



CHANGING BY CHOICE

a fresh look at climate and faith



LESSON ONE: *Truth and Consequences*

Welcome to Changing by Choice. This study series is based on the Global Ethical Stocktake, an effort launched ahead of COP30 in Belém, Brazil. The goal of the Global Ethical Stocktake was to start a global conversation about the moral and ethical dimensions of climate change.

People around the world have used these five questions as a framework for group discussion about climate change. The central question is “if we understand the science about climate change and understand that it is harming people, why do we continue to resist making changes to stop it?” The question of why we fail to do better even when we know better is a timeless question for our spiritual and religious traditions. We hope that incorporating these questions into your Lenten practice will help shape your understanding of climate change as a matter of faith, and motivate you for action on this important justice issue.

The study includes five lessons, each one focused on one of the Global Ethical Stocktake Questions. Each lesson includes a video featuring faith leaders and experts on climate diplomacy. Scripture, faith statements, news articles, and other resources are provided to guide your discussion. Plan to allow plenty of time and space for discussion. It may be helpful to have participants read some sections of the material ahead of time, to allow more space during your gathering for discussion.

Faith groups are a natural place to wrestle with questions about the appropriate response to climate change. We are people who are called to love our neighbors, not just the ones we know, but everyone. As part of our work at international climate policy conferences, we hear stories about the hardships climate change causes for people around the world. These stories move us to compassion and motivate us to work for climate justice.

Climate change can be a challenging topic. It is natural for people of faith to feel deep empathy for people around the world struggling with climate impacts. But the news is not all bad. Scientists say that we are in a critical decade to take action to protect the long-term stability of the climate. Now is the perfect time to start this conversation with others in your faith community.

With gratitude for your faithful work.

GUIDING QUESTION

Why do we so often deny or ignore what science and traditional knowledge say about the climate crisis and share or tolerate misinformation, even knowing lives are at risk?



SUGGESTED LESSON PLAN for Week One

NOTE: You can watch the video at any point during the lesson, but keep in mind that you will want adequate time for discussion after the video ends.

- ⊕ (2 min) Open with the suggested prayer or a prayer of your choosing.
- ⊕ (2 min) Review learning objectives as a group and read the Guiding Question.
- ⊕ (5 min) Read the Introduction aloud and make note of questions it raises for participants.
- ⊕ (10 min) Read one or more of the scriptural passages and discuss how participants see the scripture relating to climate change.
- ⊕ (15 min) Watch video.
- ⊕ (15 min) Discuss video.
- ⊕ (5 min) Conclude with participant prayers or reflections.

TIP: Need more discussion time? Consider setting up an email thread for the group so participants can share their reflections during the week.

INTRODUCTION

How do we know what we know about the universe? The earth? Our health? How can we know who to trust? When there is conflicting information, how can we discern what is truth?

We cannot all know everything there is to know about the way the world works. That's why we trust experts to help us make decisions. We trust a doctor to tell us which antibiotic is right to treat our strep throat. We trust a mechanic to know when our car needs a new air filter. Can we trust scientists to tell us the truth about climate change? Most of us already trust atmospheric scientists to help us make decisions, like when it's time to get into a safe place as a tornado approaches.

When atmospheric scientists and climate scientists warn us about climate change, and the impacts it might have on our lives and communities, those warnings are based on the same training and scientific understanding of the atmosphere that weather forecasters use. There are many great resources to help you understand climate science available to the public. In this week's lesson, we will discuss where we get our information, how we know what information we can trust, and the importance of seeking accurate scientific information when making decisions about things like our response to climate change.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES for Week One

- Know where to find reliable sources of information about climate change.
- Understand that climate change is a serious problem that can be helped by appropriate policy approaches and other human actions.
- Develop a personal motivation for climate action based on scientific information and the guidance of your faith tradition.

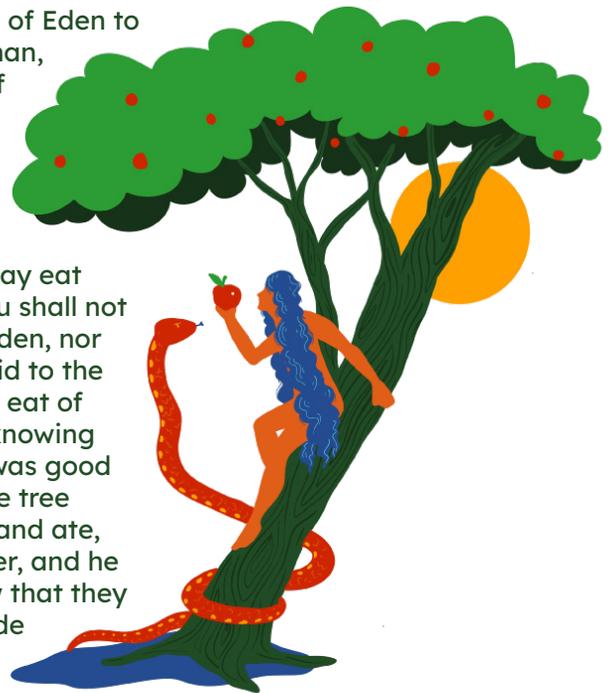
SCRIPTURE

The passages in this curriculum correspond to the Revised Common Lectionary for Year A for the five Sundays in Lent. If you undertake this study in another liturgical season, you might consider how the lectionary for that season amplifies the themes in the study.

NOTE: All passages are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible unless otherwise noted. Feel free to substitute the version you prefer.

Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7

15 The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. 16 And the Lord God commanded the man, “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden, 17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.” 3 Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God say, ‘You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?’” 2 The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, 3 but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.’” 4 But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not die, 5 for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God,[a] knowing good and evil.” 6 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. 7 Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked, and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.



Romans 5:12-19

12 Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned— 13 for sin was indeed in the world before the law, but sin is not reckoned when there is no law. 14 Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who did not sin in the likeness of Adam, who is a pattern of the one who was to come. 15 But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man’s trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many. 16 And the gift is not like the effect of the one man’s sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the gift following many trespasses brings justification. 17 If, because of the one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. 18 Therefore just as one man’s trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man’s act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. 19 For just as through the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so through the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous.



Psalm 32

- 1 Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven,
whose sin is covered.
- 2 Happy are those to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity and in whose spirit there is no deceit.
- 3 While I kept silent, my body wasted away
through my groaning all day long.
- 4 For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was dried up[a] as by the heat of summer. Selah
- 5 Then I acknowledged my sin to you,
and I did not hide my iniquity;
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,"
and you forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah
- 6 Therefore let all who are faithful
offer prayer to you; at a time of distress, the rush of mighty waters shall not reach them.
- 7 You are a hiding place for me;
you preserve me from trouble;
you surround me with glad cries of deliverance. Selah
- 8 I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon
you.
- 9 Do not be like a horse or a mule, without understanding, whose temper must be curbed with
bit and bridle, else it will not stay near you.
- 10 Many are the torments of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds those who trust in the
Lord.
- 11 Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, O righteous,
and shout for joy, all you upright in heart.

Scripture Questions

Where does information come from in the scripture passage?
What is the consequence of ignoring wisdom in the passage?
As people of faith, where do we look for wisdom?
How do we apply the wisdom we learn in scripture to contemporary problems
that are not addressed directly in the Bible?

UNDERSTANDING THE SCIENCE

How do we know about the science of climate change? How do we evaluate the things we are doing to stop climate change? How do we learn about the impacts climate change might have on our communities? There are several ways the international community investigates questions like these.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is a group of scientists, policymakers, and others from around the world who gather and interpret recent findings about climate change from scientific research and other sources. The IPCC publishes a report every five to seven years. The IPCC report is used by policymakers and planners to understand the current status of climate change and what we might expect in the future. IPCC reports are available online to the public (<https://www.ipcc.ch/>).

The National Climate Assessment is a compilation of recent climate science research written by a group of experts like the IPCC, but it focuses on climate impacts in the United States. The report covers a variety of areas from agricultural trends to air quality to extreme weather. The Fifth National Climate Assessment, published in 2023, is available online to the public (<https://toolkit.climate.gov/NCA5>).

What does climate science tell us? We know that excess greenhouse gases released by human activities like burning fossil fuels trap excess heat in the atmosphere. This extra energy in the atmosphere causes changes in the earth's climate. Climate change impacts include things like drought, extreme weather, and sea level rise. These impacts are already causing problems for people around the world. We are seeing more climate impacts in the United States too, like increasingly severe wildfires and floods.

DISCUSSION

Why do we sometimes think we know better than experts?

For you, what makes someone credible as an expert? Do you look for different qualifications depending on the topic?

Once we realize we don't understand a problem, and once we learn that the problem is affecting others, what is our responsibility? Individually? Collectively?



PRAYER

Breath of life,
who bore in your womb all created order,
all creation bears witness to you.
Teach us to respect all creatures,
increase our gratitude for your loving providence.
Forgive us for our insensitivity and carelessness toward the environment.
Inspire us to fight for socio-environmental preservation
and for an end to the climate crisis,
caring for and working to preserve species
and the maintenance of life on Earth,
as living proof of the conversion of our hearts and our lives. Amen.

(Adaptation of the Collections for Environmental Responsibility -
LOC IEAB 2015; used in COP30 Ecumenical Service)

VIDEO DISCUSSION PROMPTS

Share about a time you changed your mind after learning new information.

How do you help people you love reconcile themselves to information they don't like?

What do you do when you discover you were wrong about something? What do you do when someone else discovers they were wrong?

LEARNING AT COP



At COP28 in Dubai, UAE, negotiators finalized the text for the Global Stocktake. The Global Stocktake is a process, mandated by the Paris Agreement, where each country assessed their progress on climate mitigation and adaptation and submitted a report to the UNFCCC. Before COP28, the UNFCCC gathered all of the individual stocktakes and compiled them into the Global Stocktake, which assessed the collective progress toward climate mitigation and adaptation.

The first Global Stocktake process revealed that as a global community, we have made significant progress in mitigating climate emissions and in adapting to the impacts of climate change—but that we still have a lot of work to do if we want to limit warming to 1.5 Celsius above pre-industrial levels. The Global Stocktake is one place to find accurate, current information about climate change. (<https://unfccc.int/topics/global-stocktake/about-the-global-stocktake/outcome-of-the-first-global-stocktake>).



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