



Traditionally, Lent is a period in which we intentionally give something up in order that we can better focus on Jesus and more faithfully follow Him. The Carbon Fast centres around 40 days of simple actions that we can all do to reduce our carbon footprint. This Carbon Fast Lent Course allows us to explore some of the theological landscape that provides the Christian foundation for our response to climate change.

The course is designed for a small group from your church to use over the period of six weeks in conjunction with participating in the Carbon Fast itself. Each week we focus on a theme, providing readings, activities and questions to discuss together.

We start our journey by considering the issue of fasting in the Bible and how this relates to a biblical concept of justice, setting us up nicely to start the Carbon Fast. From there, we go on to explore God's creation and the future of the earth in week two, before considering Jesus' proclamation of the Good News in week three.

Having reminded ourselves that the earth is the Lord's and everything in it and that as Christians we are called to be the bringers of God's peace and transformation, we spend the remaining three weeks focusing on the outworking of these concepts. In week four we consider how love should be the driving force of our actions. In week five we look at the importance of contentment in today's consumer world. Lastly, in week six, we arrive at our destination by looking at our call to action.

Our prayer is that through this course we will be challenged again on how we think about God's world and our actions in it. Through the renewing of our minds and hearts may we be empowered to more faithfully follow Jesus, living lives that can bless God's creation and those who live within it.

LENT COURSE 2008 LAYOUT:

Study 1 – Fasting and Justice

Study 2 – God's Earth and the Earth's Future

Study 3 – The Good News

Study 4 – A Character of Love

Study 5 – Christian Contentment

Study 6 – The Local Church

This Lent many Christians are involved with Tearfund's Carbon Fast. The vision is that rather than the usual abstention from chocolate, we reduce our carbon emissions through small acts of self-sacrifice. The studies in Isaiah link fasting with justice and in Matthew's gospel we look at some of the attitudes that Jesus requires in those who fast. We go on to apply these to our attempt to reduce our use of the world's resources.

Agenda – approximately 70 minutes

Setting the scene for Isaiah's Fast - 2 minutes

Bible study – 15 Minutes

Setting the scene for Jesus' Fast – 3 minutes

Bible study – 15 minutes

Activity – 20 minutes

Worship and Prayer - 15 minutes



ISAIAH'S FAST

Setting the scene for Isaiah's Fast

As we undertake a Carbon Fast we recognise the injustice of climate change affecting those who have not polluted the environment.

Isaiah 58 declares God is unhappy with the nation's fast because people are acting unjustly.

Bible Study: Isaiah 58

- What links can you see between the injustices Isaiah outlines and the issues surrounding climate change? See verses 3, 6, 9-11.
- What was the major intention of the fast in Isaiah 58? See verses 2-3 and 5.
- When it comes to climate change, are there actions and attitudes in more affluent areas of the world that need a similar repentance?

JESUS' FAST

Setting the scene for Jesus' Fast

Jesus expected his followers to fast. However, He makes it clear that in their fasting, His disciples were not to copy the attitudes and actions of the hypocrites. It is a common failing that religious people (and even concerned activists of any persuasion) can spend more time drawing attention to themselves than to their cause. Matthew 6 helps us to identify some of these attitudes and lays out attitudes we could take to heart for our Carbon Fast.

Bible Study Matt 6: 16-18

- What attitudes should we avoid in our Carbon Fast? Matt 6: 16-18. Luke 10: 9-14.
- In Matthew 6 the hypocrites look like they are fasting. What would the action of putting oil on your head and washing your face signify? Psalm 104: 15, Psalm 133: 1-3 & Isaiah 61: 1-3.

HOW CAN WE STOP OUR CARBON CAST TURNING INTO A DRUDGE?

ACTIVITY

Plan a Carbon Neutral Event to celebrate the completion of the fast.

WORSHIP AND PRAYER

Begin with acknowledging God as the creator of everything good. Recognise that fasting is a way of cutting free from habits and things that might appear to rule us.

There may be some repentance of drawing attention to oneself rather than God or of undertaking spiritual exercises out of pride. Ask the Holy Spirit to help us in our Carbon Fast to combine self-denial and celebration of the God of good things. Pray for those for whom going without isn't an option, but a daily experience.

HOMEWORK

Find your favourite pictures of the natural world that you have taken, or some from books and magazines and bring them along to the group next week.

Fundamental to the debate about the environment is the place of human beings in the natural order. The first part of this study looks at a particular approach from Psalm 104. The second part of the study concentrates on the future of the planet and more particularly, what we should be doing in view of that future.

Agenda – approximately 70 minutes

Setting the scene for God's Earth – 3 minutes
Activity – Illustrated Bible Reading – 15 minutes
Bible study – 15 minutes
Setting the scene for Earth's Future - 2 minutes
Bible Study - 20 minutes
Worship & Prayer - 15 minutes



GOD'S EARTH

Setting the scene

There is a common view that God's command to "fill the earth and subdue it" (Genesis 1: 28) has given human beings liberty to pillage the earth. In 1967 Lynn White wrote "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis" in which she declared that Christianity was to blame for the way in which the environment had been treated.

Is this fair?

Does the Bible have other approaches to the relationship between human beings and the environment?

ACTIVITY

The previous week people were given homework –
now's the time to show off those favourite pictures you have.

Read Psalm 104 slowly and deliberately. At the end of each verse, let different members of the group show their pictures. It doesn't matter if there are more pictures for some verses than others.

Bible study

- What place do humans have in this picture of creation? Psalm 104: 14-15, 23 and 26.
- In the overall view of the psalm, why does our world exist? Psalm 104: 1, 31-35. Gen 1: 31, Job 38: 4-7, Colossians 1: 15-17.
- In view of this, why should we make efforts to temper our exploitation of the world?

THE EARTH'S FUTURE

Setting the scene

Passage for study – 2 Peter 3: 3–15.

- Does 2 Peter 3: 7, 10-12 presage a human-induced catastrophe? How could climate change and environmental degradation lead to this destruction? Are there parts of the world where this is happening already?
- If the world is going to end like this, why should we bother to restrain the forces that will bring it about?
- How far do the attitudes in 2 Peter 3: 11, 14 and 18 relate to our care of the world God has given us and others who live in it? 1 John 3: 17, Rom 13:10, Deut 8: 10,17 and 18.

WORSHIP AND PRAYER

- Set aside time to worship God as Creator. Reflect on the images of this good earth as seen during the reading of Psalm 104.
- Yet the world will end one day. Let us spend time repenting of those actions and attitudes that have led to environmental degradation.
- Pray about those changes that the last question raised.
- Pray for some of the Tearfund projects that seek to protect life in the face of environmental problems.

From last week we have been reminded that the earth is the Lord's and everything in it. God's creation is amazing. This week we look at the 'Good News' that Jesus proclaimed and think about its implications both for us and those around the world who suffer from climate change.

Agenda – approximately 60 minutes

Setting the scene for The Good News – *5 minutes*

Activity — *15 minutes*

Bible study – *25 minutes*

Worship & Prayer - *15 minutes*

Setting the scene

We often talk about the Good News of the Christian gospel, but what exactly is it and how do we let it shape the way we live today? What we think about the Good News will affect the way we live our lives. If the Christian Good News is only about getting a ticket to heaven, then there is less chance we will be concerned about how we behave on earth. But if our understanding of the Good News recognises the importance of living as Jesus lived while on earth, then we have our work cut out.



STUDY 3 – THE GOOD NEWS

ACTIVITY

As a group, write a list of all the different things that you have needed over the past week?
Are some of those needs more important than others? Why?

What do all these different needs tell us about ourselves?

How do you think God intended us to live? What is God's vision for our future?

Bible Study Matt 6: 16-18

Read together Luke 4: 16-21.

- Jesus quotes the passage from a mixture of Isaiah 58 and 61. Read those two chapters. How do these passages help us understand what Jesus meant?
- What different aspects of human life and human need does Jesus highlight in this passage? How close do they correspond to the needs we listed in the activity earlier on?
- What is the significance of the Good News for the poor and what does that mean for us?
- How much of Jesus' proclamation is relevant to us today? Are we given the same mission?
- If climate change is inhibiting some people's lives by making it harder to satisfy their needs, what does it mean for us to live out Jesus' words in Luke 4:16-21?

WORSHIP AND PRAYER

- Read through Luke 4:18-19 again slowly and deliberately. Spend some time in silence thinking about it.
- Spend some time worshipping God for the Good News that we find in Jesus.
- Pray for those who suffer from climate change who do not currently experience the Good News that Jesus was proclaiming in this passage.
- Pray for the role we can all play in bringing the good news to 'the poor.'

At this point in our studies we are no doubt really aware of many of the problems surrounding climate change, both in our attitudes and contribution to it and the effect it is having on the most vulnerable people in the world. This study turns our attention to the foundation of our response – what motivates us to change? This is an important question, especially in the guilt-heavy approach some people have.

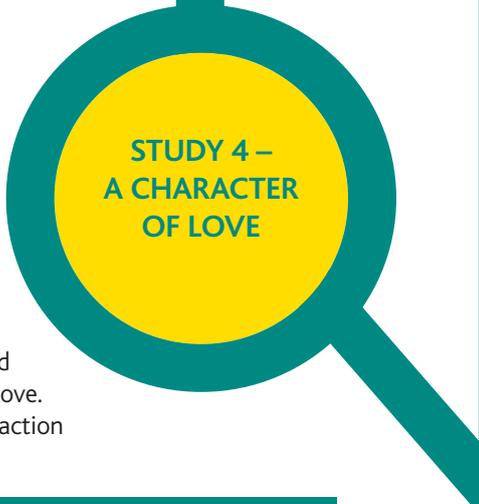
Agenda – approximately 60 minutes

Setting the scene for A Character of Love – 5 minutes

Activity — 15 minutes

Bible study – 25 minutes

Worship & Prayer - 15 minutes



STUDY 4 – A CHARACTER OF LOVE

Setting the scene

We have often heard it said, love is a verb, by which we mean love is an action that you do. To say you love someone without doing something to show it probably means you don't love them. But we are also told, God IS love. First and foremost God doesn't do love or feel love. He is love. His very nature and character overflow with love. This is important when we think about action with climate change, because 'loving' action with the wrong motivation may not be love at all.

ACTIVITY

Get everyone in the group to think about these questions and write down their answers. Then spend some time sharing your answers.

1. Think about the presents you bought for people last Christmas. How many of them did you buy because you felt you ought to or you'd have felt guilty if you had not? What does this tell us about our motivations for actions?
2. Why do you think it is important to have a character that is loving as opposed to just being able to do loving actions?
3. What are the dangers of acting with the wrong motivations?

Bible Study Matt 6: 16-18

- Read through Luke 10:25-37 together. This is a well-known story. Spend some time discussing these questions (for more information about this passage look at Tearfund's Carbon Fast Sermon notes).
- What do you think the lawyer meant by his question, 'What must I do to receive eternal life?' (Luke 10:25) Why is his answer a summary of the law?
- What do you think the lawyer means by his question, 'And who is my neighbour?' (Luke 10:29) Do you think the lawyer was asking out of a desire to love as many people as possible or some other motive?
- Who is the neighbour to the man in the story? Why would the Samaritan have been a provocative answer to the lawyer talking with Jesus? What does this story reveal about the lawyer's motivations?
- Can we relate to the lawyer in the story? Are there areas of our lives where we are concerned to show 'loving behaviour' but have little love behind them?
- What is the link between our motivation and our actions? Why do you think, when it comes to climate change, it's important that our Carbon Fast comes from the right motivation – that of love?

WORSHIP AND PRAYER

- Begin by thinking about how much of our lives we spend acting from the wrong motives – honestly acknowledge this to God.
- Spend some time considering God's love for us – perhaps have some members of the group read aloud verses that speak of God's love and grace for us.
- Speak out prayers of praise and thanksgiving for God's love and for Jesus coming and living, dying and rising again to save us.
- Pray for each other in the group to be filled with God's love and to rid us of motives that are not loving.
- Pray for more love for the poor who suffer from climate change – that a genuine love for them will be our motivation to change our behaviour.

HOMEWORK

Bring some advertisements from newspapers and magazines to next week's group. Perhaps even record some from the TV.

This study looks at some of the underlying pathology that has led to environmental degradation. We probe the underlying covetousness in our society and draw the link between the desire for "more" at the expense of those with less. In an earlier study we saw how some accuse the Christian faith as being used as an excuse to pillage the earth, but in this study our aim is to find the real culprit. We also close with recognition of our own part in these issues and look to change our attitudes and actions to be more in line with a belief in God as Creator and a desire to be God's Good News to the world.

Agenda – approximately 60 minutes

Setting the scene for Christian Contentment – *5 minutes*

Activity — *15 minutes*

Bible study – *25 minutes*

Worship & Prayer - *15 minutes*



STUDY 5 – CHRISTIAN CONTENTMENT

Setting the scene

Where does the blame for environmental degradation really lie? Some have pointed to the presence of human beings on the planet. Others care to blame political systems, yet followers of both Communism and capitalism have laid waste to huge areas of the planet and the destruction of the habitat of our fellow creatures. What basically is wrong with us?

We'll be looking at James' perceptive excavation of the roots of human hostility and greed, but we'll also look at how one of the Apostles found an answer to this quandary – yet without turning his back on the world.

ACTIVITY

From the homework last week, spend a bit of time as a group looking at the advertisements.

Consider these statements in the lights of some of the advertisements

"We buy things we do not want to impress people we do not like."... Arthur Gish

"We must clearly understand that the lust for affluence in contemporary society is psychotic."...
Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*

How much of our culture is based on defiance of the tenth commandment? Exodus 20: 17. See also Ephesians 5: 5; 1 Corinthians 5: 11 and 1 Tim 6:17-19

What are the real roots of the present ecological crisis? What needs to happen beyond changing light bulbs?
James 4: 1-10, 5; 1-6

Read Philippians 4: 10-13. What does Paul think is the proper Christian approach to consumption? Was it easy for Paul to learn to be "content whatever the circumstances"?

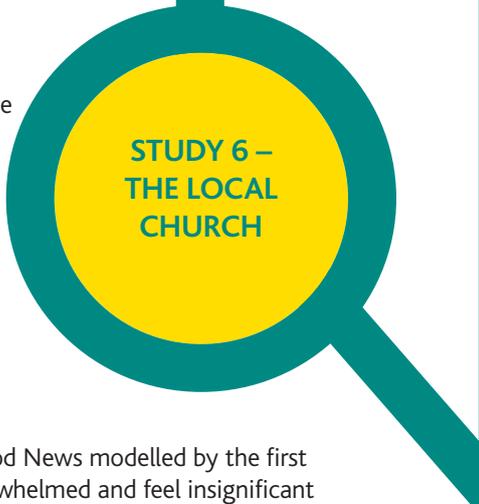
In what way does Carbon Fasting fit with Jesus' command to seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness?
Matt 6: 25-33

WORSHIP AND PRAYER

- Begin by acknowledging God's reign over all things. James praises the Father of the heavenly lights and his nature of giving. James 1:17. Ask the group to celebrate with James and to give thanks for good and perfect gifts.
- Lead prayers of repentance for greed and covetousness.
- Ask for the Holy Spirit to teach the sort of contentment which Paul had, acknowledging that the path to reach it may be tough!
- Praise God for projects where God's people both here and in other places have shared "good things" and made a difference in the lives of poor people.
- Close the time together with the Lord's Prayer, asking people to consider what "Your Kingdom come" means in terms of his reign on our lives and possessions.

In study 3 we saw that the Good News addresses a whole variety of human needs and so our action must take account these different needs rather than focusing on only one or two. In study 4 we saw the importance of any action we take coming from the motivation of love. In study 5 we considered how Christian contentment is an important virtue if we are to change our life style to help those suffering from climate change.

So, with loving hearts and a compassion for those who suffer the effects of climate change the most, the poor, we still need to act. What action can we take that has the most impact and addresses the totality of those suffering from climate change? Is this my own struggle? Does the local church have any particular role to play in this?



STUDY 6 – THE LOCAL CHURCH

Agenda – approximately 60 minutes

Setting the scene for The Local Church – *5 minutes*

Bible study – *20 minutes*

Activity – *20 minutes*

Worship & Prayer – *15 minutes*

Setting the scene

When we read the book of Acts, we see Jesus' mandate to proclaim and live the Good News modelled by the first local church. When we think about climate change, it is all too easy to become overwhelmed and feel insignificant and then not do anything at all. Acting individually is hard to sustain, but there is power in numbers! There are thousands of local churches around the world. What if they all started to change their behaviour in order to do something about climate change?

Bible Study Matt 6: 16-18

- Read Matthew 5:13-16. How do you think the themes of salt and light apply to the issue of climate change and the role of a local church?
- Read Romans 12:1-8.
- What does Paul mean by 'to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – which is your spiritual worship?'
- When thinking about climate change, in what ways can we 'not conform any longer to the pattern of this world?'
- Paul talks about different gifts we may have. Discuss how we could use these different gifts in relation to acting on climate change.
- Ultimately, responding to climate change is going to involve a willingness to consider those suffering before ourselves. Which group of people are best equipped to put others first? What foundation does Paul in Romans set as the grounding on which we are able to live this way?

ACTIVITY

Discuss what actions the group could take that would most help those suffering from climate change – remember to consider the variety of needs.

Think about how you can encourage your church to get more involved with responding to climate change? Include ways to reduce the congregation's carbon emissions as well as ways the church could campaign about climate change to the UK government.

Draw up an action plan and decide who is going to help with what and set yourself a time frame to achieve it.

WORSHIP AND PRAYER

- Spend some time reflecting on the different things you have thought about and been challenged by during this Lent course. Thank God for them and ask for the courage and empowering to live them out.
- Spend some time praying for the action plan that your group have come up with for your church.
- Ask God for strength to continue thinking about climate change beyond the Carbon Fast.

HOMEWORK

Enjoy the celebration that you planned in study 1 to end the Carbon Fast.

Well done for finishing the course.