

JUST LOVE.

Just Love Guide to Ethical Living

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Welcome to the Just Love Guide to Ethical Living

We want every Christian student to be passionate about ethical living, but it can often be hard to know where to start. So, the aim of this handbook is to set out the basics – to offer a solid foundation of what living for Jesus with all of our lives could look like. The handbook is divided into different sections which each finish with some action points. These are suggestions and they are certainly not exhaustive. Living ethically is much deeper than just going through a tick list – and that is why we begin by exploring the principles that underlie why we care about this in the first place.

Two key principles are to see ethical living as **many small steps in the right direction**, and as something that we do **in community** – as brothers and sisters, encouraging, challenging, and holding each other accountable on how we live out our faith. So, approach the action points at the end of each section with these two in mind. We are not expecting everyone instantly to do all of these things. Big lifestyle change is hard. But we want to journey together, spurring each other on, and taking many small steps towards the goal of glorifying God with every bit of our lives.

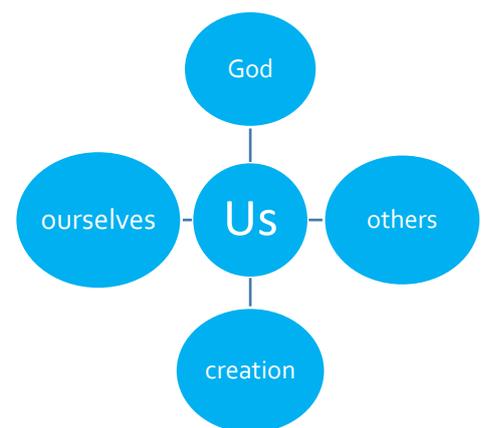
To avoid cluttering up each section, we have an FAQs section at the end which delves in more depth into questions like ‘are we certain that humans are causing climate change?’ As much as possible we want this handbook to be a conversation, so please tell us what you find helpful, what we have missed out and what we could phrase better.

Why Does Ethical Living Matter?

It is vital that we ground all that we do in *why* we, as followers of Jesus, should care about ethical living. We deal a little more with this question in the FAQs at the end, but as a really brief summary:

Ethical living matters because it impacts four dimensions of relationship:

- Our relationship **with God**. The way that we live can be an act of worship.
- Our relationship **with others**. It is the world’s poorest who are suffering the most from climate change and the exploitation fuelled by our consumption.
- Our relationship **with creation**. The creator God has delegated authority to us to steward his creation well. How we treat creation communicates a lot about our attitude towards the creator.
- Our relationship **with ourselves**. This is a bit more complex and we need to unpack it a little more.



Seeking Simplicity

Changing our behaviour is important, but the heart of the problem is deeper. Consumerism is a dominant force in western culture. The culture we live in expects us to be buying the latest products, moving up the social ladder and looking beautiful in the process. Greed is commended as ambition, arrogance is encouraged as confidence, and hoarding is considered prudence. Consumerism is not necessarily a bad thing. But it can turn people into ‘passive participants’ and as consumers, we can become detached from production lines, producers, and products themselves, meaning that we consume things with less respect.ⁱ

But the solution isn't a rejection of material things altogether. The picture that emerges from scripture is that material possessions are not in themselves evil, 'but the imperative is that they are only given for the sake of others.'ⁱⁱⁱ Such generosity comes from a place of simplicity.

Simplicity is a spiritual discipline – 'an inward reality that results in an outward lifestyle.' It is, says Richard Foster, 'the only thing that sufficiently reorients our lives so that possessions can be genuinely enjoyed without destroying us.' This inward reality of simplicity is cultivated if we view our material possessions as a gift to be cared for by God and available to others.ⁱⁱⁱ Such simplicity liberates us from the insatiable demands of consumerism, and enables us to live ethically – as a community witnessing to the cross and to new creation – with all our lives, not as a duty but as a joy.

"Contentment says 'I have enough'. The secret to being able to say this is learning to be thankful."
Ruth Valerio

Our response

In light of the injustice and destruction resulting from our current habits, John Stott described any lifestyle, other than a simple and ethical lifestyle, as 'indefensible'.^{iv}

But sometimes being confronted with reality can be paralysing. Despair is easy. Denial – isolating ourselves in a bubble of polite affluence and anaesthetised religion, pretending everything is fine – is equally tempting. But there is a third way offered by the hope that we have in Christ: resolute action.

The reality is that all four of those relationships – with God, with others, with creation, and with ourselves – have been fractured by sin. But the gospel is the good news that Jesus is Lord and is putting *all* of those fractured relationships to rights. And so, whilst climate change, consumerism and systematic injustice can seem like impossibly big problems, the gospel means that we can act with resolute hope because we know that in the new creation we will worship God with all of our lives, we will treat each other with love, that all of creation will be redeemed and indwelt by God, and no counterfeit gods will compete for our loyalty and identity. Because we have that hope, we can anticipate those restored relationships as God's future breaks into the present in part.

As consumers, we have power. Every consumer decision that we make is, effectively, a vote – and we can choose to vote for systems of violence, oppression and exploitation, or for systems of justice, peace and respect for God's creation. Whenever we shop, that is our choice. It's not always straightforward, but we can make informed choices to consume in a way that conforms to the narrative of scripture – of grace, hope and selfless love – not the narrative of greed, individualism and numbness. Ethical options are available in almost every area of consumption, so it is vital that we grow our ethical literacy. This handbook ought to be a good starting point, but two great resources for the day to day are [Ethical Consumer](#) – an online magazine which ranks different products using various criteria to determine the best ethical choices – and the [Lifestyle](#) section on Tearfund's website.

If you're interested in how we talk about ethical consumerism without being self-righteous and how this is different from self-help, then flick to the FAQs at the end.

As we align our lifestyles with the big-story of scripture, our primary aim is not to tick some behavioural boxes, or to feel a bit better about ourselves. Activism, campaigning, praying, giving to effective charities and serving on the ground are all essential partners to ethical living, but none of them is the primary aim. Rather, we seek first the kingdom.

Food

The food that we eat presents us with our most frequent consumer decisions. With such a vast array of choice, here are some key things to consider if we want to eat ethically.

Enough for Everyone

There is enough food produced in the world for everyone on the planet to have 2,700 kcals a day – considerably above the requirements of the average adult.^v But it is not evenly distributed and while millions of people don't have enough to eat, we, in the UK, throw away nearly 7 million tonnes of food and drink a year. Reducing what we waste is vital and there are lots of good [resources](#) to help with this.

Meat

Because of the amount of energy required to produce meat and the greenhouse gases emitted in that production, reducing how much meat we consume, together with changing how we travel, are the two greatest steps we can take towards making a positive impact on the climate.^{vi} Our demand for cheap meat in the west results in deforestation, pollution and all sorts of issues of animal welfare. We tend to be detached from these processes because it is far more convenient not to think about how our meat is produced. But a biblical understanding of stewardship compels us to press beyond this detachment. This [video](#) challenges that attitude of convenience. Make sure you watch right through to the end.

This is a difficult one. For many of us, meat is a central part of our diet. Are we prepared to take steps to change that for the sake of worshipping God with all of our lives? At the very least, will we care more about where our meat comes from? Will we vote with our wallets for a world in which God's creation is honoured and not ruthlessly exploited for our greed? Will we move towards buying less meat, but from sustainable sources, or deciding to cut meat out of our diets altogether?

The Red Tractor logo means very little. Go for the RSCPA Freedom Food logo as a minimum, and ideally meat and fish that is free range – avoiding the cruelty of intense farming – and organic – avoiding the ecological damage and energy-intensive production of artificial fertilisers.^{vii}

Remember, the key is lots of little steps in the right direction. If you're wondering whether you can actually make a difference, have a read of the 'will this actually make a difference?' question in the FAQs at the end.

"If I cannot extrapolate my standards of living for the whole world and still find nature flourishing, my standard of living is immoral"
John Carmody

Supermarkets

[Ethical Consumer](#) rates M&S and the Co-op most highly, while Tesco, Asda and Morrisons do badly. There are all sorts to consider with supermarkets such as their supply chains, tax evasion, paying staff a living wage and stocking fairtrade products. They all tend to be bad at some things, and slightly less bad at others.

Where possible, it may be best to support independent local shops, provided that their products, supply chains and treatment of staff are actually better than in supermarkets. When this isn't an option, then make use of Ethical Consumer, and the advice of others in your Just Love community, and from product-to-product go for the most ethical options in supermarkets. If the demand for ethical products is rises, supermarkets will stock more.

It is important to know where food comes from, but bear in mind that on average only 10% of the carbon footprint of food comes from transportation. 80% come from production.^{viii} So, whilst buying locally produced food can often be good, it is more important what type of food you buy and how it has been produced. There is no simple answer, but it pays to do your research.

Fairtrade

The fairtrade movement ensures that producers get a fair wage for the work that they do. It covers far more than just food, but food and drink are perhaps the easiest areas to buy fairtrade. Just 20 years old, the fairtrade movement has had a huge impact on the food industry and there are now fairtrade options for all sorts of groceries. Rainforest Alliance prioritises conservation and environmental issues and is a good option when Fairtrade products are not available.

For the sake of spending a few more pennies, buying fairtrade is worth it. Traidcraft products can be a little more expensive, but that is because they are committed to trade justice and go beyond mere compliance with the standards required. Especially for tea, coffee and chocolate, they are great ways of voting for a world where great food and drink go hand in hand with trade justice.

Actions: Food

Email your local supermarkets to tell them why you are not buying certain products from them or to ask them to stock more of a particular product.

Change where you shop. Get to know local independent shops and find out where they get their produce from. For big shops, try to go to those who are higher ranked on Ethical Consumer.

Change how you shop. Buy products with minimal packaging (see the section on waste in 'General Lifestyle'), try to buy groceries in season and organic, learn how and where they have been produced. Plan meals well to avoid buying things you won't eat.

See what products you could **swap to fairtrade alternatives**. The easiest place to start is coffee, tea and chocolate.

Reduce food waste. Only buy and cook what you need or what can be eaten as leftovers.

Cut back gradually on **meat consumption**. If that's daunting, start by going meat-free one-day a week. If you do buy meat or fish, buy free range and organic and see it as a treat.

Coffee

It is obviously part of the bigger food and drink category, but we felt that coffee, and in particular coffee shops form such a significant part of a lot of Christian student culture, that it merited its own section.

Shops

Some coffee shops sell Fairtrade coffee and tea, others don't. Ask them, and if their coffee isn't at least Fairtrade (some will buy equal exchange coffee, which can be even better) then make it clear that you would be far more inclined to come there regularly if their coffee was more ethically sourced. Be aware that some of the bigger chains advertise themselves as being Fairtrade but only some of their products are Fairtrade. Again, ask. This is far better done in a team, then you can share what you find out with each other. It saves you asking every coffee shop in town yourself. Ethical Consumer also have a [run through](#) of all the major chains.

Buying Coffee

When it comes to making our own coffee, the options are wide. This is an area in which Fairtrade products have made huge progress and as such there are all sorts of coffee available from ethical sources. This means it is really easy to buy coffee which has been produced in a way which respects people and the planet. Ethical consumer has great depths of information [here](#) too.

Coffee pods are a bad option, simply because they produce a lot of waste which can easily be avoided by making coffee by other means.

Taxes

Starbucks' tax evasion has been fairly widely publicised and Caffè Nero also pay almost no taxes. We need to seriously consider whether we want to support these kinds of practices.

Cups

Brought to light recently by the likes of Hugh Fernley Whittingstall, the thin layer of polyethylene on the inside of many paper cups means that they cannot be recycled in all but a couple of sites in the UK. Instead, the majority get incinerated. In the UK we use around 7 million disposable cups every day.

Actions: Coffee

Opt for the most ethical coffee available.

Whenever there is an option, avoid the big-chain coffee shops and **choose smaller chains** with better ethical policies (like Soho, AMT and Esquires), **independent shops** or **social enterprises**.

Buy a **reusable cup** and get into the habit of carrying it everywhere so that you don't need to use a disposable cup.

Cosmetics

This category includes a huge range of ethical issues, not all of which can be covered here. It's well worth visiting Ethical Consumer's pages on [Health and Beauty](#) for a more in-depth run through of different products, as well as being healthily sceptical when faced with advertising claiming that products are naturally good or life-enhancing. Quite simply we don't need as much in our bathroom cupboards as we are told we do, and the number of toxic chemicals are not only potentially damaging for us but are undoubtedly harming the environment.

Advertising

Cosmetics companies are increasingly advertising 'environmentally friendly' products, but unlike with organic food there is no legal standard for describing products as organic or natural, enabling companies to get away with the bare minimum of non-toxic chemicals. However, the COSMOS Organic certification is a good starting point in ensuring organic versions have been used where they exist, and fewer synthetic materials are likely to be present. Look out for products with the EU ecolabel too – it helps identify products and services that have a reduced environmental impact throughout their lifecycle. The label isn't only on cosmetic products, but also on clothes and household items.

Bear in mind as well that the whole cosmetic industry is designed to convince you that you need to be beautiful and that buying this next product will make you beautiful. It convinces you that you are incomplete and then offers solutions which never quite fulfil their promise so that you keep buying more. What if we refused to buy into this lie and instead trusted that, in Christ, we are immeasurably beautiful and infinitely valued and don't need to sacrifice on ethics to earn that value?

The first step with cosmetics is to apply the principle of simplicity and to work out how much we actually need. All sorts of products are simply unnecessary, or can be replaced with far simpler alternatives like soap and coconut oil. Once we have reduced the amount we buy, we can then consider spending a little of the money that we save on buying the best ethical options.

"Too much of the world's happiness depends on taking from one to satisfy another. We don't have a production problem, we have a greed problem"
Eugene Peterson

Environmental Damage

Most cosmetic products tend to come in non-recyclable packaging. There are many ways to reduce the plastic that we throw out. Best of all is simply to reduce the number of cosmetic products that we buy. With some of the money that we save, we can buy better quality products that will last longer. Consider using Lush's re-usable packaging, recyclable packaging, soap bars rather than liquid hand and body wash, and bamboo toothbrushes.

Animal Testing

A relatively well publicised issue over the last few years. It is extremely hard to justify the cruel exploitation of God's creation for the sake of beauty products. Buying products that have been tested on animals condones that rapacious cruelty. Even companies that state that they do not test on animals may simply commission a third party to do that testing.

Lush have a more positive approach: actively boycotting entire companies that conduct animal testing, helping to create positive change in the industry. Once again, it pays to spend time doing your research on a product to product basis.

Palm Oil

Palm Oil is found in all sorts of consumer products, from food to cosmetics. Clearance of land to create palm-oil plantations has devastated the environment in places like Indonesia and Malaysia, causing the forced displacement of indigenous people, and the deforestation of land crucial to the survival of many species including the world's remaining orangutans. Even palm oil certified as 'sustainable' is ethically dubious, and so it is best to avoid the product altogether.^{ix}

"The creation is quite like a spacious and splendid house, provided and filled with the most exquisite and the most abundant furnishings. Everything in it tells us of

God"

John Calvin

Make your own

Have a little internet browse and you'll discover ways that you can make all sorts of cosmetic products, including [toothpaste](#), soap, and facemasks.

Actions: Cosmetics

List all of the cosmetic products that you buy and work out which of them you actually need.

Find out about the chemicals used in the products that you buy and the company's **animal testing policies**. If you are not satisfied **email the company** to explain that you will be boycotting them and let them know why.

Each time you run out of a product, can you upgrade it to a more **ethical alternative**?

Each month, experiment with **making your own** products.

"There are two ways to get enough: one is to accumulate more and more. The other is to desire less"

G.K. Chesterton

General Lifestyle

Obviously, this is a huge category, and we have only picked out a few key battlegrounds, but we can apply the same principles to all areas of our lives so that we do all that we do to the glory of God.

Travel

Cars produce a fifth of the UK's carbon dioxide emissions.^x Sometimes there is no alternative to using the car, but when we can use public transport, or – even better – walk or cycle, we should. If we find ourselves needing to buy a car, then go for the most [energy efficient](#) option you can afford and only use it when there is no viable alternative.

The growth in budget airlines has made flights more accessible than ever. But this comes with a cost. Alongside meat consumption, flying is the most environmentally costly activity that we do. Here we need to ask the question of what we are willing to sacrifice for the sake of being a good steward of creation and a loving neighbour to those who suffer the consequences of climate change. At the very least we ought to avoid domestic flights. With lots of European destinations, trains, ferries and coaches are all viable, if less convenient, options. Are we willing to change our attitude towards holidays and only fly abroad every five or ten years?

When we do fly, the least that we can do is carbon offsetting the flight. A good place to do that is A Rocha's [Climate Stewards](#) project. It would only cost the average American \$105 a year to offset all their carbon emissions. Even better, why not make a regular habit of spending some of the money you save by not flying on carbon offsetting anyway – that way you can actually offset more carbon than you produce.^{xi}

[“We tolerate a high rate of waste and then try to cope with the problem of recycling. Would it not be more intelligent first of all to try and reduce the rate of our waste?”](#)

E. F. Schumacher

Waste

This is touched on previous sections, but the problem of waste is far wider. If you are unconvinced, the documentary [Trashed](#) is well worth watching.

Our current levels of waste are unsustainable. We need to look for every opportunity to reduce the amount we put in our bins – being wise about buying products with minimal, or preferably no, packaging is a good starting place.

When we have to buy products, opting for well-made products that will last may cost a little more but will reduce what we waste and may well save money in the long run.

The concept of zero-waste has emerged in the last few years, and it is a great principle to aim for. As we take steps in that direction, Tearfund give [five simple tips](#) to get you started.

Energy

The convenience of the access we have to electricity makes it very easy to be distanced and apathetic about the impact that our domestic energy use has on the planet. In descending order, the average household uses the largest amount of energy on heating, hot water, using appliances and cooking.^{xii}

It's important that we think about simple ways that we can reduce the amount of energy we use – like reducing the temperature of the central heating, using energy efficient light bulbs and turning them off when you don't need them, and putting the right amount of water in the kettle. But our approach needs to be holistic. One hot bath adds more to your carbon footprint than leaving a phone charger on for a year. Leaving a TV on standby for a year contributes less than two hours of driving.^{xiii} It's not that we shouldn't care about the smaller habits – they matter too – but we mustn't settle for doing a few small things and avoid those habits that have a far bigger impact. That's what psychologists call moral licensing – when people who do something good compensate by doing fewer good things in the future. Obviously, if we're following Jesus we don't get to pick and choose when we do good, so we need to cultivate that holistic lifestyle where we consistently choose to care for creation in *both* big and small ways.

It is now easier than ever to switch to a 100 percent renewable energy supplier – such as Ecotricity, Good Energy and LOCO². Not only does this reduce your carbon footprint, it also invests in the expansion of green energy production.

Banking

Over 80% of current accounts in the UK are with the big five banks – HSBC, Lloyds (including Halifax and Bank of Scotland), RBS (including Natwest), Barclays and Santander. Unfortunately these banks are among the [biggest investors in climate change](#). As well as investing in fossil fuels, the big five have a poor record on investing in the arms trade and paying huge bonuses.

As a result, we should consider moving our current accounts, savings accounts and ISAs to more ethical alternatives who invest that money in good things like renewable energy and charities. As well as these ethical banks, it is worth considering other places, such as mutual unions and credit unions, to keep your money.

Ethical consumer has details of a whole range of accounts. The [Move Your Money](#) campaign and the [Current Account Switch Guarantee](#) make moving your money very straightforward.

“We simply cannot continue these present economic patterns, and reduce global poverty, and preserve a liveable planet all at the same time. We could choose both justice for the poor and a liveable planet – but only if we give up rampant materialism and hard choices to reverse environmental destruction”

Ron Sider

Technology

Technology is another category in which the discipline of simplicity is really essential. We should get in the habit of asking ourselves questions like *do I need this new product? Is the old one still working? Can I get it repaired? Do I need to buy a new product or can I buy something second hand?*

If we have honestly wrestled through all of these questions and conclude that we will buy a new product, then [do the research](#) and find out what the most ethical option in your price range is and go for that.

Buying new technology can be an opportunity to support really great projects, such as the [Fairphone](#) and green energy.

Actions: General Lifestyle

Try to **walk or cycle** everywhere within a certain distance and gradually increase that distance over time.

Commit to **flying less**, or not at all, and **carbon offsetting** the flights when there is no alternative.

Find and encourage those around you to take easy steps to **reduce your energy consumption** at home or in halls.

Switch your energy supplier to a 100% renewable plan.

Where possible, choose to buy products with **minimum packaging**.

Switch bank accounts from the big five to ethical alternatives.

When buying a new item of technology, do your research and choose the **most ethical option** you can afford.

“We are the ones who live the social gospel – not those trying to improve the lot of the poor. Through a thousand consumer choices we evangelicals have committed ourselves to a social gospel – not the social gospel of those who thought the kingdom of God could be established by social action, but the social gospel of Western consumerism.”

Tim Chester

Clothes

What we wear is a means of communication that can celebrate art and creativity. It also communicates our values. If we are wearing clothes that have been made by children in appalling working conditions, or by companies which cause environmental destruction, then, at best, we communicate a callous apathy towards injustice. Excitingly though, we can choose for what we wear to communicate justice, hope and love.

The Highstreet

Brands like Primark and Asda George are (rightly) infamous for the way they exploit their workers in order to produce prices that seem too good to be true. But, sadly, there are very few among the main [highstreet brands](#) who stand out as being ethically good options. A possible exception is H&M's *Conscious* range, which may not be a completely pure buy, but also ought not to be disregarded because H&M are such a big force in the industry and our purchasing power can encourage more change in a positive direction. In other words, we should be really cautious about buying any clothing from the highstreet. If we do, then deliberately choosing the *Conscious* range is the best option.

Ethical Brands

The best way of buying new clothes is with ethical brands, of which there are now many including small start-ups with links to Just Love such as [Visible_Clothing](#) and [Know the Origin](#). In such a competitive market, it is hard for these small companies to survive, and their products tend to cost a little more than their Highstreet equivalents. It's really important to realise that what we pay for ethical fashion is the proper price, since it hasn't comprised on ethics to artificially lower the value of a product. If cost is a problem, then why not simply buy fewer clothes, but choose ethical options when you do make a purchase?

[“Laying down their rights and their precious little wrongs, laughing at labels, fasting essentials. The advertisers cannot mould them... They wear clothes like costumes to communicate and celebrate but never to hide”](#)

[Pete Greig](#)

Charity Shops

Charity shops are a great way of shopping for clothes on a tight budget and re-using clothes that other people no longer want. And, obviously, money going to charities is a good thing. Try to donate as much as you buy.

Fabrics

As well as how clothes are made, we need to consider what they are made from. This gets complicated. Reused, recycled or reclaimed fabrics tend to be the best options. Cotton production uses 16% of the world's insecticides and in places like Uzbekistan it is linked to terrible working conditions, so it is definitely better to buy fairtrade and organic cotton. Even then, its production can use a lot of water and land, which could otherwise be used to grow food. Other natural fibres have similar issues with land and water use. Wool is natural and biodegradable, but, as covered in the *food* section, the rearing of sheep produces a lot of greenhouse gases. Artificial fabrics, like polyester, are best avoided where possible because they require a lot of energy to make, tend to be lower quality and so don't last as long, and can take hundreds of years to biodegrade.

Redeeming Creativity

Whilst there is plenty about the fashion industry that does not honour God, it is important that rather than withdrawing totally, we seek to redeem it. All sorts of resources can help inspire this. [The True Cost](#) and [Slowing Down Fast Fashion](#) are two great films to watch on the topic. If you're on Instagram then Liv Firth and Fashion Revolution are worth following. And there are great websites where you can explore things in more detail including labourbehindthelabel.org.

Actions: Clothes

Consider only buying something if you are confident that you will wear it at least **30 times**.

Organise clothes swaps, or just make it normal to **share clothes** between friends and family.

Never throw clothes out – if they are in good condition take them to charity shops, if they need mending upcycle them (learn to sew!), if they are beyond help then at least they can make good cleaning rags.

Try to buy **as little as possible from highstreet** brands and let them know why you are boycotting them.

Choose to buy products from **ethical clothing companies** – choose quality and durability.

“When our protests against war, segregation and social injustice do not reach beyond the level of a reaction then our indignation becomes self-righteous, our hope for a better world denigrates into a desire for quick results, and our generosity is soon exhausted by disappointments. Only when our mind has descended into our heart can we expect a lasting response to well up from our innermost self ... In the solitude of the heart we can truly listen to the pains of the world because there we can recognise them not as strange and unfamiliar pains but as pains that are indeed our own.”

Henry Nouwen

Frequently Asked Questions

Are we certain that humans are causing climate change?

Climate scientists are pretty unanimous on this. Of the top 200 climatologists at the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) only 3 disagree that climate change is mainly caused by human activity and will continue if greenhouse gas emissions are not reduced. That's pretty overwhelming. It's claimed that only Newton's laws of motion enjoy wider scientific consensus.

And here's the thing: even if we weren't sure that our consumption was directly contributing to climate change, ethical living would *still* be the right response to the gospel.

Partly, this is simply because of good sense: the potential catastrophic impact of climate change (even if it was only a small chance – and it's not small – it's big) is enough to make action unavoidable. As William Macaskill explains: 'Even if scientists had not already shown that man-made climate change is happening, the mere fact that man-made climate change might be happening is enough to warrant action.'^{xiv} If we act and it turns out that the scientific consensus on climate change was wrong, then there are no major losses. But if we don't act and it turns out that the 97% of top climatologists were right, then the results would be devastating.

Secondly, we need to remember that consumption goes deeper than simply how we behave on the outside. If we are serious about stewarding God's creation, about cultivating the discipline of simplicity and about worshipping God (and not the idols of consumption, greed and competition) with all of our life, then the only viable option is to live ethically – to hold onto things lightly, to treat all that we have as gifts not possessions, to root our identity in Christ and to care deeply for all life.

Is ethical living really biblical?

Yes. Here are some key points, but if you want to explore this in greater depth, have a look at the Just Love Guide to Theology and Social Justice:

- *Good creation*
 - o The first chapters of Genesis are unambiguously clear: God's creation is good.
 - o Creation exists not to serve human interests but to reflect the glory of God.^{xv} Passages like Psalm 19 and Romans 1:19-20 make clear that creation points to God.
 - o In Genesis 1:21, we see humanity's role within creation: 'let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, *so that* they may rule over the fish in the sea'. We therefore have delegated authority to steward creation – reflecting God's character to creation.^{xvi}
 - o Ecology – caring for God's household (*eco* means household) – is crucial throughout the Old Testament and reflected in the concern for the land in the law of Moses, and the way that the land acts as a barometer for the sins of the people throughout the Old Testament.
 - o We are created in the image of a Trinitarian, and therefore relational, God to enjoy four dimensions of relationship: with God, with each other, with self, and with creation.

Throughout scripture *tzedeq* (justice/righteousness) and *shalom* (peace) describe the state where all of these relationships are as they should be. Any one of these relationships, including our relationship with creation, being broken means that we cannot enjoy that fullest flourishing.

- Throughout scripture, and supremely in Jesus, we see that we worship a God who is not distant from creation, but who penetrates and dwells in creation.
- *Cosmic redemption and New creation*
- All four dimensions of relationship that we were created for (with God, others, self and creation) have been marred by sin. Ecological damage – the vandalism and pillaging of God’s house – is, therefore, a result of sin – and the consequent broken relationship between humanity and creation.
 - Through his life, death, resurrection and exultation, Jesus dealt with and defeated the power of sin. The gospel – the good news that Jesus is Lord and is putting all things to rights – is cosmic in scope. Jesus is redeeming all four dimensions of relationship – including our relationship with creation.
 - Christian hope is not about escapism – not about disembodied souls leaving a material earth and going to a spiritual heaven. Rather, our hope is of New Creation – of material, imperishable resurrection bodies, of heaven coming to earth and God renewing creation.^{xvii} This means that the material world of creation matters.
- *Social justice*
- The four dimensions of relationship we were created for (with God, with others, with self and with creation) are always interwoven.
 - As well as concerning our relationship with creation, our lifestyle and consumption also has huge implications for our relationship with others. It tends to be the world’s poorest who suffer the most from the effects of Climate Change – for example, from flooding, droughts, desertification and lower crop-yields.
 - Much of our consumption relies on exploitation – perhaps through child-labour, unsafe working conditions, unfair wages, or overwork. There are few matters that the bible is clearer on: exploiting the poor is an offence to God. If the biblical call to social justice is something you’d like to explore more, then a good place to start would be the theology section on [Just Love’s website](#).
- *Implications of the gospel*
- The gospel ought to radically change how we live. Experiencing grace naturally leads us to extend grace. Imitating Christ, following the way of the cross, means preferring others and loving people beyond what is convenient and comfortable.
 - Richard Hays suggests that Christian ethics have three focal points: community, cross and new creation.^{xviii} When we consider what living out the gospel in every area of our life looks like, we need to do so with sisters and brothers in our church community. We need to ask *is it in line with the cross? Is it in step with the sacrificial love and self-emptying of Christ? Does it radiate the grace that we have received? And does it point*

forward to – does it anticipate – the new creation, where God will restore all things to their right relationships?

- *The Integrity of our Witness*
 - o It is also a matter of integrity – the hypocrisy of claiming to follow Jesus and then communicating scorn for creation and for our neighbour through the way we consume is detrimental to our witness.

How do we do ethical consumption without being self-righteous?

Action is essential, but it matters how we act. Ethical living is particularly prone to self-righteousness. It's really easy to slip into an us-versus-them mentality that places us in opposition to those who 'don't get it'. That is not the sort of positive vision that people will be compelled to join. We need to paint a compelling verbal picture of what ethical living – worshipping God with all of our lives – could actually look like.

Humility is really important. When we're talking to people about ethical consumption, seek to understand them and their unique story and experiences before trying to get them to understand us. There is a place for gracious challenge and laying out the case for ethical living, but often that won't be the most effective way to win people over and it certainly won't be very effective if people don't already know and respect us for our integrity in living out what we value.

Think, when we communicate this stuff, about being defined by what we are for rather than what we are against, because vision is caught more than it is taught.

It takes time, but be encouraged that we have seen all sorts of people – from parents to sceptical friends – changing their consumption habits because of the radical and beautiful alternative that Just Love students have modelled.

Is this just self-help or therapeutic Christianity?

We touched on it in the section of Simplicity above – but ethical living has to be so much more than behaviour modification or just ticking some boxes. Our actions matter, but they are the fruit of something much deeper and so if all we do is address the external, we do not get to the heart of the problem: our accommodation of consumerism. That's why we have to start with the gospel – we have to start with grace – and our identity as a new humanity in Christ. What we do flows from who we are, not the other way round.

We must also avoid seeing ethical living as a sort of 'therapeutic Christianity'.^{xix} If we live ethically in order to feel better about ourselves then we are still captive to the same insatiable quest for personal fulfilment that drives consumerism. It's easy to fall into the trap of 'moral licensing', whereby we feel that making one ethically good decision allows us to compromise on others. Sadly, we are often more concerned about looking good than we are about actually doing good.^{xx} Ethical living is often quite inconvenient, but discipleship was never meant to be about convenience. The focus of living ethically must be God, not us. It is about worshipping the Living God with our whole lives. He is the hero.

Will I actually make a difference?

This is an important question. We may wonder, for example, whether choosing to reduce the amount of sausages we buy from a supermarket might not actually change the number they stock – it might simply mean that more meat ends up in the bin. Does our choice not to buy a product actually reduce the quantity of that product produced? The answer is that most of the time, it probably won't. But a key rule of economics is that supply of a product will decrease if the demand for that product decreases. And whilst most of the time, a small decrease in sales of sausages is unlikely to change the quantity of sausages that a supermarket stocks, since they tend to work with rounded figures, occasionally, if the sales fall below a certain point, the supply will be reduced. And when that happens the impact will be huge – perhaps reducing the supermarket's stock by hundreds of units. As William Macaskill explains, 'Economists estimate that giving up one egg, total production falls by 0.91 eggs and if you give up one gallon of milk, total production falls by 0.56 gallons.'^{xxi} Most other products fall somewhere between those two extremes. So yes, choosing to shop ethically does make a difference.

Also consider the impact that your decisions to consume ethically will have on those around you. On our own we can make a small difference, but together, we can make a big difference.

Notes

ⁱ Ruth Valerio, *Just Living: Faith and Community in and Age of Consumerism* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2016), pp. 62-4

ⁱⁱ Valerio, *Just Living*, 171

ⁱⁱⁱ Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: the path to spiritual growth* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2008), pp. 99-119

^{iv} John Stott, *The Radical Disciple: wholehearted Christian living* (Nottingham: IVP, 2010), p. 79

^v Valerio, *Just Living*, 243

^{vi} Valerio, *Just Living*, 245-9; Ethical Consumer have a useful article comparing the greenhouse gas emissions require to produce different types of protein sources [here](#).

^{vii} Valerio, *Just Living*, 245-9; The only thing the Red Tractor logo guarantees is that the product was produced in Britain and that the farm was not breaking any laws. See this [article](#) for more information. Ethical Consumer have a simple summary of why buying organic is a good choice [here](#)

^{viii} William Macaskill, *Doing Good Better: effective altruism and a radical new way to make a difference* (London: Guardian Books, 2015), p. 168

^{ix} Ethical Consumer have an in-depth report on Palm Oil [here](#)

^x Valerio, *L is for Lifestyle*, 38

^{xi} Macaskill, *Doing Good Better*, 169-173

^{xii} Valerio, *Just Living*, 227-8

^{xiii} Macaskill, *Doing Good Better*, 168

^{xiv} Macaskill, *Doing Good Better*, 116

^{xv} Howard Peskett and Vinoth Ramachandra, *The Message of Mission: the glory of Christ in all time and space* (Nottingham: IVP, 2003), p. 48

^{xvi} Valerio, *Just Living*, 18; RV2 33

^{xvii} See, for example, the work of N.T. Wright, Jurgen Moltmann, and Richard Bauckham

^{xviii} Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation* (New York: Harper Collins, 1996)

^{xix} Valerio, *Just Living*, 146

^{xx} Macaskill, *Doing Good Better*, 180

^{xxi} Macaskill, *Doing Good Better*, 107