [Creation Care Hub](#) has recommended books and websites. We are also planning an online seminar series on Christian perspectives on climate change, likely beginning January 2025. Sign up [here](#) to be kept informed.
- Connect ... with other YWAMers at the monthly Creation Care Circle zoom meetings: sign up [here](#).

### Campuses

- Calculate your location's carbon footprint using a tool such as <https://www.climatestewards.org/carbon-calculators/>.
- Consider how travel, food, energy and waste processes can be improved. The YWAM [Creation Care Hub](#) can connect you with people who can help with this.

### Training

- Ensure that God's intention for creation as a whole is being taught on DTSS, in line with the [curriculum](#).
- Support and multiply existing training relating to creation care e.g. the school of sustainable development, the Foundations of Creation Care seminar.
- Seek to integrate the theology and practice of creation care into ongoing training.

### Outreach

- Use direct flights/ low-carbon modes of transport where possible.
- Consider how outreach teams may be able to serve the environmental, as well as spiritual and social needs of those with whom they are connecting.
- Build spiritual authority through acting with integrity (the journey is important, as well as the destination).
- Training in creation care (including as integrated with evangelism).

### Movement

- Evaluate our structures and rhythms of meeting in light of their implications for e.g. travel-related carbon emissions.
- Seek the Lord for how to respond both practically and spiritually at the different levels of our movement, and evaluate and review our policies and practices accordingly.