The documentary film, *The Ants and the Grasshopper*, offers an important story about what missionary work looks like in a time of climate change. The film also addresses themes such as **hunger**, **climate change**, and **race**.

The documentary film therefore a helpful prompt for Christian communities seeking to understand what Christianity requires in the twenty-first century.

The following script is designed to offer the format for a discussion of the film over the course of three Sunday School or Bible Study classes of one hour each.

- **SESSION 1:** A Malawian Missionary
- **SESSION 2:** America’s Role in the World
SESSION 3: Race and Hunger

The study guide that follows is designed to lead a community through the themes of the film. Each session touches the issues of care for the earth, care for women and families, fellowship, missionary work, and loving communication with fellow Christians.

Each study session includes biblical passages for consideration, discussion prompts, and a short prayer for closing.

How to Watch the Ants and the Grasshopper.

If you are considering teaching this session, please watch the 2-minute trailer for the documentary here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6J29qHOMm8k

Churches may schedule a viewing of the documentary by filling out this form: https://www.antsandgrasshopper.org/for-churches/. There are options for a streaming link that you can share with church members, an MP4 high-definition file suitable for projection in a classroom or on a tv screen, and a digital cinema package for cinema/theater venues. The form explains a sliding scale for contributions to defray the cost of making the film.
SESSION 1: A Malawian Missionary

Watch the first twenty minutes of the film.

Discussion Topic 1
Drought in the village.

Read aloud the following statements:

Anita’s village practices the subsistence agriculture typical of many communities across the third world.

Much of the world is 3° Fahrenheit hotter than pre-industrial times. That means more uncertainty in the weather, and more extremes of drought, flood, pests, and wildfire. The parts of the world most vulnerable to these extremes are also the poorest.

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Try answering the following questions as a group:

- What are the challenges to farming?
- Where do they get water?
- How has access to water changed recently via climate change?

*Discussion Topic 2*

*Anita’s witness and her marriage.*

Read aloud the following statements:

In the film, we learn that Anita wanted to be a nun before she was kidnapped and beaten by her future husband. We learn that Anita has been working with other women in the village to end the practice of forced kidnapping of young women.

We also learn that Anita is working with other women in the village. They are teaching literacy to children. They are teaching each other recipes. The women are also encouraging the men of the village to help out with farming, cooking, and childcare.

Try answering the following questions as a group:

- What is Anita’s calling?
- What does the Holy Spirit say about such practices of violence, via Anita’s witness?
- Who is she helping and how? What is she trying to change?
- Who sanctions Anita’s work?
- How is the situation in Anita’s village similar to challenges in your community?
- What is spirit saying about the status of women in Malawi? What is the spirit telling us about the work of witness overall?

*Discussion Topic 3*

*Missionary work in the village.*

Anita is a missionary. She is also very brave; she displays her courage in talking to the men of her village, some of whom disagree with her. There is a biblical support for her work.

Read aloud the following passage from Matthew 18:15-17:

If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.
We are called as Christians to talk about our concerns with our neighbors, to hear their side, and to feel the trouble with our whole hearts.

Try answering the following questions as a group:
- How difficult do you think it might have been for Anita to get through to some of the individuals in her village?
- Why do some of the men in the village have a hard time hearing her?
- What is the role of persistence in Anita’s work?

Discussion Topic 4
Missionary work overseas.

In the film, we learn that Anita is going to continue her program of ministry, moving from Africa to the United States. She has heard that some Christians in the United States don’t believe in climate change. She also understands that only American Christians are in a position to stop climate change.

Anita has a message of hope. She believes that even women in a small village can change the outlook of their village if they speak from their hearts. She is a kind of missionary.

Read aloud this passage from Psalm 126, 4-8:

Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like the watercourses in the Negeb. May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy. Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves.

Much of the missionary work performed in the U.S. – building housing, delivering food, serving in soup kitchens – has little to do with climate change. Yet climate change is affecting the condition of communities in many places in the developing world every day – making storms worse, pulling down housing, and ruining agriculture.

Try to answer the following questions as a group:
- How is Anita’s work similar to the missionary culture of the United States?
- How does Anita’s witness stand to bring something new to Christians that they haven’t heard before? Why might this be important?
- Can we imagine a kind of missionary work that would answer the needs of communities in Africa?
Talking about appropriate responses to climate change can be challenging. It is important to remember that God is with us as we discuss such things. Read aloud this passage from Matthew 19:26:

But Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

Try to make your answer to what kind of missionary work you are called to do more concrete. Is there something you could do as an individual to encourage a kind of missionary work that would matter to climate-affected communities? Is there something your family could do? If your profession took Anita’s plight seriously, might some members of your profession do anything differently than they do now? What about your church – what would an effective response look like from your congregation? What if your denomination worked together as a whole?

The discussion leader may close with a short prayer:

Loving God, give us courage to talk to our neighbors about how to live. Give us courage to make our families and communities more just. Help us to learn from the example of the teachers you have given us. Amen.
SESSION 2: America’s Role in the World

Watch the second twenty minutes of the film.

Discussion Topic 1  
Two Worlds

Read aloud the following prompt:

In the film, we see Anita meeting with farmers whose experience of climate change is very different from that of her family. In an earlier section of the film, we learned that climate change has affected farmers in Anita’s village of Malawi. A severe drought has affected every aspect of farming. Women have to dig in the river bed to get water. Many villagers are concerned that if the drought becomes more serious, they will not be able to survive.

In the first part of the film, Anita resolved to visit America to talk to American farmers about climate change. As a Christian, she is dedicated to the practice of talking to her neighbors about their behavior. She has heard that America is the only nation that can stop climate change, but that America will not stop climate change because many Americans do not believe that climate change is real.

In America, Anita meets with farmers who have few experiences of drought. Many of them believe that changing weather conditions are due to a temporary disturbance rather than a long-term change of climate.

Try answering the following questions as a group:

- How is the experience of the American farmers different from Anita’s experience?
- Why do villagers in Malawi believe in climate change?
- What evidence do they have of climate change?
- Why has climate change affected the experience of American farmers so little, by comparison? Why are some American farmers disinclined to believe that their community needs to take action on climate change?

Discussion Topic 2  
The missionary faces a hostile audience

Anita’s work is the work of a missionary. She is obeying biblical advice to talk to those with whom she disagrees about the matter at hand.

Read aloud this passage from Matthew 205: 44-45:
44 But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.


Try answering the following questions as a group:

- How is Anita’s ministry an epitome of biblical teachings about missionary work?
- Is Anita’s ministry different than the kind of missionary work engaged in by affluent American churches? How so?

Read aloud this passage from Isaiah 24:1-25:21:

Behold, the Lord will empty the earth and make it desolate, and he will twist its surface and scatter its inhabitants. And it shall be, as with the people, so with the priest; as with the slave, so with his master; as with the maid, so with her mistress; as with the buyer, so with the seller; as with the lender, so with the borrower; as with the creditor, so with the debtor. The earth shall be utterly empty and utterly plundered; for the Lord has spoken this word. The earth mourns and withers; the world languishes and withers; the highest people of the earth languish. The earth lies defiled under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant. ..."}

Try answering the following questions as a group:

- Isaiah talks about a time when the earth becomes desolate for poor and rich alike. How does this describe the future predicted by climate change?
- Isaiah blames this desolation of the earth on the “transgression” of laws and “breaking” of an “everlasting covenant.” What do you think Isaiah is talking about? Does that apply to the experience of climate change? What is the covenant that has been broken?

Read aloud this passage from Jeremiah 44:1-30:

[...] “Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: You have seen all the disaster that I brought upon Jerusalem and upon all the cities of Judah. Behold, this day they are a desolation, and no one dwells in them, because of the evil that they committed, provoking me to anger, in that they went to make offerings and serve other gods that they knew not, neither they, nor you, nor your fathers. Yet I persistently sent to you all my servants the prophets, saying, ‘Oh, do not do this abomination that I hate!’ But they did not listen or incline their ear, to turn from their evil and make no offerings to other gods. ..."

1 See also: Psalm 24: 1-2 “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein, for he has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers.” Jeremiah 2:7: “And I brought you into a plentiful land to enjoy its fruits and its good things. But when you came in, you defiled my land and made my heritage an abomination.”
Try answering the following questions as a group:

- Who is being called to repent in Jeremiah? Why? If Anita, in the role of missionary, is confronting American Christians about climate change, how is Anita like a prophet?
- When Anita meets with the American Christians, who is being called upon to repent? What are the “other gods” that American farmers may have been worshiping?

Discussion Topic 3
The Kind of World God Wants

Read aloud the following prompt:

The number of people who are food insecure in the United States is 50 million, over one in seven Americans. Globally, the figure is 2.37 billion, around one third of all humans. While the number of hungry people climbs around the world, the total amount of food available per person is also set to rise from 2,789 calories per person per day in 2000 to 3,130 calories per person per day by 2050. Poverty prevents people from accessing this abundance. In the US, large farms produce an abundance of soy and corn. The soy is used for animal feed. The main use of US corn is not food, but ethanol. Soy and corn are staples for peasant families throughout the world.

Try answering the following questions as a group:

- What does Matthew 20:5 say to people like Anita? Does Matthew 20:5 suggest that Anita’s village is suffering a drought because her people lack righteousness? Do Americans have enough to eat because they are overall more righteous?
- At the beginning of this class, we talked about how Anita is fulfilling biblical instructions about how to talk to one’s neighbor in a time of crisis. How is Anita setting an example for other Christians? What aspects of her way of being might you or your community want to learn from?
- What would a loving response look like to a world where climate change is causing increased drought? What could an individual do that would constitute a loving response to people suffering from increased drought and displacement? What could a family do? A profession? A youth group? A church? A nation? A denomination?
- Read aloud from 2 Timothy 1:7:

  For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.

  What might a loving action look like that one could do right now, or in the next week? What could an entire denomination do to respond, if it had five years?

The discussion leader may close with a short prayer.
Creator God, give us courage to consider facts that are challenging. Give us courage to build the world that you want. Help us to see the gifts that you have given us in the form of holy witness.
SESSION 3: Race and Hunger

Watch the last twenty minutes of the film.

Discussion Topic 1
Race in the United States.

The Bible is filled with accounts of people who were given warnings. Sometimes those individuals change their mind and listen to God’s messengers. Other times they ignore them. Read aloud the following two passages.

Leviticus 26: 18-22
And if in spite of this you will not obey me, I will continue to punish you sevenfold for your sins. I will break your proud glory and I will make your sky like iron and your earth like copper. Your strength shall be spent to no purpose: your land shall not yield its produce, and the trees of the land shall not yield their fruit.

Genesis 41: 28 - 31 (Joseph interpreting the Pharoah's dream)
It is as I told Pharaoh; God has shown to Pharaoh what he is about to do. There will come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt. After them there will arise seven years of famine, and all the plenty will be forgotten in the land of Egypt; the famine will consume the land. The plenty will no longer be known in the land because of the famine that will follow, for it will be very grievous.

Try answering the following questions as a group:

- Last week, we asked: Who is the prophet in The Ants and the Grasshopper? Who is being called to repent? This week, we met other people in the United States, including farmers of color in Detroit, Oakland, and North Carolina. Many of them share Anita’s perception that rich and powerful individuals in America have ignored climate change and created systematic hunger. We learned that many African-American communities in the United States are already taking steps to provide healthy food for their own people.
- Who is Joseph in this story? Who is telling his vision of justice to power? Who is Pharoah? Who is being warned, and what is he being warned about?
- Read aloud Zechariah 11:16-17:
  o For I am now raising up in the land a shepherd who does not care for the perishing, or seek the wandering, or heal the maimed, or nourish the healthy, but devours the flesh of the fat ones, tearing off even their hoofs. Oh, my worthless shepherd, who deserts the flock! May the sword strike his arm and his right eye! Let his arm be completely withered, his right eye utterly blinded!
  
Who is the “shepherd who does not care for the perishing” today? What is the flock that he has deserted? What does Zechariah believe God has in store for him?

Discussion Topic 2
Race and Hunger

Read aloud the following prompt for discussion:

In the United States, one in five African American families are food insecure, over twice the rate of white families. For every dollar in wealth a white family has, an African American family has 10 cents. At the end of the 1800s, 14 million acres of land was farmed by African Americans. By the year 2000, 90% of that land had been lost. Today, farm operators are 96.3% white.

- How is the situation of African American farmers in the U.S. different from that of white farmers? To what degree is that informed by race?
- What do white Christians owe to these communities?

Discussion Topic 3
America’s Work in the World

Remember that in the first part of this documentary, we learned that Anita’s village in Malawi was suffering from a severe drought related to climate change. Her community of farmers, growing tiny plots of corn and squash, create no fossil fuel emissions. Even in Malawi, many people understand that climate change has been caused by nations that use fossil fuels to their own benefit. Only nations that emit carbon and influence other nations can reverse climate change.

Try to answer the following questions as a group:
- Why is American politics so important to Anita and her community in Malawi?
- In this week’s section of the film, Anita meets with several American politicians. What does Anita ask for? What steps could American politicians take to restore Earth’s atmosphere?
- Why can’t farmers from Malawi pursue policies to contain carbon emissions via African politics? Why do American politicians matter more, in this case?
- Read aloud Revelation 18:7-8:

  As she glorified herself and lived luxuriously, so give her a like measure of torment and grief. Since in her heart she says, 'I rule as a queen; I am no widow, and I will never see grief,' therefore her plagues will come in a single day -- pestilence and mourning and famine -- and she will be burned with fire; for mighty is the Lord God who judges her."

  How might this passage apply to America today?

Discussion Topic 4
A Change of Mind
At the end of the film, we hear testimony from several of the white farmers who changed their mind about climate change due to Anita’s witness. Some of them have changed their practices of farming.

Read aloud this passage from Philippians 2:1-4:

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.

Try to answer the following questions as a group:

- How do you feel called to emulate Anita?
- Working as a family, a community, or a church, what can we do to address hunger? What can we do to address climate change?
- What would it mean to work in “humility”? What would it mean to regard people like Anita as “better than yourselves”? What would it look like to work with people like Anita and the farmers of Detroit as if one were “in full accord and of one mind”?

The discussion leader may close with a short prayer:

God, you have told us that you want justice to roll down like waters and righteousness like a flowing stream.

Even in this time of hunger, drought, and terrifying change, dear Lord, you have scattered the Earth with your witnesses. You have given us farmers who are feeding the hungry and courageous women who are organizing their village. You have given us prophets who have spoken truth to power. Help us to join in full accord, in one mind, with the witnesses who are speaking to us about climate change and the response it requires of us.

Help me and my family, dear God, to hear what you are saying to us. Open our hearts and help us too to become shepherds who feed the hungry.

This study guide was composed with contributions by Dan Flanagan, Rebecca Tankersley, Raj Patel, Christine Guldi, Richard Guldi, and Jo Guldi