Uncovering Climate Clues

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We need clear climate information more than ever, especially as we sift through news from the Copenhagen Climate Conference, as well as "Climategate," the recent revelation from one climate research institute that appeared to indicate that data regarding climate temperatures had been falsified. Since I started writing on environmental issues, I've searched for the most current, authoritative climate information—not only for my readers, but for my own peace of mind.

My daughter Claire often unravels the plots of her favorite books for me—in excruciating detail. Sometimes I beg, "Okay, honey, cut to the chase!" On the Internet, anybody can access peer-reviewed scientific data on climate—in excruciating detail. "Peer-reviewed" data means that other scientists scrutinize it for accuracy, reliable methods, and logical arguments and use it for their own research (e.g., *Nature* is a peer-reviewed journal that often tackles climate topics). If snuggling up with a scientific journal doesn't appeal to you, or if you want to "cut to the chase," *USA Today*'s website provides a list of climate sources for laypeople and educators (www.usatoday.com/weather/wteach.htm).

When I teach college composition and research methods, I encourage my students to access the biggest publisher in town: the U.S. government. Government agencies accumulate all kinds of information. Check out the Environmental Protection Agency (www.epa.gov), the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA, www.noaa.gov), and the U.S. Department of Energy (www.energy.gov) for anything from reports to information about other agencies to consumer facts.

The National Climatic Data Center, part of NOAA, just launched a new website, www.climate.gov, designed specifically to answer questions about climate research. I love the short video clips of scientists explaining their data—and why we should care about it—in everyday language.

What about Christian environmental sources? I connect to Christian organizations with a biblical foundation of faith and a willingness to engage with emerging scientific information. The Evangelical Environmental Network has helped me understand what the Bible says about caring for the earth and how to understand new climate research (www.creationcare.org). It also connects me with other Christians who are asking similar questions.

Climate science is not set in stone. Most scientists concur that gas, oil, and coal combustion increases the levels of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. Data recorded by NOAA reveals that "seven of the eight warmest years on record have occurred since 2001 and the ten warmest years have all occurred since 1995." (For a credible summation about what scientists know and don't know about global warming, visit www.ncdc.noaa.gov/oa/climate/globalwarming.html.) Scientists, politicians, and ordinary citizens alike argue about how much human activity has sped up global warming, and what the consequences of that warming will be on earth's climate patterns.

As Christians, how do we piece apart the good, the bad, and the ugly of the worldwide climate conversation? I believe we can start by getting informed, thinking critically, and sharing our concerns with each other in open dialogue. Debate fuels conflict, but listening and learning builds unity. I believe we can also start by praying. There's a lot at stake. Many secular people care about the environment but are cynical about the future. The church needs to demonstrate hope, trust in God's sovereignty, and ask God to give us wisdom. He has promised to do just that. ■

What is global warming?

The Environmental Protection Agency answers that question this way: "For over the past 200 years, the burning of fossil fuels, such as coal and oil, and deforestation, have caused the concentrations of heat-trapping 'greenhouse gases' to increase significantly in our atmosphere. These gases prevent heat from escaping to space, somewhat like the glass panels of a greenhouse. Greenhouse gases are necessary to life as we know it, because they keep the planet's surface warmer than it otherwise would be. But, as the concentrations of these gases continue to increase in the atmosphere, the earth's temperature is climbing above past levels. According to NOAA and NASA data, the earth's average surface temperature has increased by about 1.2 to 1.4°F in the last 100 years.…If greenhouse gases continue to increase, climate models predict that the average temperature at the earth's surface could increase from 3.2 to 7.2°F above 1990 levels by the end of this century." (www.epa.gov/climatechange/basicinfo.html)

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