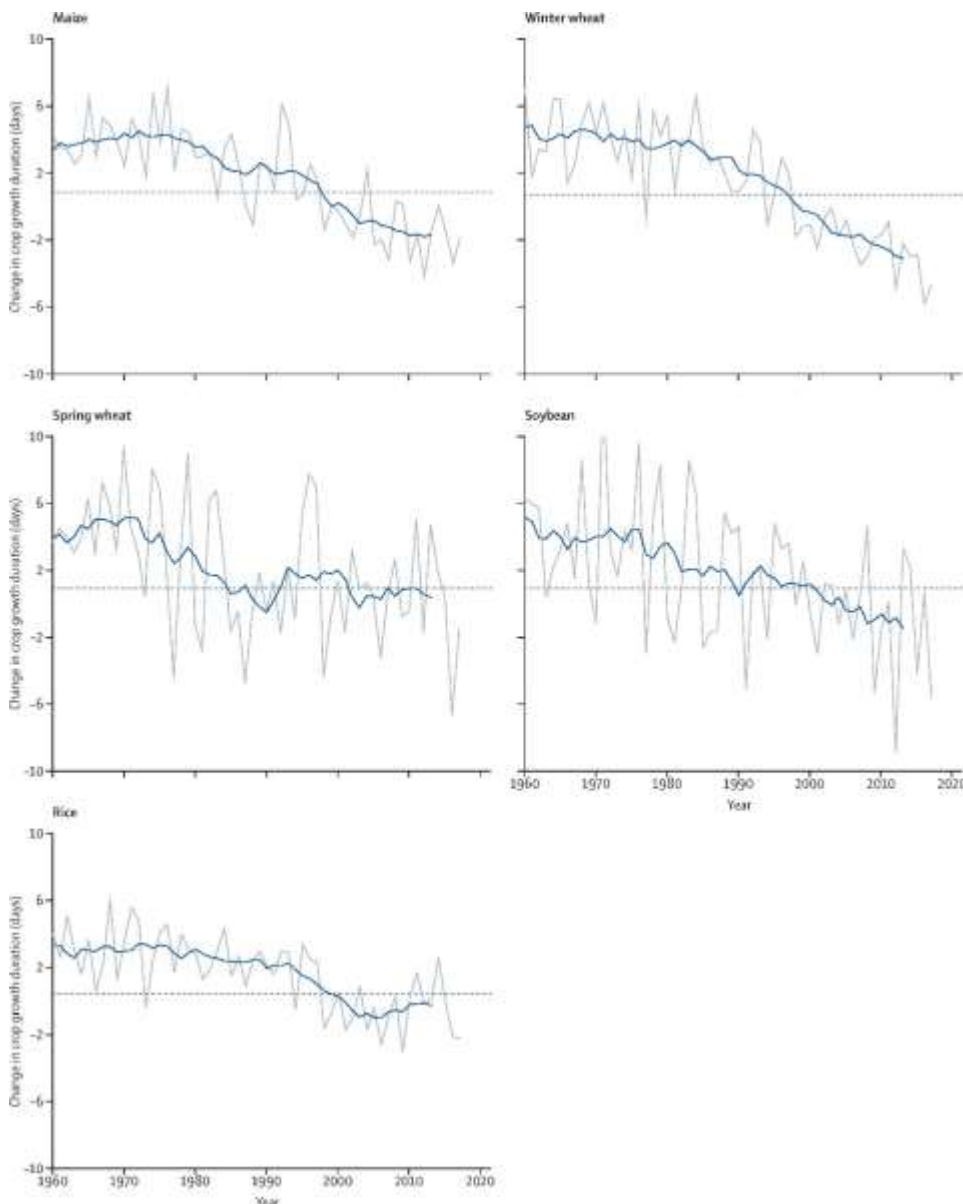


Why should we be concerned about the environment? It isn't just because of the dangers we face from pollution, climate change, or other environmental problems—although these are serious. For Christians, the issue is much deeper: We know that God created the world, and it belongs to Him, not us. Because of this, we are only stewards or trustees of God's creation, and we aren't to abuse or neglect it. The Bible says, "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it" (Psalm 24:1). The Rev. Dr. Billy Graham, April 2017

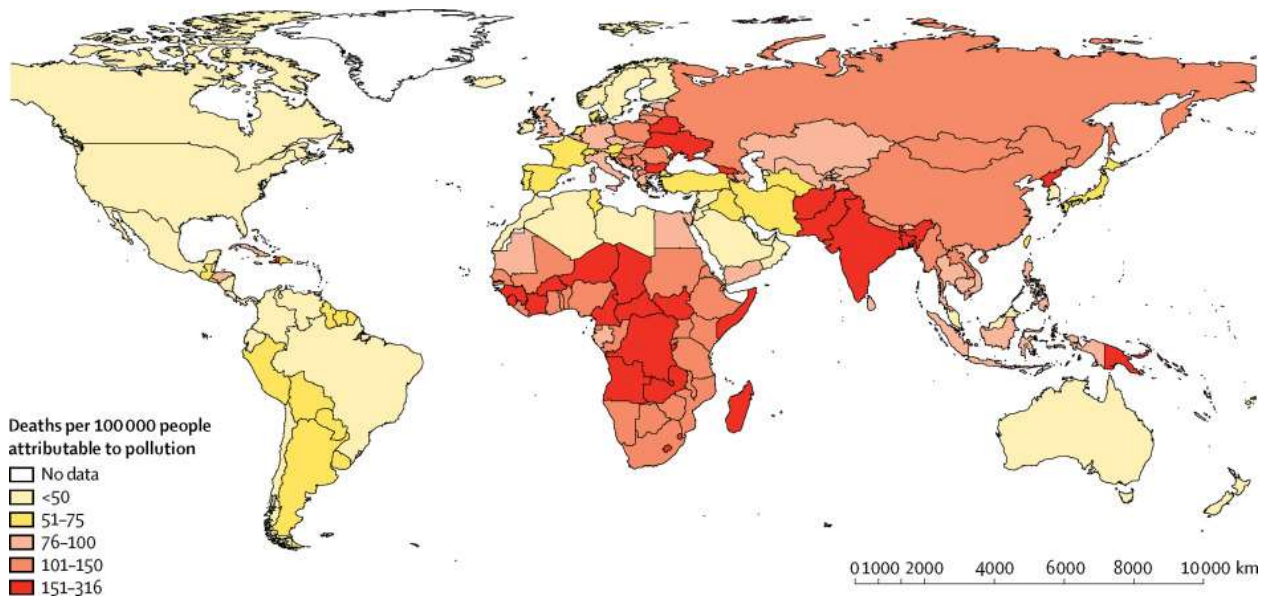
It is difficult to imagine how the Gospel can be spread throughout the world when so much of the church, especially in the United States, continues to ignore the greatest moral challenge of our generation: climate change. Climate change already impacts all God's children worldwide. From the one person displaced every two secondsⁱ to massive decreases in food productionⁱⁱ to over 4000 dying each day from air pollution in China,ⁱⁱⁱ climate change and other fossil-fuel



pollution impedes both our efforts to evangelize and our relationship with Jesus, the creator and sustainer of all things.^{iv}

When many Christians hear concerns about the environment, they automatically assume they are coming from “tree huggers or tree worshipers” whose exaggerated worries about an endangered snail blocks the efforts of job-creating industries. However, scripture makes it clear that the stakes are much higher than this. If we believe God is the Creator and that all creation belongs to Him, then we have a double responsibility as Christians to both care for the “least of these” and to care for creation. Failure to steward what belongs to God and failure to care for those who are suffering interferes with our relationship with God. It’s time we realize that creation care is an act of discipleship, part of what it means to follow Jesus. Creation care is a matter of life, especially human life!

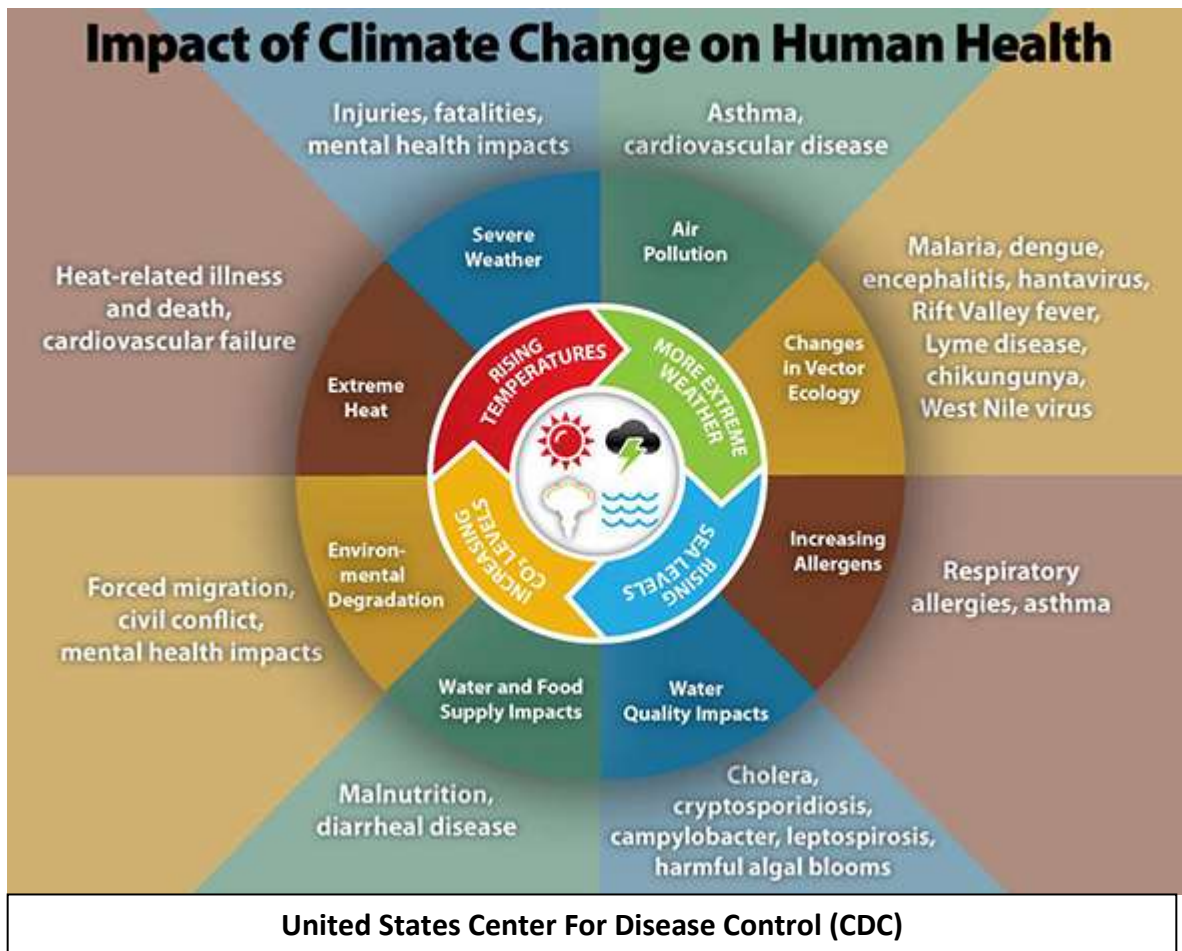
According to the 2017 *Lancet Commission* report, over 9 million people around the world die prematurely each year from pollution.^v While this number is most likely an underestimation, the untimely deaths caused by pollution each year are three times more than the deaths from AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis combined. They are fifteen times more fatalities than those caused by all acts of violence.^{vi}



The Majority World suffers pollution’s highest fatality rate, but even developed nations such as the United States are not immune. More than 108,000 U.S. residents die from air pollution annually, with at least 5,000 newborns dying from soot (PM_{2.5}) pollution alone.^{vii} According to the American Lung Association’s [State of the Air 2019](#), 43% of Americans live in an area of unhealthy air pollution. Climate change-induced temperature rises have exacerbated the problem generating more ground-level ozone (smog) in many North American cities, resulting in severe health consequences for those already suffering asthma, lung, and heart diseases.

In addition to pollution-related deaths, climate change poses its own unique threats to human life: temperature escalations; more extreme weather; rainfall pattern changes; increased spread of vector-borne diseases such as malaria, dengue, Zika, and Lyme. All fearsome and deadly, all with a common source: fossil fuel use.

Fossil fuel combustion emits over 100 toxic chemicals that directly damage human health. These include PAHs (polyaromatic hydrocarbons); metals like arsenic, lead, and mercury; carcinogens like benzene; and fine particles (soot) that are all inhaled and that harm vital organs including the heart, lungs, and brain. Not to mention carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases which are driving our climate crisis.



Unfortunately, we have not internalized the message. While dissolved carbon dioxide in oceans is turning the water to acid, destroying a major food source for billions and threatening the generation of as much as 70% of Earth’s oxygen, we continue to increase the carbon dioxide spewed into the atmosphere at alarming rates. During 2014 and 2015, we saw a marked decline in carbon dioxide output even while the world’s economy continued to grow. Since then, however, carbon dioxide has soared to levels never seen in biblical history.

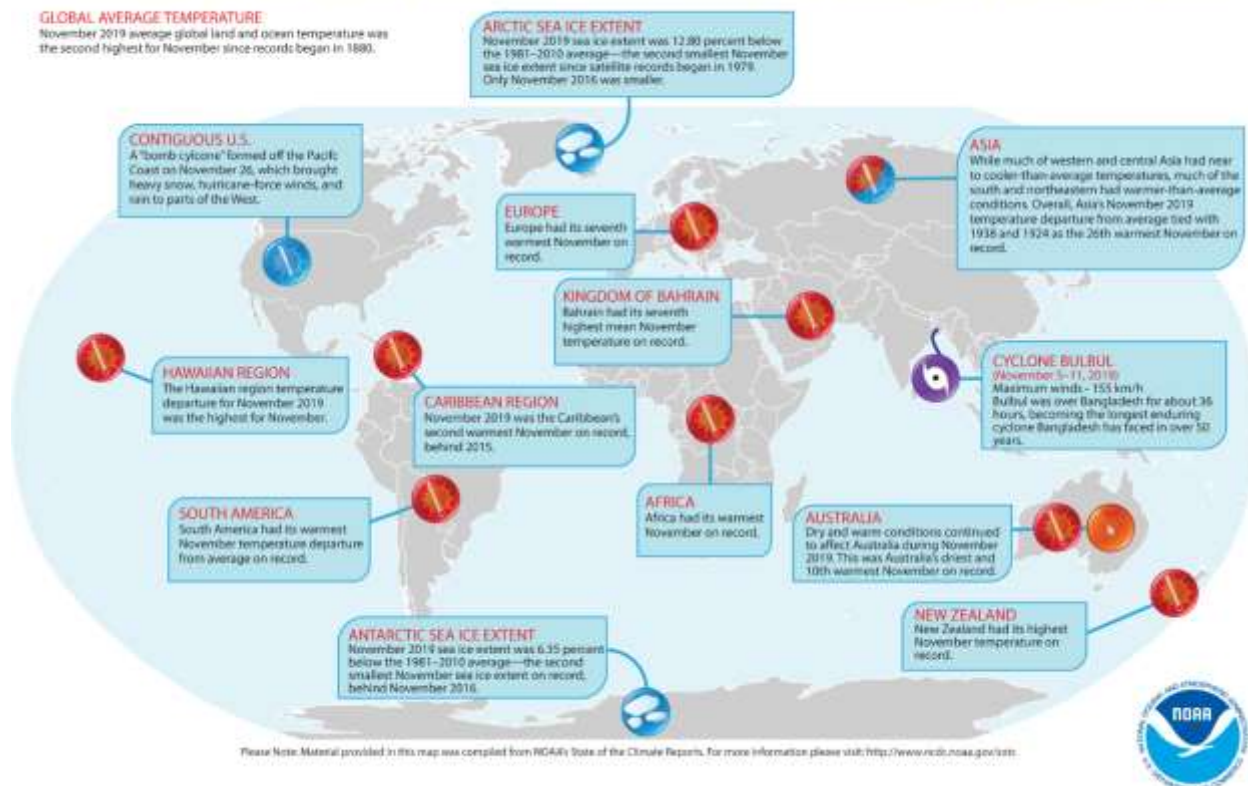
God created the world with a finely calibrated blanket of greenhouse gases. This blanket includes a level of carbon dioxide that hovers at approximately 270 parts per million (ppm). This blanket keeps the world 60-70°F warmer than it would be without it. It is not an exaggeration to say that this blanket is what allows human life to flourish on Earth. Today, carbon dioxide levels in this atmospheric blanket are dangerously out of whack, soaring over 415 ppm and continuing to climb. In effect, we added an extra blanket to our atmosphere, making the coverage 53% thicker (and getting thicker)—trapping in heat, changing God’s design for creation, and threatening life as we know it. We are fulfilling Isaiah’s prophecy:

Isaiah 24:4-5 (NIV)

***4 The earth dries up and withers,
the world languishes and withers,
the heavens languish with the earth.***

***5 The earth is defiled by its people;
they have disobeyed the laws,
violated the statutes
and broken the everlasting covenant.***

Selected Significant Climate Anomalies and Events November 2019



The last five years—from 2014 to 2018—represents the warmest 5-year stretch ever recorded in the 139 years that the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has

tracked global heat. It is likely 2015-2019 will beat it once the data is compiled in 2020. We are at a critical time in caring for God's creation. It's time to act. Thanks be to God; we are neither helpless nor hopeless.

Thanks to leadership from the Lausanne Movement and their [Cape Town Commitment](#) issued in 2010, the evangelical tradition has a sound theological statement and call to action for addressing the climate crisis:

The earth is created, sustained and redeemed by Christ. We cannot claim to love God while abusing what belongs to Christ by right of creation, redemption and inheritance. We care for the earth and responsibly use its abundant resources, not according to the rationale of the secular world, but for the Lord's sake. If Jesus is Lord of all the earth, we cannot separate our relationship to Christ from how we act in relation to the earth. For to proclaim the gospel that says 'Jesus is Lord' is to proclaim the gospel that includes the earth, since Christ's Lordship is over all creation. Creation care is thus a gospel issue within the Lordship of Christ.

...

We lament over the widespread abuse and destruction of the earth's resources, including its bio-diversity. Probably the most serious and urgent challenge faced by the physical world now is the threat of climate change. This will disproportionately affect those in poorer countries, for it is there that climate extremes will be most severe and where there is little capability to adapt to them. World poverty and climate change need to be addressed together and with equal urgency.

In 2015, the National Association of Evangelicals (US) adopted the Cape Town Commitment's wording on climate change and in their 2018 [For The Health of the Nation](#) stated:

Climate change is a threat multiplier. It increases the harm from desertification, pollution and other damage to creation. It especially impacts the poorest of God's children in the world. Food and water insecurity and vector-borne diseases force migrations, increase conflicts and make daily life more challenging in the developing world. In the United States, it increases disease spread and asthma attacks, causes sea level rise and flooding, melts permafrost, lowers air quality, increases drought and fires, and adds severe weather threats.

These statements do more than live on a page. They have inspired faithful and hope-filled action from evangelical groups the world over. Thanks to the leadership of the Lausanne Movement, the World Evangelical Alliance, the National Association of Evangelicals; Christian development ministries like Tearfund, World Vision, World Hope, Convoy of Hope, Plant with Purpose, World Renew; education and advocacy groups like Climate Caretakers, the Climate Witness Project, Young Evangelicals for Climate Action, the Evangelical Environmental Network

and others, the evangelical church action has begun to act. Yet there much more work to be done.

Being serious in announcing the good news of Jesus demands creditable action on the greatest threat to each of God's children worldwide. If absent, our message of God's love fails to meet the daily challenges faced by those we try to reach. In short, it lacks creditability. However, if we live Jesus' love in action, the worst of the climate crisis can still be averted. Yet to do so, it will require that we truly live as stewards of Christ's wondrous creation.

The developed world must reduce carbon pollution now and turn to new forms of energy generation while becoming more energy efficient. We have undergone these energy transitions before. For example, in the United States as in much of Europe, energy generation started with wood, transitioned to coal, then oil, and has since become dominated by natural gas. Today, wind and solar generation are often the least expensive forms of electricity production, outbidding the aging fossil fuel technologies of the past.

However, switching to renewable energy does not apply just to the developed world but the Majority World as well. With renewable energy's plummeting cost and the ability for local generation without the need for massive transmission infrastructure, every child of God could have cheap, clean electricity. Energy that would empower refrigeration for food and medicine storage; switch on lights, charge computers, and enable internet access for education; power water pumps that provide water and food security—all while keeping air and water pure and free of life-threatening toxins.

Reaching all the world for Jesus requires caring for God's magnificent creation. If we continue to destroy creation, we eliminate perhaps the greatest witness of all to God's glory and our most powerful partner in winning people for Christ:

Romans 1:20 (NIV)

For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

Climate change is the greatest moral challenge of our time. If addressed with courage and faithfulness, it can turn out to be the greatest hope yet for providing a flourishing life for all God's children. That's the Kingdom message we need to bring to the mission field. It is good news not only for the people we are trying to reach, but for all God's creation.

The Rev. Mitchell C. Hescox
President/CEO
Evangelical Environmental Network

ⁱ **Forced from Home.** Oxfam Policy Papers. December 2, 2019.

<https://oxfamlibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/620914/mb-climate-displacement-cop25-021219-en.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Nick Watts, Markus Amann, Nigel Arnell, Sonja Ayeb-Karlsson, Kristine Belesova, et.al. **The 2019 report of The Lancet Countdown on health and climate change: ensuring that the health of a child born today is not defined by a changing climate.** *Lancet* 2019; 394: 1836–78. Published Online November 13, 2019 [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(19\)32596-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(19)32596-6).

ⁱⁱⁱ Robert A. Rohde, Richard A. Muller. **Air Pollution in China: Mapping of Concentrations and Sources.** 20 Aug 2015 PLOS ONE. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0135749>

^{iv} Col. 1:16-17.

^v Prof Philip J Landrigan, MD, Richard Fuller, Nereus J R Acosta, PhD, Olusoji Adeyi, Robert Arnold, PhD. Prof Niladri (Nil) Basu, PhD, et al. The *Lancet* Commission on pollution and health. October 19, 017DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(17\)32345-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(17)32345-0)

^{vi} GBD 2015 Risk Factors Collaborators. Global, regional, and national comparative risk assessment of 79 behavioral, environmental and occupational, and metabolic risks or clusters of risks, 1990–2015: a systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease. *Lancet* 2016; 388: 1659–724.

^{vii} Christopher W. Tessum, Joshua S. Apte, Andrew L. Goodkind, Nicholas Z. Muller, Kimberley A. Mullins, David A. Paoella, Stephen Polasky, Nathaniel P. Springer, Sumil K. Thakrar, Julian D. Marshall, and Jason D. Hill. Inequity in consumption of goods and services adds to racial–ethnic disparities in air pollution exposure. *PNAS* March 26, 2019 116 (13) 6001-6006; first published March 11, 2019 <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1818859116>