

SHIFTING CLIMATES



Sunday School Guide

10 week curriculum

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10-Week Sunday School Curriculum Guide

This guide is meant for Sunday School classes who want to dig into the full content of the Shifting Climates podcast. Each week, either listen to the episode as a class during the Sunday School hour or assign it as homework for the preceding week. We highly recommend listening to whole episodes, but facilitators are more than welcome to share clips of their choosing to jog people's memories. Of course, feel free to pick and choose or add to the questions to best suit your group.

Find all podcast episodes on our website, www.shiftingclimates.com. Links to episode transcripts can be found on corresponding episode pages. Transcripts may be a helpful resource for those who have trouble following the audio. All episodes can also be found on any podcast app, including Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Stitcher, and Google Podcasts.

In addition to the following discussion guide, we invite you to use the photo essays as visuals to accompany each week's lesson. Photo essays and other resources can be found on our website, www.shiftingclimates.com.

For the most recent version of this curriculum, see the Faith & Climate Resources page on CSCS's website, www.sustainableclimatesolutions.org.

This curriculum was written by Harrison Horst, Michaela Mast, and Sarah Longenecker. For questions, feedback, or suggestions, please email us at shiftingclimates@gmail.com.

Week 1: Weeping While Planting

Listen to Episode 1 (36 minutes)

Discuss:

1. In all of our interviews, we start with the same question: “What was your relationship with the earth like as a child?” We found that this question helped ground our conversations and establish empathy. Share with one another: What was (and is) your relationship with the earth like?
2. Is it difficult for you to have conversations about climate change, or to bring up climate change in an everyday context? How would you have responded to Randy if you were across the table from him?
3. Aubrey Taylor McClain talks about taking an active role in the process of God’s restoration and makes a distinction between the “prophets” and the “kings.” Who do you think are the “prophets” and “kings” of today?
4. In additional conversations we have had with Sibö, it is clear that she believes strongly in the urgency of action. We’d be remiss if we didn’t leave you with a call to action! What is one thing you can do this week to begin acting on climate change, however small it is?

Additional Resources:

- *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture* by Ellen Davis is a great book detailing the relationship between the Hebrews of the Old Testament with the land.

Link to Episode and Transcript: <https://shiftingclimates.com/episode-1/>

Week 2: Feeding the Five Thousand

Listen to Episode 2 (30 minutes)

Discuss:

1. What emotions do you feel when you hear the words, “climate change”? (*Suggestion: go around the room so that each person has a chance to speak. Before opening up the floor, invite everyone into open and honest conversation, regardless of expertise or uncertainties.*)
2. We enjoyed our conversation with Bob & Linda because they were willing to be vulnerable and honest with us. By the end, it felt like we had more in common than not, and that society had kind of tricked both of us into not trusting each other. Did you find yourself empathizing with Bob & Linda as you listened?
3. In Episode 1, we talked about the direct effects of climate change with extreme weather in Zimbabwe. Bob & Linda are also affected by climate change, but not in the same way as Sibö. Brainstorm: What are some of the other economic, social, and political impacts of climate change that we don't often talk about? Who is getting left behind?
4. Matthew Groves points out that, while conservative denial gets more attention, what he calls “liberal denial” is just as problematic. He defines “liberal denial” as “believing that you can have the benefits of fossil-fuel level consumption without having to deal with the side effects (we've also heard this called “soft denial”). Do you agree that climate change denial is problematic all along the political spectrum? What types of denial do you see in yourself?
5. What do you think of Matthew's assertion that “the church needs to speak science if they want a seat at the table” in the 21st century?

Additional Resources:

- Listen to Karenni Gore's full speech at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS) <https://soundcloud.com/followambs/2018-09-27-r-g-karenni-gore-a>
- Visit Matthew Groves' website, www.matthewdgroves.com, for additional writings, including his “Climate Change Guide for the Perplexed.”

Link to Episode and Transcript: <https://shiftingclimates.com/episode-2/>

Week 3: Winds of the Spirit

Listen to Episode 3 (35 minutes)

Discuss:

1. Do you have any experiences with Mennonite Disaster Service (or other service agency) that remind you of Kevin's or Durga's stories? How have you seen Christ move in places of brokenness?
2. What are some of the values or traditions we already possess as a church that we could draw from as we try to mitigate the impacts of climate change? What are ways the church could act as a model in that way?
3. We talk about going to the "frontlines of ecological devastation" as a church. What can you imagine that looking like? As the impacts of climate change grow more severe, how do you think this will transform the church?
4. We end with a story from Markella about a house fire and mention a film by Josh Fox, "How to Let Go of the World and Love All the Things the Climate Can't Change." What does "letting go" mean for you? And what things can't climate change take away?

Additional Resources:

- *How to Let Go of the World and Love All the Things the Climate Can't Change*, by Josh Fox (<http://howtoletgomovie.com/>)

Link to Episode and Transcript: <https://shiftingclimates.com/episode-3/>

Week 4: Tales of a Sower

Listen to Episode 4 (35 minutes)

Discuss:

1. Ben talked about his amazement with the “magnificent” patterns of the natural world. What are you grateful for this week? What sparks wonder in you? (*Suggestion: go around in a circle to give everyone a chance to share*)
2. Are there similarities between the way your faith community interacts with climate change and the way our interviewees in Bluffton responded? How is climate change talked about in your community? Is it ever discussed using different language?
3. Pastor Matthew Yoder says the Bible leads him to an understanding that the land we live on should have rights, but like ancient Israel, we’ve come to valorize the exploitation of land. Reflect again on your relationship with the land. Has it changed since you were a child? How? What does that relationship look like now?
4. We’ve been surprised as we come to understand the layered effects of climate change. When we started, we thought the main impacts of climate change were natural disasters, but we didn’t think of the farmers dealing with seasonal changes or the coal mining communities needing to transition economically. Are there ways that your community has been impacted by the sub-effects, or ripple effects, of climate change?

Additional Resources:

- If you’re interested in learning more about the particular impacts of climate change in different parts of the U.S., including agricultural yields and mortality, check out this research article.
<https://www.brookings.edu/research/how-the-geography-of-climate-damage-could-make-the-politics-less-polarizing/>

Link to Episode and Transcript: <https://shiftingclimates.com/episode-4/>

Week 5: Communion

Listen to Episode 5 (38 minutes)

Discuss:

1. In small groups: When is it that you feel most connected to the world? When is the last time you've experienced that connection?
2. For the organizers at Camp Friedenswald, inviting campers to worship outside is a crucial part of becoming re-connected to the land. Have you ever worshipped outside? Is it easy or difficult to hear God when you are in nature?
3. Do you resonate with the term "environmental amnesia?" Some of you may have observed a shift away from an agricultural lifestyle in your lifetime, and much of what Ray describes has to do with that shift. Do you think a return to an agricultural lifestyle is what we need? Or are there other ways for us to restore our connection to the land?
4. Think for a moment about the ways that food has connected you to others, God, and the earth in your own lives. Can you think of ways we could add to our rituals around food that would help us counteract environmental amnesia? (*Example: Thank God for the life that has gone into the meal in addition to the hands that prepared it. For Michaela, this has become a way of remembering where her food comes from and expressing gratitude for the plants and animals whose lives are fueling her own*)
5. Tallu says the Nashville Food Project has been transformed "from charity into something that looks more like justice" to the point that it has become their mission. What are some ways your community could begin to move "from charity into something that looks more like justice"? What could this idea look like in your own context?

Additional Resources:

- For more ways on how Anabaptist theology could weave itself into our connection to the land, see *Watershed Discipleship*, a collection of essays compiled by Ched Myers.

Link to Episode and Transcript: <https://shiftingclimates.com/episode-5/>

Week 6: Healing of the Eyes

Listen to Episode 6 (33 minutes)

Discuss:

1. We end our episode by asking the questions: “Who else are we overlooking? And what can they teach us?” What are your thoughts?
2. Are there cultural biases to how we understand Christianity? What are some ways that learning from other cultures could make us better Christians?
3. The origin story Randy told includes several different animals. Duck is initially eager, but after understanding the depth of the situation, decides maybe someone else should do it; Otter gets distracted by material comforts and forgets to work on the problem; and Beaver overextends himself and returns cynical and disillusioned. Which animal do you relate to most?
4. Climate change is an overwhelming topic, and it’s not something any of us can tackle alone. Sharing our fears and anxieties within a trusted community has been healing for us. When it comes to climate change, what fears or anxieties do you have?
5. Randy says he believes our sole purpose as Christians and humans is to “repair disharmony.” Do you agree with him? Are there narratives or stories in the Bible that give the same message? What are some of the ways we have not done a good job of living up to our mandate? Are there places in your life that you see disharmony being repaired?

Additional Resources:

- “Peacing it all Together” – a podcast by Randy Woodley
- *Braiding Sweetgrass* by Robin Wall Kimmerer is a beautiful collection of short stories that weave together Indigenous teachings, ecology, and reflections on motherhood.
- Here’s the IPCC SR 1.5 report that we reference throughout the episode. We’d recommend reading the Summary for Policymakers, which is a bit more manageable than the entire report. <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/>
- Look over the “Reparations for Black-Indigenous Farmers map” on our website, under our donate page <https://shiftingclimates.com/give-your-money/>

Link to Episode and Transcript: <https://shiftingclimates.com/episode-6/>

Week 7: Bodies of Christ

Listen to Episode 7 (37 minutes)

Discuss:

1. Reflect together on the content (*Suggestion: spend a few minutes in reflective silence after listening to this episode This is heavy stuff – it's all right to give it some space!*)
2. What are some of your initial impressions after listening?
3. Karennia mentions a quote from Thomas Berry – that “the universe is a communion of subjects, not a collection of objects.” Karennia goes on to compare the objectification of the earth to the objectification of women in our society. What do you think about the claim that working on the problem of objectification could help us respond to climate change?
4. We've come to understand that climate change has both “front-end” impacts and “back-end” impacts. Back-end impacts are the direct effects of climate change through severe weather and natural disasters, which we focused on earlier this season. Front end impacts, on the other hand, are the localized impacts of pollution from the industries that are *causing* climate change. Veronica's story showcases one community experiencing the front-end impacts of climate change. What communities in your context are experiencing front-end impacts?
5. Where do you see acts of racism happening in your community and yourself, both deliberate and not?

Additional Resources:

- Learn more about Veronica Kyle and her work at Faith in Place at their website, www.faithinplace.org. Their website includes many of the strategies and projects they use to partner with faith communities, which may serve well as a resource for your congregation.
- For further exploration of specific cases of environmental justice, listen to our second season: <https://shiftingclimates.com/season-two/>.

Link to Episode and Transcript: <https://shiftingclimates.com/episode-7/>

Week 8: Death and Resurrection

Listen to Episode 8 (37 minutes)

Discuss:

1. Are there times when you've experienced God as a weed, or been surprised when God shows up unexpectedly in "strange places"?
2. Myrna talks about cradle-to-cradle economies and how "...there is no grave; there is no away." What are some of the ways you've experienced the reduced lifespan of everyday products, like appliances and devices? (i.e. "Things aren't made the way they used to be!"). What are some ways we can reduce our reliance on single-use goods?
3. Jordan describes the "social function of waste" – that once we get used to throwing *things* away, it's not a far step to throwing *people* away. Are there specific parts of your town, or specific groups of people, that you may have dismissed as unworthy of attention or care in the past?
4. Do you agree with Myrna and Wendy that "the earth wants to reclaim itself"? How have you experienced this? What comparisons can you draw between Christ's resurrection and everyday miracles of resurrection you witness in your own life?

Additional Resources:

- Listen to this related episode about the history of planned obsolescence from the NPR podcast "Throughline." <https://www.npr.org/2019/03/27/707188193/the-phoebus-cartel>

Link to Episode and Transcript: <https://shiftingclimates.com/episode-8/>

Week 9: The Eye of the Needle

Listen to Episode 9 (38 minutes)

Discuss:

1. Mark and Jamil are quick to point out the contributions of capitalism and greed when it comes to environmental degradation and climate change. Do you agree with them that the root of the problem is cultural?
2. Is the concept of “powering down” frightening to you? Do you think it will or should come to that?
3. Ken & Sara say they are not just responding to climate change, but actually “looking for a better way to live.” Harrison follows that up with the story of Jesus and the rich young man. What do you think of the idea that the Bible holds the guideposts for climate change response? Are there pieces of our Anabaptist tradition that already point us to climate change response?
4. What would a transition town look like in your context? What activities would you be excited to implement or participate in that would serve a dual purpose of building community and transitioning into a less carbon-intensive lifestyle?
5. How is your “climate change mental health”? How have you maintained hope when thinking about climate change? Do you have safe places to express your fears in community with others?

Additional Resources:

- Benjamin Isaak-Krauss’s sermon on “Apocalyptic Hope” at the Rooted & Grounded conference in 2018 <https://soundcloud.com/followambbs/2018-09-28-r-g-benjamin-isaak>
- Read about the Wizards and Prophets of our world, a helpful framework for understanding two contrasting approaches to global environmental threats: <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2018/03/charles-mann-can-planet-earth-feed-10-billion-people/550928/>

Link to Episode and Transcript: <https://shiftingclimates.com/episode-9/>

Week 10: Go, in Peace

Listen to Episode 10 (38 minutes)

Discuss:

1. “Oh, because we’re coming together. When it’s a drought, nobody have any water or food, we’re coming together.... let’s collaborate while we can before we have to.” Veronica also describes the environmental village – that it’s going to take all of us. How can we inspire action and engagement in each other?
2. Naomi from Camp Friedenswald points out the challenges of moving “fast together.” What stands in the way of us moving “fast together”?
3. We return to the framework of the three empty chairs in this episode, which we first introduced in Episode 2. As we move towards action, who in your communities should occupy those empty chairs?
4. Mark describes what he sees as the unimaginable genius in nature (spiders) and the importance of slowing down to set our compass. What areas of your life inform your compass the most now? How do you think those informants have altered your relationship with nature? Or your community’s relationship with nature? In what ways do we need to walk backwards as we reset our compasses?
5. This is the last episode of Season 1 and the end of the curriculum. What’s next for each of you?

Additional Resources:

- For a creative look at where we may be with the issue of climate change in 2050: <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2019/03/11/688876374/its-2050-and-this-is-how-we-stopped-climate-change>

Link to Episode and Transcript: <https://shiftingclimates.com/episode-10/>