



### **Biblical texts and teachings relevant to divestment**

The Bible offers a number of teachings that may be directly applicable to a discussion of fossil fuel divestment and investment in a clean energy future. Here are four biblical themes:

#### **1. God wants us to prosper responsibly. We're accountable for how we use our financial resources**

Psalm 112:5

Proverbs 21:2-3

Matthew 25:14-30

Luke 12:15, 23, 34

God wants us to make the most of our resources, working diligently to improve what we've been given. At the same time, God wants us to manage our resources fairly and justly, and to treat the poor and creation with respect. The Bible criticises greed, especially when it distracts us from God and causes harm to others.

#### **2. Creation belongs to God and we are its stewards**

Genesis 2:15

Psalm 24:1

Leviticus 25:23-24

The Bible teaches that the earth belongs to God. Christians, through all aspects of our lives, are to be its good stewards. This means that our investments as well as our lives should reflect stewardship values and help care for creation while also helping our churches and our institutions to flourish.

#### **3. In times of crisis, God calls the faithful to rebuild society**

Nehemiah 2:17-18; 4:6

Nehemiah was a Jew who worked in the court of the Persian king, but returned from exile to Jerusalem, because he had learned that the walls of Jerusalem were in ruins. He motivated his fellow Israelites and organised the rebuilding of the walls as a sign of the

renewed faithfulness of the people of Israel. A commitment to the development of a clean energy economy would represent a similar expression of leadership by the faith community – a new way for people of faith to serve as a ‘light to the nations’.

#### **4. When it is time to act or when we know what is right, we shouldn’t delay**

Luke 9:58-62

James 4:13-17

In certain circumstances, Jesus calls us to act with urgency, and particularly when we believe we know such action is needed urgently and will save lives, protect future generations, and increase the well-being of the entire human family. We must act now.

*Adapted with thanks from GreenFaith <http://greenfaith.org/>*

#### **The Parable of the Talents: Fossil fuel disinvestment and reinvestment**

This Bible study is designed to help church groups discuss the moral significance of fossil fuel disinvestment and clean energy reinvestment.

Climate change exacerbates extreme weather events, destroying roads, bridges, communications systems, sewage systems and ecosystems. Those people with the fewest resources are the most vulnerable to these impacts.

This study reflects on the story in the New Testament that most directly discusses the topic of investment: the Parable of the Talents. It is one of a series of Jesus’ teachings about preparing for the coming of God’s Kingdom. How should we understand the Parable of the Talents given the parable that immediately follows it?

Read this passage with the understanding that the talents represent not our own financial resources, but rather the natural resources that God has placed into our care. We understand the master in this story to represent God in Christ, the servants to represent God’s people and the talents to represent the resources of creation.

#### **Read: Matthew 25:14-30**

Discuss:

- If you interpret this parable literally, what do you think Jesus is saying about how we should invest our money?
- Think of other passages in the Bible where Jesus talks about money. Does a literal interpretation of this parable seem consistent with Jesus’ financial values?

- Think of other parables in the Bible. Do you think we should interpret them literally? Why or why not?

### **Reflection**

This story, like other parables, is an allegory – a story with a concealed meaning. Many people immediately assume that the parable should be interpreted as a teaching on how to manage financial resources. Others suggest that the talents symbolise our gifts and skills, which we should increase for the glory of God. But what if we considered a third possibility: that God wants us to consider the talents as representing the bounty and resources of creation – resources that are given to us to manage, but for whose use, management and well-being we are accountable to God?

This way of thinking is consistent with the ancient Israelites' understanding of the relationship between the land, their God and themselves. They knew that the land was God's and God's alone. It represented the promise of God's favour – a gift from God, rather than a human-owned asset. God tells the Israelites: 'No land may be permanently bought or sold. It all belongs to me – it isn't your land, and you only live there for a little while' (Leviticus 25:23).

### **Discuss:**

- If the talents represent the earth's resources, how does that impact your understanding of this parable?
- In what ways does your life support the flourishing of creation? In what way does your life harm or degrade creation? Are you accountable to God for this?
- If the talents represent the earth's resources, how might this parable inform faithful approaches to the investment of religious funds?
- Should Churches earn money from sources that act in contradiction to their values? Why or why not?

### **Reflection**

Matthew 6:21 says, 'Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.' What does this mean to you?

Closing Reading: Psalm 112. Not everyone has access to significant financial resources but for those who have enough to invest and share, this psalm provides biblical values for framing financial decisions.

*This Bible study was written by the Revd Jenny Phillips and Revd Fletcher Harper and used with permission from GreenFaith.*