

## introduction

---

# CHRISTIANS AND CLIMATE CHANGE

“For most of us, until recently this has not been treated as a pressing issue or major priority. Indeed, many of us have required considerable convincing before becoming persuaded that climate change is a real problem and that it ought to matter to us as Christians.”

—*Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action*

The idea for this book developed slowly, over time. It grew out of questions we received from people trying to separate climate change fact from fiction. It came from conversations with friends who wanted to know the “truth” about climate change from a fellow Christian, someone they could trust. It was fed by discussions with colleagues, who wanted to understand the “religious position” on climate change from someone they knew was a Christian.

As we have listened to our friends, colleagues, and the people around us, we’ve realized we have an incredible opportunity to speak out on one of the most pressing issues facing our generation. Most Christians are not scientists, and it’s hard to say how many scientists are Christians. In our family, we have both.

Katharine studies how climate change will affect the places we live. Andrew pastors a church in Texas where many Christians just don't buy into the whole global warming thing. Together, we have talked to Christians all over the country who are asking whether or not climate change is real. They want to know if it's a genuine crisis that requires our attention or if the whole thing is just a lot of smoke and mirrors. They also want to know what the Bible says, if anything, about a Christian response.

## A Christian Perspective?

Even talking about climate change from a Christian perspective might seem suspect, because so many people associate global warming with a certain agenda. The issue just isn't on our collective radar of things Christians should be concerned about.

Common thought on climate change generally sounds something like this:

- How do we know that climate change is really happening?
- Wasn't there a record cold winter just last year in such-and-such a place?
- All those scientists are always disagreeing with each other.
- It's too early to decide—we just don't have enough information.

Some people who acknowledge that our climate *is* changing believe it's just another natural cycle that has nothing to do with human activity.

You may have heard others say something like: "Those save-the-whales, tree-hugging liberal activists are just pushing the human angle as part of their agenda to turn the world into a place where everyone eats raw vegetables and worships the mother goddess."

Or here's another view: "Even if it turns out that global warm-

ing is real, and we're somewhat to blame for it, there's nothing we can do without destroying our economy. It's much wiser just to wait it out. We've adapted successfully to everything nature has thrown at us so far. Why would this be any different? And we know from the Bible that the world doesn't end because of global warming. So what's the big deal?"

Still others might say that climate change *is* happening, that we *are* responsible, and that the effects are likely to be serious. But they might add, "All we really need to do is pray. If we have enough faith, we can move mountains, right? So we should just offer up some prayers and then get on with our lives."

## A Sea of Opinions

As Christians, we're naturally suspicious of people who believe differently from us. How can such activists—those whose voices have so often been raised against us on fundamental issues like family and the sanctity of life—have anything worthwhile to say about the environment?

In the past, we may have seen climate change used as a political tool on the part of this party or that organization to manipulate and get what they want. Our hesitations are justified. It's hard to trust information from sources we feel might manipulate facts to suit their political agenda.

But the issue of climate change really is different. It's not about blue politics or red politics or any kind of politics. It's about thermometer readings and history. It's about facts and figures. It's about reality. And that's what we want to explore with you in this book.

Who's on board already? Is there any solid, reliable group that's already convinced that climate change is real? Well, yes, actually there is.

A recent report commissioned by the Pentagon concluded that abrupt changes in climate may be the greatest security threat we

face in the twenty-first century. Eleven National Academies of Science, including that of the United States, signed a statement concluding that human-induced climate change is real and that world leaders need to take prompt action to reduce its causes. Industry leaders ranging from Wal-Mart to General Electric have called for national standards for reducing emissions of heat-trapping gases. Polls show that a growing number of registered Republican voters believe global warming will pose a serious threat within their lifetime. Republicans such as John McCain and Newt Gingrich have issued strong statements regarding the necessity for reducing our environmental impact on the planet. This last decade, we've seen a radical shift in the conservative mind-set.

The Christian community has similarly been galvanized by calls to action from prominent leaders. In 2006, the Evangelical Climate Initiative was released, which stated that our moral convictions as evangelicals demand a response to the climate change problem. The leaders of nearly one hundred churches, charities, and seminaries from the Salvation Army to Saddleback Church signed the initiative. In 2007, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops announced that, by harming the atmosphere, a God-given gift that supports life here on Earth, we dishonor our Creator and His gift of creation.

In 2008, forty Southern Baptist leaders, a convention that traditionally sides with more conservative viewpoints, declared that we as Christians should take responsibility for our contributions to environmental issues. They stated that it's not only prudent, but also necessary, for individuals, churches, communities, and governments to act now to curb actions that are causing degradation of the environment. A survey of evangelical Christians the same year found that although less than a third were firmly convinced that global warming was happening, 45 percent had made recent changes to become more environmentally conscious, and 90 percent thought they should take a more active role in caring for creation.

Why this growing shift in opinion? We think it's because Christians are beginning to realize that climate change is really about physical changes that can have serious consequences on our lives. It's about temperature records and rainfall patterns, not liberals or conservatives. We've reached the point where we can no longer stand by, believing that climate change is the invention of some radical mastermind to push forward his or her political agenda. People of all political persuasions are now recognizing that climate change is real and it's happening now.

There are legitimate reasons why Christians have hesitated to take on the climate change concern. For example, doesn't climate change mean that we have to believe in evolution and a four-billion-year-old Earth? Not at all. Climate change is fully understandable without ascribing a birth date to planet Earth. As we go back in Earth's history, our satellite, thermometer, natural, and written records consistently validate the dramatic and unprecedented nature of the recent increase in heat-trapping gases in the atmosphere. And this recent increase corresponds directly with the dawn and growth of our industrial age less than three hundred years ago.

But what about natural cycles and the sun? Carbon dioxide from plants and volcanoes? Yes, we can account for these and many other frequently heard objections to the science of climate change.

This book, then, is an invitation. Find out more about the *why* of climate change and the truth about the most popular "spins" put on the issue. Climate change may not be obvious where you live, but real people around the world are being affected in drastic ways today. The impacts of climate change are already a reality.

Let's begin with a story about some real people whose lives are being threatened by climate change.

And they just happen to be Americans.