

When the Earth Groans: A Christian Response to Europe's Heat and Drought

Rev George Mwaura

There comes a point when unusual weather can no longer be spoken of merely as an inconvenience. Across Europe, prolonged heat, drought, depleted soils, wildfires and water shortages are increasingly becoming matters of life and death. Western Europe has just experienced its hottest June on record, with the World Meteorological Organization reporting continuing extreme heat, worsening drought conditions and wildfire danger. Europe is now recognised as the fastest-warming continent.[1]

For Christians, the question cannot simply be, *how do we keep ourselves comfortable until the heat passes?* A deeper question confronts us: *What does faithfulness to God require of us when creation itself is under such strain?* The Apostle Paul offers a remarkably contemporary image: “We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time” (Romans 8:22). Paul was not writing about modern climate change, yet his image speaks powerfully into our circumstances. Creation is not merely scenery surrounding the human story. It belongs to God, and humanity exists within it, dependent upon its soil, water, air and intricate ecosystems.

The first Christian response, therefore, must be to listen to the groaning. We must resist the temptation to normalise what is happening. Heat is already the deadliest weather- and climate-related hazard in Europe. The European Environment Agency estimates that as many as 95 per cent of fatalities associated with weather and climate extremes between 1980 and 2023 were linked to heatwaves. More than 70,000 heat-related deaths were estimated in Europe in 2022, followed by nearly 48,000 in 2023.[2] These are not simply statistics. They represent parents and grandparents, neighbours and strangers, people whose lives possess infinite worth before God. This leads to a second Christian response: protect the vulnerable.

Jesus consistently draws our attention towards those most easily overlooked. Extreme heat does not affect everybody equally. Older people, young children, those with existing illnesses, outdoor workers and people without adequate housing or resources are particularly vulnerable.[2] Christian climate action therefore begins very close to home. It may mean checking regularly on an elderly neighbour, providing cool spaces in churches, ensuring drinking water is available, supporting homeless people, changing working practices during extreme temperatures and pressing public authorities to protect those most at risk.

Opening an air-conditioned or naturally cool church, creating a cool space, during a dangerous heatwave may be every bit as Christian as opening it for Sunday worship. Jesus' words remain our measure: “Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me” (Matthew 25:40). But compassion without examining the causes is insufficient.

The biblical mandate given to humanity is not unrestricted exploitation of the earth. Genesis describes humanity as being placed within the garden “to work it and take care of it” (Genesis 2:15). Stewardship means that what has been entrusted to us does not ultimately belong to us. “The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it” (Psalm 24:1). Christians therefore cannot regard care for creation as an optional interest for environmentally minded members of the Church Eco groups! Nope, this work belongs within discipleship itself. How we consume energy, travel, heat and cool our buildings, use water, purchase food and goods, invest money and manage church property are spiritual questions because they concern our treatment of God's creation and our neighbour.

But there is also a third response: repentance. Hear me out! Repentance means more than feeling guilty. The biblical word implies turning around and recognising that a direction is destructive and choosing another way. Our societies have often confused abundance with excess, prosperity with consumption and dominion with domination. Climate change forces us to reconsider whether endless consumption on a finite planet can ever be reconciled with the Christian virtues of restraint, gratitude and justice. And justice matters profoundly because those who contribute least to environmental destruction are frequently among those who suffer most severely from its consequences. I have firsthand experience of friends and family in my own village in rural Kenya. Climate responsibility therefore belongs alongside the Church's historic concern for poverty, peace and human dignity.

Yet Christians must resist despair. Paul's image in Romans 8 is deliberately hopeful. Creation's groaning is compared not with the groaning of death but with the pains of childbirth. Something new remains possible. Christian hope does not mean sitting comfortably and expecting God to repair what humanity continues to damage. Biblical hope produces action. Churches can reduce emissions, conserve water, increase biodiversity on their land, plant trees and provide shade, advocate for serious environmental policies and teach creation care as part of Christian discipleship. Communities can strengthen local resilience and prepare for extreme heat. The European Environment Agency stresses that adaptation, including stronger infrastructure, healthier ecosystems and effective early-warning systems can substantially reduce climate risks.[3]

Above all, Christians can recover a *theology of enough*. Our culture constantly whispers, more. The Gospel teaches gratitude, generosity and sufficiency. Perhaps one of Christianity's greatest contributions to the climate crisis is therefore not technological but spiritual: helping humanity rediscover that flourishing does not require endless acquisition.

The increasingly fierce summers of Europe should trouble the Church. They should move us to prayer, certainly, but prayer that leads to changed lives. They should move us to compassion, but compassion expressed practically towards those endangered by heat. They should move us to repentance, but repentance demonstrated through different choices. And they should move us to advocacy, because loving our neighbour sometimes requires challenging systems as well as changing ourselves

The earth is groaning. The vulnerable are suffering. Some will inevitably die during periods of extreme heat. Christians cannot prevent every death or reverse decades of environmental damage overnight. But neither can we stand beside a wounded creation and claim that its suffering has nothing to do with our faith. The God whom Christians worship is the Creator. The neighbour whom Christ commands us to love includes the elderly person struggling in an overheated flat, the farmer watching crops wither in drought, the firefighter confronting another wildfire that destroys houses worth millions in Stourbridge, and the child who will inherit the world we leave behind.

Perhaps, then, the Christian question in this increasingly hot and fragile age is wonderfully simple: If this earth belongs to God, and our neighbour depends upon it for life, how can caring for it be anything other than an act of love?

Rev George Mwaura
United Reformed Church Minister
Church of Christ the Cornerstone, Milton Keynes

References

1. *World Meteorological Organization, "Western Europe has hottest June on record," 9 July 2026.*
2. *European Environment Agency, "The Impacts of Heat on Health: Surveillance and Preparedness in Europe," 2025/26.*
3. *European Environment Agency, "Extreme Weather: Floods, Droughts and Heatwaves," 2026.*
4. *The Holy Bible, Genesis 2:15; Psalm 24:1; Romans 8:19–23; Matthew 25:31–46.*
5. *World Meteorological Organization & Copernicus Climate Change Service, European State of the Climate, 2025.*