

Too Many Believe Climate Change Won't Affect Them

I met a Texan who speaks regularly about climate change and has lived to tell the tale.

With my John Ray Initiative colleagues, Margot and Martin Hodson, I attended an event hosted by [Climate Outreach](#) at St Mary's University Church, Oxford, on Nov. 15, 2017.

Climate Outreach's purpose is to ensure that climate change and its impacts are understood, accepted and acted upon across the breadth of society.

George Marshall, co-founder and director of projects at Climate Outreach, and Katharine Hayhoe, an atmospheric scientist who is a professor in the department of political science and director of the Climate Science Centre at Texas Tech University, part of the U.S. Department of Interior's South-Central Climate Science Centre, led the meeting.

Hayhoe, who is married to Free Church pastor Andrew Farley, studies climate change, which she sees as one of the most pressing issues the world faces today.

She doesn't accept global warming on faith but analyzes the data and models in order to help engineers, city managers and ecologists quantify the impacts.

Hayhoe stated the data tells us the planet is warming, the science is clear that humans are responsible, the impacts we're seeing today are already serious, and our future is in our hands.

She noted that we have three choices: mitigation, adaptation and suffering, and that "we're going to do some of each."

The more mitigation we do, the less adaptation will be required, and the less

suffering there will be.

Hayhoe is the co-author of a recent 477-page report released on Nov. 10, 2017, representing a comprehensive review by 13 U.S. federal agencies.

The report stated it was “extremely likely” (95 percent to 100 percent certainty) that global warming is caused by human activity, which produces carbon dioxide through the burning of coal, oil and natural gas.

Hayhoe observed that this period is now the warmest in the history of modern civilization.

In the report, scientists highlighted a dozen “tipping points” of potential dangers that could result from warming, things that she said “keep me up at night.”

From her own context in Texas, where her friends are largely skeptical about climate change, she rehearsed ways of sharing the worldwide concerns of climate scientists.

She observes that the real problem does not lie with the science, which is conclusive, but rather that people do not generally believe that it will affect them.

Hayhoe suggested that images of polar bears on icebergs gave support to the view that this issue is far removed from them and therefore does not matter.

But, more important, we don’t know what to do about it; we get depressed that we cannot influence the problem, and further scientific assessments trigger fear, anxiety, inadequacy and detachment.

So, we don’t want to talk about climate change because it is depressing. Yet, she maintains that climate scientists can make a difference, especially for the poorest in the world, and “I do it because I have a profound love of people.”

Hayhoe urged all of us who are concerned about climate change to speak from our heart about what matters to us and what matters to those we meet – the

importance of connecting with the values and concerns of our friends and neighbors.

She emphasized that climate change is not an environmental issue but a human issue; it affects the air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat, our health, our economy and our world security. We need to show how climate change affects every aspect of life.

The relationship between science and faith was also a focal point of Hayhoe's presentation, and she used the example that science can tell you which is north, south, east and west, but cannot tell you which way to go.

Science can tell us the statistical impact of climate change, but cannot tell us what to do. This comes from the heart.

We find very little to offer us hope in the science; science shows us that we have underestimated the effects of climate change, but we need hope because if we have no hope, we will fail.

Hayhoe offered glimpses of hope: the provision of solar energy for the poorest in the world; the fact that China and India are leading the world in renewable energy; the fact that 30 percent of the U.S. economy, represented by cities, states and corporations have signed up to the climate change principles; and especially that her personal faith gives the assurance of the possibility of change.

So, Hayhoe urged us to present hope, which does not come from science, but from our faith - "the fear is in my head; the hope is in my heart."

She encouraged us to read her favorite Bible verse. "For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline" (2 Timothy 1:7).

God is not the author of fear. Fear paralyzes us, but God through his Spirit gives us love, power to get things done, and a sound mind to make good decisions.

Can we have hope? Can our thoughtless and selfish actions thwart the purposes of God?

The promise of the first covenant, with Noah, is that while human sinfulness and self-centeredness will continue so will God's gracious promise "never again" to destroy the earth, (Genesis 8:21-22).

God promises to be present with us in the realities of life (Psalm 23; Isaiah 43:1-5; Matthew 28:20) and encourages us to hold onto hope in the face of uncertainty.

We learn from both Amos and Jeremiah that the false prophets promised hope without catastrophe while God's prophets offer hope beyond catastrophe.

We can speak of the hope of judgment - that there is accountability for our lack of care of the poor and of the environment. Our hope is based on God and God's justice and grace, which are not thwarted by human sinfulness.

In Romans 5:1-5, there is a link between hope and endurance; hope is the motivation to keep on going.

We are faced with a failure and crisis in politics and public opinions in regard to climate change, and the situation for the poor in the developing world is reaching crisis proportions.

But, ultimate hope is in God and is eternal, while human hope is temporal and uncertain.

Christians are called to a hopeful discipleship in the light of our ultimate hope in God's promises and purposes. We live as those who are created in the image of God and cooperate with God's transformative action in and for the world.

[John Weaver](#) is the chairman of the John Ray Initiative (JRI), an educational charity focused on connecting environment, science and Christianity in the United Kingdom. He was principal of South Wales Baptist College until his retirement in 2011 and served as the president of the Baptist Union of Great Britain in 2008-09.

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