

## **Bible Study: For The Least Of These**

*To Leaders:* Climate change is an urgent issue that is bringing together a diverse group of policy makers, religious leaders, and environmental groups to urge action on the local and national level. As Christians, we have an important role to play in this conversation. Climate change relates both to our call to tend and till God's creation and to care for the least and last among us. That is why the American Values Network is organizing a series of Bible studies all across Nevada, Colorado, and Arizona during the months of December and January, to help people reflect on what the Bible has to say on this topic and how our faith calls us to action. But we need your help. This Bible study, utilizing the video "Sisters on the Planet," raises awareness of the moral implications of climate change and how it is already impacting the poorest among us in the U.S. and around the world. This video and study provide a good opportunity for Christian groups to explore the Biblical and moral implications of environmental stewardship.

Our goal with this guide is to provide a forum for Christians to learn about an important national and global issue within the context of their faith, and to encourage them to become involved in grassroots efforts around environmental stewardship, including creation care service projects. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid is also planning a tele-town hall with the faith community in early 2010 to discuss the moral and national security implications of climate change. This will be an important opportunity for Christians to share with him how faith informs our positions on this and other key issues. To make all this work, however, we need people like you who are willing to lead a Bible Study.

So what do you need to do? Pick a location, date, and time for your Bible study. You could choose a time when your regular Bible study group already meets and just do this material one week, or you can make a special meeting out of it. Then just email [rjohnson@americanvaluesnetwork.org](mailto:rjohnson@americanvaluesnetwork.org) with your name, address, and the date and time of your Bible study. We will send you a copy of the DVD and answer any questions you may have.

Anything else? Yes. There is another very important thing leaders need to do; you need to encourage people to become involved. At the end of the Bible study, people will be looking for opportunities to "do something" on this issue. Along with the DVD, we will send you a sign-up sheet for people to indicate other events they would be interested in. One important event you should ask them to participate in is the faith tele- town hall with Senator Reid. The way the tele-town hall works is on the day of the event the people who sign up will receive a call asking them to join in. Then

they can simply listen or ask the Senator a question. The date and time of the town hall have not yet been determined

Other "asks" include getting people to agree to host their own Bible study or house party. A house party is similar to the Bible Study with just more of a policy focus. It's an opportunity to get people together socially, learn about an important issue, and have fun while doing so. We will send whomever signs up to do a Bible study or house party a complete packet with materials and a guide.

You can also ask people to consider participating in one of our creation care service projects in the spring. These service projects are a great way to put ideas to action and will range from helping weatherize homes for shut-ins to cleaning up local stream banks of trash. People who sign up will get emails letting them know about upcoming service projects, which they can RSVP to.

After you had your Bible study, please send the sign-up sheets through email or snail mail to Rachel Johnson at [rjohnson@americanvaluesnetwork.org](mailto:rjohnson@americanvaluesnetwork.org) or 1901 N. Fort Myer Dr. Suite 901 Arlington, VA 22209.

## Bible Study Guide

Scripture Passage: Matthew 25: 31-46

Materials: DVD “Sisters on the Planet” and DVD equipment for viewing

Other Resources: [Biblical Guide to Creation Care](#) – **This is a great resource if you are looking for other scripture passages to augment your discussion. It provides dozens of Bible verses related to creation care that can be explored by theme or books of the Bible, as well as commentaries by theologians and Church Fathers, and “take-aways” to summarize the main themes of the passage.**

### Introduction

Open the Bible Study by showing the video “Sisters on the Planet.” The video is only half an hour long, but if you are limited for time, each of the women’s stories can be played individually and you can choose not to show them all.

After watching the video, begin by asking the following questions:

- What are your first responses to this video? Did anything in particular strike you? What and why?

### Scripture

Ask someone in the group to read aloud Matthew 25: 31-46.

Ask the group:

- Who are the least of these in today’s world? Would you include these women? Why or why not?
- What is our responsibility to them?
- Is caring for creation a valid way to meet that responsibility?

### Discussion Questions

*The following are questions to help cultivate discussion. Allow responses to the initial questions about the movie and Scripture reading to determine where to take the conversation next. You do not need to cover all the questions (and it is unlikely you will be able to do so in the time you have), nor do they need to be asked in any particular order. They are merely provided as a guide to help facilitate conversation and present a number of directions you can take it to best match your group’s needs/interests.*

One of the reoccurring themes in these women's stories is that weather patterns are not as stable as they once were which is disrupting agriculture and making it difficult for communities to know when to plant crops.

- Does this experience resonate with our lives at all, or is it wholly unfamiliar?
- Are we ever forced to reflect on how our sources of food are impacted by weather? How aware are we of where our food comes from?
- When they were wandering in the wilderness after the Exodus, the Israelites were forced to rely entirely on manna from God for their food (Ex 16:4-5). In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus instructs us to ask God for "our daily bread" (Matt 6:11). Has anyone ever had the experience of not knowing from where their food for the next day is coming? Does believing that God is ultimately the source of all our gifts, including food, mean that we don't need to help those who lack daily bread? What if it is our actions that are making it so others do not have enough food?
- Can anyone in the group think of times when the supply of any of their food was disrupted? E-coli threats? The loss of corn crops in the mid-west after severe flooding? Sick cattle or chicken? If you were impacted by these instances or others like them, to what degree was your life affected?
- What would it be like to be entirely dependent on food grown in your community?

Note that the areas in which these women live consist primarily of poorer populations – both abroad in third world countries, but also here in the U.S. One often overlooked aspect of climate change is the devastating impact it is already having on the lives of the poor.

- Martina says that in her own life she has witnessed the changes in the land caused by climate change. Why have we in the U.S. not more directly or severely experienced these changes? What are some of the things we do to protect ourselves from the effects of climate change? Are we able to do those things because of our country's wealth?
- "Adaptation" is a term used to describe how communities are adjusting to the changes in their circumstances as a result of climate change. The work Sahena does in her community to help them prepare for natural disasters and to protect food and water supplies is a small-scale form of adaptation. Should we be doing more to help poor communities internationally and domestically adapt to the changes they are experiencing on a larger scale? How far does our financial obligation go to help the poor trying to adapt abroad? How does faith inform this discussion, and would you give money or agree to higher taxes to help the poor?

- Jesus says, “I was hungry and you gave me food. I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink.” At one point Martina asks, “What can I do to end this thirst?” Due to increases in droughts and floods that are destroying crops, millions of women just like Martina and Sahena are unable to feed their families or provide them with clean water. Does Matthew 25 suggest we will be held accountable if we do nothing about climate change? Why or why not? Are our responsibilities corporate/communal or individual – or both?
- Sharon and Sahena’s stories emphasize the importance of not only responding to disaster, but of taking steps to protect people from further harm. What steps should be taken to prevent further loss of human life? Is this a moral issue? Is large-scale action needed by the U.S. or on the global stage? Do we have a responsibility to act?
- Sahena presents preparing for natural disasters as part of her daily life. Can anyone in the group share an experience when their life was impacted by a natural disaster? What would it be like to have storms and flooding that continue to grow more severe be a constant threat in your life?
- At one point, Martina asks, “Is it really people here who are damaging the rain patterns and climate?” Consider that the U.S. has 4 percent of the world’s population, but produces nearly a quarter of its CO2 emissions. It is the emissions of wealthy nations that are most directly contributing to climate change, but the poorest among us are the ones experiencing the consequences. What is our responsibility to them? Are we reflecting Jesus’ love for the poor in our individual actions and as a nation? Does a secular Republic like ours have a responsibility to care about moral constructs and how our actions will affect non-citizens? Should churches and Christian groups in the U.S. be doing more to act on this issue or should they have other priorities?

The stories in this video come from women all over the world. Most often, discussions of climate change will center on areas such as Africa where there are severe droughts, or southeast Asia where there is widespread flooding.

- Is climate change a *global* threat? How urgent do you think the threat is?
- Were you surprised to see someone from the United States included in this video? Did Sharon’s story provide anyone with a different perspective on the threat posed by climate change?
- Considering that natural disasters have quadrupled in the last year, and have been increasing in intensity, what impact is climate change having on the United States, both directly and in terms of the aid we offer other regions?
- Are we responding to climate change with an appropriate sense of urgency as the Church and as a country? If yes, why? If no, what more should we be doing? On the global stage, what role should the U.S. play among other nations in responding to climate change?

Consider reading out loud this short commentary on the story of the Good Samaritan that provides an interesting perspective on corporate versus individual responsibilities:

We all know the story of the Good Samaritan. A traveler is accosted by robbers, beaten, and left for dead on the side of the road. After he is ignored by several holy and righteous men of that time, along comes the Good Samaritan, who sees the injured stranger, binds his wounds and takes him to a place where he can be nurtured back to health. But what if the story had not ended there? What if the next day the Samaritan had been walking along that same road and again came upon a man who had been set upon by robbers? What if it happened a third and a fourth time? The Samaritan surely would have treated those men the same way. But how long do you think it would take before the Good Samaritan's love of neighbor would have compelled him to say, "You know, someone really ought to be patrolling this road!"

- Is our calling from God to be good stewards of his creation and our calling in Matthew 25 to care for the least and last merely an individual responsibility or also a corporate one that should inform our communal and national decisions?
- What are the difficulties of applying Christian responsibilities to national policies?
- What are the dangers of not doing so?
- If every regular church-attending Christian in this country tithed, the Church would have more money for mission/service than the U.S. Government spends on all non-defense domestic programs. And the number of work hours by all federal and state social service, juvenile justice, and education employees would be dwarfed by a commitment by weekly church attenders to volunteer 1 hour a week to community service. Christians in this country have the ability to bring about significant social change. Why do you think we have thus far failed to do so?

Although not directly addressed in this video, a coalition of [22 senior U.S. Generals](#) backed by several CIA reports have said that climate change will be one of the greatest national security threats our nation faces in the coming decades. As oceans rise and rivers and lakes dry up, there will be increasing population pressures (like the one following the drying of Lake Chad and mass-migration that followed and played a key role in the Darfur genocides) that will destabilize regions, result in wars over resources, and create hotbeds for extremism. [[Click here for a fact sheet on how climate change threatens national security](#)]

- Does this information change the way you view the threat of climate change?

- Does the U.S. really need to worry about destabilized 3<sup>rd</sup> world countries?  
Could one make an economic argument for investing in adaptation now to avoid paying the much larger military costs (to say nothing of the human ones) of war or peacekeeping later?
- Do you think the combination of the more “selfish” national security argument with the more selfless moral one makes for a more compelling case for action on climate change or waters down the strong and clear Christian call to help those in need?