

Stewarding God's creation

“God spoke: ‘Let us make human beings in our image, make them reflecting our nature so they can be responsible for the fish in the sea, the birds in the air, the cattle, and yes, Earth itself and every animal that moves on the face of the earth”
[Gen 1:26 The Message, emphasis added]

For the first two weeks In November, Glasgow will be the centre of the world's attention as the United Kingdom hosts the UN Climate Change Conference known as COP26.

COP stands for ‘Conference of the Parties’. The ‘Parties’ are every nation in the world who signed up to the original UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, which came into force in 1994. Every year since, an annual gathering has been held to review progress on the climate targets agreed. The 26th annual meeting should have been held in 2020 but was postponed until 2021 due to Covid – hence the title COP26. You can read about the background to and goals of COP26 at <https://ukcop26.org/>

This will be the largest global gathering ever held in Glasgow, possibly in the UK. There will be at least 30,000 delegates, folk from a wide range of firms, agencies, charities, faith groups, activists and demonstrators. Over 190 heads of government- Presidents, Premiers, Prime Ministers, Chancellors or their representatives – will gather for the opening ceremonies and again at the end for the formal signing ceremony – assuming there is an agreement. For an intriguing aspect of a COP is that every nation must agree the final text – there is no majority voting and no sanctions one group can impose on another to gain agreement. COP's depend on complete consensus for their success.



So what does COP26 have to do with the church, and in particular with the prayer movement? The most obvious thing is that we need to pray for the peace and security of Glasgow and the nation, as events such as these are ‘magnets’ for terrorist groups or extreme activists who seek to generate violence during peaceful demonstrations. We need to pray for the authorities national and local, the Police and security agencies as they plan for every eventuality to keep the delegates, and all of us safe.

in 2014 the church poured prayer into the Glasgow region during the Commonwealth Games. Many commented on the ‘atmosphere of peace and joy’ they encountered on the streets. We need that ‘peace and joy’ in November – we need the church to pour prayer into Glasgow and the nation once again!

Churches and Christian organisations will play an active part in COP26. Prayer walking around the site is already happening and will continue up to and during the event. Churches are planning a wide range of activities. YWAM are sending mission teams to engage with those on the streets. They will be based at a church on the edge of the 'blue zone' – the secure conference area at the SECC, which will also be the Christian Aid base. Tearfund are basing themselves at a city centre church which will be a Christian 'hub' for the 2 weeks.

We need to pray that every conversation, every encounter will be used by God to bring many to faith in Christ Jesus. This is about much more than a conference or climate change – this is a 'God-opportunity' to reach tens of thousands with the Gospel!

As well as being covered by a '*canopy of prayer*', Glasgow's atmosphere needs to be filled with the '*praises of His people*', recalling the origins of the city's motto engraved on the Tron Kirk bell in 1637: '*Let Glasgow flourish by the preaching of thy word and praising of thy name*'. Local churches are taking it in turns to host an evening of praise, worship and prayer so that at least one such event occurs each day. We invite churches throughout Scotland to host similar joint evenings during COP26, raising a '*canopy of praise*' over the nation. Contact us for more details.

Prayer resources are already available to use before and during COP26 and more will appear. The event will be a focus for the global prayer movement, with daily prayer points going from Christians at the conference around the world. For

more on all of this, see our website or email us.

We are well aware that even within the Christian community any mention of 'climate change' or 'global warming' produces very differing reactions – some positive, some negative. Wherever we are on that spectrum, we cannot ignore the Genesis verses quoted above. Created in God's image, humanity was given the responsibility for caring for God's creation, and whatever we think about 'global warming' we cannot deny that, as part of the general consequences of the 'fall of man', we have not made the best job of it, particularly in recent times.

The decisions made at COP26 will affect the world – for good or for bad. This is not just about Glasgow, Scotland or the UK – this has global significance. So we need to pray, asking God for his forgiveness for not being the 'good stewards' He created us to be, and praying that despite the many faiths and none that will be around that conference table, it will be God's agenda and God's decisions that will prevail. Scripture reminds us over and over again that God will use the most unlikely people to fulfil His purposes!

COP26 is not simply about focussing on a conference. It is an opportunity for us all to reconsider how we are *stewarding God's creation* – how well we are fulfilling that responsibility given when our Father God created us in the beginning.

“Lord, Your Kingdom come, Your will be done, here on earth!”

Alistair Barton
Director

COP26 and the Church

Callum Henderson

From a Christian perspective I believe the saddest thing about climate change and the broader issue of environmental degradation is the failure of the church of the Son of God to provide leadership to the world and fulfil its purpose in revealing the wisdom of God.



A major criticism of the church is that a blinkered theological view, based on an incomplete interpretation of Genesis 1 that only understands humankind's interaction as ruling over and benefitting from the physical earth, has led to arrogance in our exploitation of nature and indifference to its effects.

There are two principal commands in respect to creation: a) In Gen 1:26-28 - *'be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and rule over it,'* God gives man dominion over nature. (See also Ps 8:6 'made him to rule'); b) In Gen 2:15 - *'then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden to cultivate it and keep it'.*

The Hebrew word translated as *'keep'* (shamar) is the word used to keep God's law. It is also translated as *'careful'* and is used to describe the work of the angels who guard you and me.

Those two commands should not be in conflict. The biblical model of authority with care and protection stops that authority becoming tyranny or exploitation. It prohibits the selfish use of what we are given authority over.

There are several negative 'Christian' responses to the issue of climate change. One is the Revelation 21 new heaven and earth idea that considers the earth as wearing out and therefore dispensable and unworthy of care. This kind of logic is more closely applied in the Bible to personal belongings (see Mt. 6:19 etc.) so consistency would demand such people take no care of cars, watches, homes and any physical belongings which will also perish or ultimately rust or fade!

There can also be a justifiable concern that many people in the green movement are pushing a moral agenda Christians cannot align with. The antidote to this is a strong Christian voice proclaiming God's creative glory and our responsive stewardship. By doing this we avoid becoming a 'behind the times' echo chamber for a non-Christian green movement.

Pray for a distinctively Christian voice that not only tackles the issue but honours and glorifies God as Creator.

Climate change is not just an environmental issue. As C S Lewis said, *"What we call man's power over nature turns out to be a power exercised by some men over other men with nature as their instrument."*

On a global canvas this is especially true for climate change where the power and economic might of 'western' nations spills over into the global south. Countries with which I am familiar through my work with Comfort International such as DR Congo, Rwanda, Burundi and South Sudan are responsible for only **1/500th** of the carbon emissions per person, as compared with the amount per person in the largest carbon producing countries in the industrialised 'West' and the Middle East.

However, because of its largely agricultural base together with infrastructure and technological challenges, Africa in particular is highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, with a range of outcomes (outlined by the World Meteorological Organisation) including extremes of drought, storms and flooding, stress on water resources, population displacement, increased food insecurity, insect invasions, heatwaves, reduced crop productivity and already there are sea level rises of around 5mm per year. This is the legacy of our lifestyles and choices – we are pushing vulnerable people into increasingly difficult lives.

As appropriate, repent for our actions that have adversely affected poorer parts of the world. Pray for the vulnerable to be listened to and supported in their efforts to ameliorate the effects of climate change. Pray for skilled creative Christians who will bring creative solutions to help deal with these challenges.

Here are some Scriptures for us to meditate and pray over:

- A clear framework of God as Creator and Owner (Ps 89:11, 104:24; 1Cor 10:26; Col 1:16).
- The goodness of creation and God's care for it (Gen 1:4 etc. and 1:31; Ps 65:9).
- The purpose of God in creation - God's pleasure and our praise (Ps 19:1-3, 104:31; Rom 1:20).
- Man's food (Gen 1:29) & food for wildlife (Gen 1:30; Ps 104:21, 147:9).
- Creation's expression of worship (Ps 148:7-13; Rev 5:13).
- The multiplication and value of animals (Gen 1:20, 8:17; Jonah 4:11; Mt10:29; Lk 12:24-27).

One of the unexpected outcomes of the pandemic is that the church, as it has reached out in compassion to those affected by lockdown, illness or isolation, has become relevant again in many communities from which its presence and influence had all but disappeared. By putting into practice the commands of Jesus it has carried the Kingdom into the community and nation.

For too long many parts of the church have been an irrelevancy, and sometimes a hindrance, in the area of environmental stewardship. As we emerge from the Covid restrictions let our concern for our neighbours be matched by our concern for the environment we share with them.

Pray for the eyes and heart of the church to be opened to our responsibilities as stewards of God's creation, and for the witness and relevance of the church to increase through its care of creation.

Callum earned a PhD in ecology, before becoming an Elim Church minister in two pioneering church plants in Edinburgh. He founded a Scottish charity called Comfort Rwanda, which has since expanded and he is now Director of Comfort International.

Praying about God's Planet – Our World

"The Earth is the Lord's, and everything in it; the world, and all who live in it" (Psalm 24:1).

David Nussbaum

What an incredible world we live in – such beauty and diversity. Just within the borders of Scotland the variety of the geology, geography, botany and demography is a witness to God's creativity. As Christians, we know the story of where this came from: "And God said, 'Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees ... So God created the sea creatures ... every winged bird ... the wild animals ... the livestock ... according to their kinds... And God said it was good.'" – Genesis 1.



Promotions for the recent BBC Earth series 'A Perfect Planet', narrated by David Attenborough, say: "this stunning series reveals how perfectly our planet is set up to nurture life". The final episode, entitled 'Humans', explains how the behaviour of our species is impacting the rest of the natural world.

For Christians, this is a familiar story. Genesis sets out how God created the world, including humanity, and how humans have messed it up. The consequences of disregarding the Maker's instructions were disastrous then, and likewise are today. "The Lord saw that the world was corrupt and full of violence" (Genesis 6:11).

As Sir Ghillean Prance, former Director of the Royal Botanical Gardens, put it: "As a botanist, I am working with God's creation. All around me I see that what humankind is doing to the planet is motivated by greed. The church at large, and I as an individual Christian, should be a strong voice in defence of creation, or 'the environment' as some people call it."

Through the industrial revolution and since, humans have applied the ingenuity God gave us to bringing incredible technological benefits to our lives. But in our ignorance, we initially did so without realising what the effects of burning coal, and later oil and gas, would be on the levels of carbon dioxide (and other gases such as methane) in the atmosphere. But now, we do know about the consequences: our actions are changing the climate.

"Climate Change is the most important environmental problem we face ... With so much more knowledge, the changes humans are making to the climate are turning out to be bigger than we ever expected." So said the late Sir John Houghton, a Christian who was formerly Professor of Atmospheric Physics at

Oxford, Chief Executive of the Meteorological Office, Chair of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution, and Chair of the Scientific Assessment Panel of the Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change.

In November, Glasgow hosts the next international conference on climate change, known as COP26. Thousands of people will gather there, many of them hoping to influence the discussions and negotiations which will take place. As Christians, we have the privilege of being able to engage with the Glasgow meeting whether or not we are physically there – **we have the privilege of engaging through prayer.**

So I urge you to pray: before, during and after COP26 in Glasgow. Why should we pray? Primarily because as Christians we have a responsibility to care for God's creation – “the world, and everything in it” - but also because our outreach to future generations and therefore the future of the church in this country matters.

As James Jones the former Bishop of Liverpool put it: “If the Church wishes to find a common agenda with young people who are passionate about the future of the planet, it needs to recover to its theology the Biblical vision and moral imperative of caring for the environment.”

Many of the psalms, hymns and songs celebrate creation – the world which God called into being. If we humans are harming that creation through our actions, we Christians must act and pray. This is an imperative of the gospel of Jesus, the son of the creator God. As the late Rob Frost, of Share Jesus International said, “When Christians take the earth seriously, people take the gospel seriously”.

We can pray for the decisions which governments and their representatives in Glasgow will make; we can pray for organisations which are seeking to encourage governments to commit to the actions necessary to tackle climate change; and we can pray for ourselves and our communities – that we will be willing to play our own part in supporting and taking the actions needed to protect God's creation from the effects of climate change.

Christians look forward to the fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah 61:17, when God will renew everything, including the earth (Revelation 21). But in the meantime, let us fulfil the creation mandate given to us in Genesis 1:26, to be God's caretakers of His wonderful creation: through our actions, through our words, and through our prayers.

David Nussbaum served as Student Assistant Pastor in Edinburgh while undertaking theological research at New College for his MTh in the 1980s. He was the Chief Executive of the World Wildlife Fund-UK from 2007 to 2016.