

BIBLE STUDIES



**CHURCH
DIVESTMENT
FROM FOSSIL
FUELS AND
INVESTMENT IN
CLEAN ENERGY**



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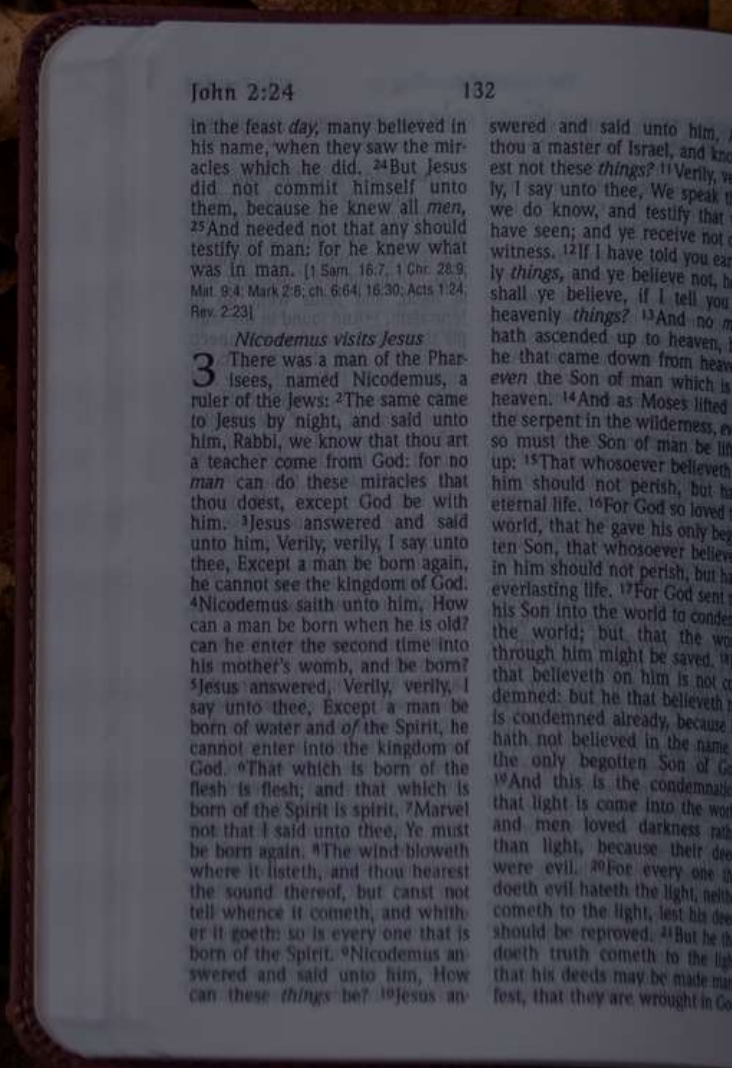
These Bible studies are designed to help church groups discuss the moral significance of fossil fuel divestment and clean energy investment.

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.

These Bible studies have been adapted from those written by the Revd Jenny Phillips and Revd Fletcher Harper and are used with permission from GreenFaith.

<http://greenfaith.org/>

1. *For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*
2. *The earth is the Lord's*
3. *Follow me*
4. *The Parable of the Talents*



'FOR WHERE YOUR TREASURE IS, THERE YOUR HEART WILL BE ALSO'

Psalm 112:5

Good will come to those who are generous and lend freely,
who conduct their affairs with justice.

Luke 12:15, 23, 34

15 Then he said to them, 'Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.'

23 For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes.

34 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Matthew 25:14-30

The parable of the bags of gold

Proverbs 21:2-3

2 A person may think their own ways are right,

but the Lord weighs the heart.

3 To do what is right and just is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice.

Discuss:

- What should be our attitude towards our finances?
- Is there a tension between living 'normally' in our society and how our faith is calling us to live?
- How do we resolve that tension?
- Is there also a conflict between spending time and energy on our finances, ensuring they are invested for good, and focusing on spiritual matters?

Reflection:

God wants us to prosper responsibly. We're accountable for how we use our financial resources, and are called to work 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.

'THE EARTH IS THE LORD'S, AND EVERYTHING IN IT, THE WORLD, AND ALL WHO LIVE IN IT'

Genesis 2:15

15 The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

Psalms 24:1

1 The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it;

Leviticus 25:23-24

23 The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you reside in my land as foreigners and strangers. 24 Throughout the land that you hold as a possession, you must provide for the redemption of the land.

Discuss:

- Whose planet is it? How about your garden, your house, your car, your bank balance?
- How would you best describe our intended role in creation?
- How would you best describe our current actual role in creation?

Reflection:

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.

'FOLLOW ME'

Luke 9:58-62

58 Jesus replied, "Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."

59 He said to another man, "Follow me." But he replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father."

60 Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God."

61 Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family."

62 Jesus replied, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."

James 4:13-17

13 Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money."

14 Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.

15 Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that."

16 As it is, you boast in your arrogant schemes. All such boasting is evil.

17 If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them.

Discuss:

- Was Jesus asking a lot of his prospective disciples in Luke 9? Do you think you would have understood the urgency if you had been one of them?
- Whose job is it to provide moral leadership in a time of crisis
- How does the passage in James make you feel?

Reflection:

When it is time to act or when we know what is right, we shouldn't delay. 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.

THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS

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).

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Read: Matthew 25: 14-30

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.