

Christians & Climate

Q & A

What is the “climate crisis”?

The continual burning of fossil fuels like coal, oil, and natural gas to obtain energy produces carbon dioxide and other harmful gases that thicken the ozone layer, trapping excess heat in our atmospheric system and warming our earth. This change is hijacking our weather patterns, causing storms, droughts, sea level rise, wildfires, hurricanes, and more to intensify. The consequences of these changes are severe: Many species of wildlife are losing their natural habitats and being forced to migrate, disrupting the rhythms of Earth’s natural ecosystems. Entire islands are at risk of being submerged. Farmers are losing arable land. Harvest seasons are yielding less. Hurricanes and floods are ravaging homes and displacing entire communities. Black communities are suffering from alarming rates of cancer and asthma. In regions facing drought, political conflict intensifies. Continuing at the current rate of warming will bring about catastrophic effects for human and animal life.

Why should Christians care about the climate crisis? Isn’t climate change a liberal issue?

The climate crisis is jeopardizing the health and well-being of our most vulnerable neighbors around the world and in the U.S. This is a matter of serious injustice—it’s not fair that the people who do the least to cause the problem bear the burden of the crisis first and worst. And because we believe in a God who calls us to steward the earth wisely and pursue justice and peace, caring for God’s creation and God’s people is a deeply Christian issue, not a Republican or Democratic one.

Sure, the climate is changing, but hasn’t it always been changing? Is it really a “crisis”?

The climate does change in historic cycles. Scientific studies show that our earth has gone through full cycles of warming and cooling every 100,000 years. Without human influence, one typical warming cycle would take half of that time, about 50,000 years. Yet, the same rate of warming we are seeing today is happening at an unprecedented rate: In 100 to 200 years instead of 50,000. This alarming rate of warming, scientists tell us, is due to the excess amount of greenhouse gases—particularly CO₂ and methane—that we add to the ozone layer of our atmosphere primarily through the burning of fossil fuels, but also through deforestation and corporate agricultural practices that trap heat in our atmosphere. Today, there is a 97 percent consensus among scientists that evidence points to human-induced climate change. Human-induced climate change has caused the global temperature to rise 1 degree Celsius since 1880; at the current rate of emissions we will reach a warming of 1.5 degrees Celsius by 2030—a change with catastrophic implications for human and animal life.

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Some Christians cite that the earth being destroyed is proof that the end times are coming and Jesus is returning. How can I respond?

This idea stems from 2 Peter 3:10, which says “the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.” This is one indication of Jesus’ return. Yet in the same verse, the apostle Peter says that “the day of the Lord will come like a thief,” meaning no one will know when the end times will arrive. The previous verse says “the Lord is patient with you, not wishing that any should perish” (3:9). Today, an increasing number of people around the world are suffering from the climate crisis, their crops and homelands devastated by storms or seasons of drought. Families have perished. This is clearly not God’s will.

While there will be a time when God makes all things new, it is obvious that God does not command us to speed up the destruction of the world through burning fossil fuels while precious people and wildlife live on it. Instead, God implores us to be faithful: faithful stewards, faithful in following Christ, and faithful in loving our neighbors as ourselves. And that requires us to respond to the climate crisis swiftly and boldly.

But God gave us the gift of fossil fuels. Why shouldn't we use them as resources?

The reckless use of fossil fuels, which trap heat into our atmosphere, destabilize weather patterns, and cause people and wildlife to suffer, is not wise stewardship of God’s resources. It is disobedience of God’s commandment to cultivate and keep all of creation.

The book of Genesis describes God’s many acts of creation, and Genesis 2:15 says that “the Lord God put people into the Garden of Eden to ‘tend’ and to ‘watch over’ it.” In the original Hebrew, these two words are *avad* and *shamar*, which often appear in reference to God watching over and protecting the people. God gifted us an abundance of natural resources with the responsibility to steward them with utmost care for the flourishing of all life. Instead of fossil fuels, there are more responsible, less harmful methods of creating the energy we need to sustain life—such as solar, wind, and geothermal energy. Plus, these energies are becoming cost-effective; the solar industry is producing more jobs than coal, oil, and natural gas combined.

Okay, I'm on board. How can I respond faithfully to the climate crisis?

As Christians, God calls us into a journey of sacrificial, transformative discipleship in order to become more like Christ. To respond faithfully and compassionately to the suffering caused by the climate crisis is to participate in this journey.

We can take the first step by making thoughtful lifestyle choices that minimize our individual impact on the climate crisis—like buying and using less, reducing our energy use, eating less meat, recycling, and composting. You can find your individual footprint and discover ways to reduce it with this [simple tool](#). This is personal discipleship.

We can go deeper in our journey by taking action for the well-being of our climate-affected neighbors—praying for and petitioning our members of Congress to prioritize climate, advocating for policies that address the climate crisis, supporting and voting for local legislators who share this concern, and even voting with our feet in the streets through direct action. This is public discipleship. You can join us in this journey at [SojoAction](#).

This is so overwhelming! How can we stay hopeful in this time of crisis?

When we tune into the litany of climate disasters happening at such a massive scale and speed, it can be so easy to slip into despair and apathy. And yet biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann reminds us that the basis of Christian hope is the reality that God is a real character and effective agent in the world. Hope is created when we partner with the living God, bound to God’s vision of a transformed, renewed, and reconciled world where all creation can flourish. What better way to experience that reality than to stand alongside our brothers and sisters on the frontlines of the climate crisis and advocate for justice?

In the process of participating in this ministry of reconciliation, we recognize we too are being transformed into the likeness of Christ. We recognize that commitment to climate discipleship in community will involve creativity, talent, and compassionate sacrifice from each member of this body. Climate discipleship will also require seasons of rest, art, resistance, and joy as we build this movement. That is hope against hope.

We envision a world where all creation flourishes.

Join us!