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the power to live to submit to abide to give to serve

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Caring Stewards

*Stephen Chavez, Managing Editor
Adventist Review*

The late Ray Kroc is famous for taking a single drive-in hamburger joint and turning it into McDonald's, an international, multi-billion dollar business. One of the secrets of his success was his fanatical attention to detail. He insisted that each franchise meet the same standards of efficiency, cleanliness, and customer service.

He was so fixated on neatness that one of his employees once remarked, "If you ever see a man in a suit out in the parking lot picking up trash, you'd better get out there and help him, because it's probably Mr. Kroc."

The way we care for our environment says something about our values. Because we worship a God of beauty and order, we try to reflect those values in our immediate surroundings. We make sure, for example, that our homes and churches reflect the beauty and order we appreciate in God.

Unfortunately, we live in a society where many care little for the environment. A walk along any well-traveled road reveals that a shocking number of people see the world as their own private trash can. Everything from bottles and cans to disposable diapers and fast food wrappers litter most major arteries. River banks and lake shores are fouled by discarded tires, appliances, and other refuse.

Christians don't worship "Mother Earth" as some new-agers do, but we do take seriously the fact that God gave men and women dominion over His creation. We owe it to Him and our ancestors to be good stewards. This stewardship includes, but is not limited to, properly disposing litter and waste, responsible use of the earth's dwindling resources, and working to preserve the natural beauty of our mountains, shores, and deserts.

We know that when the "day of the Lord" comes, "the heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare" (2P 3:10). But until then, the closest thing we have to God's new creation is the one He's already given us. It's our responsibility to care for it.

Jesus and Lessons from Nature

From the staff of Dynamic Steward

Introduction

It is interesting to reflect on Jesus and His references to nature, especially as we acknowledge His role as Creator of our world. This study will look at several lessons Jesus drew from nature, or His environment, during His brief stay on earth. As we study, may we gain new insights into our relationship to and our responsibility for His creation.

1. The Living Water

Read: John 4:13-14; 7:37-38; Exodus 17:6; Isaiah 44:2-4

Jesus chooses this critical element of life when He refers to Himself as the Source of Living Water. As recorded in Leviticus, Moses strikes the “rock” and God pours out the refreshing, life-sustaining liquid. This Scriptural passage communicates God’s ability to provide for His children.

As Christian stewards and environmentalists, how can we cooperate with God and minister to the peoples of the world by contributing to such an essential need?

2. The Bread of Life

Read: John 6:35; 48; 51

Bread is an essential part of much of the world’s basic food supply. Jesus acknowledges this when He states: “I am the Bread of Life” (Jn 6:48). Christ broke bread with His disciples. He shared a little lad’s lunch of loaves and fishes and fed thousands of people on at least two occasions, as recorded in Scripture. And the bread was miraculously extended because Jesus blessed it.

In what practical ways can we help extend Jesus’ breaking of bread and His expanding blessing to the world? Think of ways, first, within your own family, then within your own community, and finally, the world.

3. The fifth sparrow

Read: Matthew 10:29 and Luke 12:6

In the book of Matthew Jesus tells us that two sparrows were sold for a farthing. By comparison, in Luke’s passage, Christ tells us that five sparrows could be purchased for two farthings. Not much for the fragile little creatures! But with two farthings, one sparrow was thrown in free!

What makes us stop and truly consider is what Jesus goes on to say about these tiny birds: “Yet not one of them is forgotten by God.”

If God cares so much for His creation that He notices one apparently insignificant sparrow, how does He care about creation in its entirety?

God asks us to care with Him—to begin where we are, doing what we can. As with Peter and John at the gate Beautiful, we cannot give what we don’t possess, but we can respond with them, “What I have I give you” (Ac 3:6).



Creation

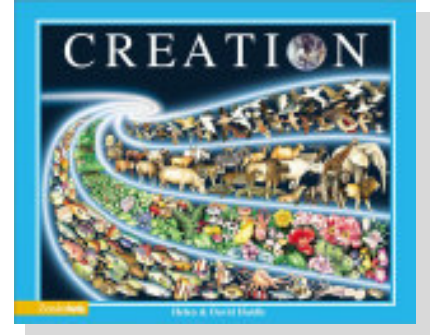
Zonderkidz' beautifully illustrated book entitled, *Creation*, is written and illustrated by Helen and David Haidle, respectively. The story of Creation features excerpts from Genesis and the Psalms which show the beauty of God's inspired work.

After describing the Creation week and how God blessed the Sabbath or seventh day and rested upon it, the book does not end there. The reader receives three additional sections as a bonus—

- “God Created Amazing Creatures!”
- “God Created Amazing Senses!”
- “God Created Colorful Creatures and Amazing Shapes!”

These last six pages describe and smartly illustrate such interesting creatures as the octopus, the moth-brooder fish, the star-nosed mole, and more.

The graphics exude a sense of movement as God travels through the atmosphere creating this world. A good book to share and discuss with your children.



by Helen and David Haidle
Zonderkidz
Grand Rapids, Michigan
2000 \$US 4.99

Psalm 19:1-4

The heavens tell about the glory of God.

*The skies show that
his hands created them.*

No sound is heard from them.

*At the same time, their voice goes out
into the whole earth.*

—From *Creation*

quotes

Environment . . .

I look upon the world as my parish.—*John Wesley*

The world is God's epistle to mankind—his thoughts are flashing upon us from every direction.—*Plato*

What a glorious world Almighty God has given us! How thankless and ungrateful we are, and how we labor to mar His gifts.—*Robert E. Lee*

You've seen the world—the beauty and the wonder and the power, the shapes of things, their colors, lights and shades, changes, surprises—and God made it all.—*Robert Browning*

It is no accident that wherever we point the telescope we see beauty, that wherever we look with the microscope there we find beauty. It beats in through every nook and cranny of the mighty world.—*Rufus Matthew Jones*

Open, ye heavens, your living doors; let in the great Creator from His work return'd magnificent, His six days' work, a world!—*John Milton*



His World—Our Task!

*Benjamin C. Maxson, Director
General Conference
Stewardship Department*

Where did we lose it?

The environmental community confronts us with a challenge. Will we survive the abuse we heap on our environment? Periodic reports on the “greenhouse effect” or global warming warn of environmental change and potential catastrophe. While we understand the end of the world will come with the Second Coming of Jesus, as Christians, we are not exempt from this challenge or from responsibility for misuse of our world and its resources. In fact, Christians who emphasize Jesus’ Second Coming and a catastrophic end to the world are often accused of being indifferent to the environment.

The perceived attitude is one of disinterest in the long-term survival of the environment since it will all be destroyed at the Second Coming. This all makes me wonder where we lost our God-given sense of responsibility. After all, this world *does* belong to God, and we are stewards of the resources He has placed in our hands.

In the beginning

If we are to seriously accept the care for God’s world, we must return to where it all began—creation.

During the six days of creation, God spoke this world and all its resources into existence. The world is His by right of creation. He claims it as His own: “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it” (Ps 24:1).

On the sixth day of creation, God created Adam and Eve and gave them the responsibility of “ruling” over this world and all in it (Gn 1:28-30). This “dominion” was presented in the context of their being created in God’s image. Thus our management of natural resources is an extension of the initial responsibility given to humanity at creation—an extension of God’s management. As a result, we must administer this trust in the spirit and attitude of the Creator.

Challenging a sacred responsibility

However, there are a number of factors which challenge our fulfillment of this sacred responsibility:

1. *Selfishness.* We must face the reality of our natural sinful tendencies. We tend to think about our needs and wants regardless of others, or the impact on the environment.
2. *Indifference.* Too often we simply don’t care. We see natural resources as limitless and don’t stop to think about our impact on the world around us.
3. *Ignorance.* We do little to educate Christians as faithful stewards, and even when we address the subject of stewardship, little is said about care for the world and our environment.
4. *Ownership.* We forget that God is the real Owner of this world and think it is ours to do with as we wish.

So, what can we do?

It all starts with basic Lordship. We must accept this world as a divine trust. Weakened as it may be by six thousand years of sin, the environment is the context in which our stewardship takes place. Ignoring care for the environment is a rejection of the initial responsibility given to Adam and Eve. This is a sacred trust.



Accepting this trust, we must look for ways to make a difference in the practical issues of daily life. There are world environmental issues, but few of us have much impact at that level. However, we can make an impact on the portion of the environment which God has placed in our hands—our areas of direct responsibility.

- We can extend our worship of God into our management of all our resources, including the world in which we live.
- We can help our church members understand this sacred trust. This should include sermons on the world belonging to God and our role as stewards of His creation.
- We can move from a wasteful or careless attitude to one of careful choices. This includes our decisions about the use of resources in our homes.

Ignoring care for the environment is a rejection of the initial responsibility given to Adam and Eve. This is a sacred trust.

“This is our Father’s world . . .” the hymn says, but what do our lives say? How long can we continue to ignore the sacred responsibility God gave to Adam and Eve?

stewardship window

more from
the director’s desk ...



Southern Asia Division Stewardship Summit

The Southern Asia Division conducted a division-wide training event in connection with a Division Stewardship Summit. Ben Maxson and Jean-Luc Lézeau represented the General Conference Stewardship Department. This training event took place on February 20-22, with more than forty stewardship and ministry leaders from across the division. The focus of the training was on stewardship principles and discipleship. The group gained new insights and understanding into a biblical approach to stewardship by focusing on making disciples.

The division-wide Summit followed on February 23-27. More than one-hundred administrators and stewardship directors spent four days discussing contemporary trends and biblical stewardship principles. Additional discussion focused on future plans and strategic training for implementing a comprehensive stewardship program across the division. The challenge is to get the training to the members scattered across the wide territories of India and into the diverse cultures of a varied and complex church.

Earth Day, April 22

We searched the web to see what it had to say about Earth Day, April 22, and found the Earth Day Network at www.earthday.org.

This international site lists home pages for numerous countries. Take a look and “Measure Your Ecological Footprint”—an online quiz to measure your impact on Earth’s resources. Sources are also listed to help you determine what is in your water. Educators can even find lesson plans for classroom environmental education.

As Seventh-day Adventist Christians, we can all find something to do to help care for Creation, can’t we?

The Gentle Whisper

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*“A trip into God’s unspoiled
creation testifies to the
truth of the Gospel.
Everything I see is His
creation and provision.”*

Going to the mountain

Elijah went to the mountain to hear God’s “gentle whisper” (1K 19:12). It’s a model I’ve followed all of my years. For instance, if I believe God directs my life, even in the task of designing lesson plans for the English classes I teach—and I do believe it—then it is imperative that I hear His voice. I do that best in silence.

As did the poet Thoreau, I have discovered it is in His Creation we call “nature” that the noise of everyday life is quieted. It is in the silence of trees and rocks, fern and brook, flora and fauna, ridge tops and valleys, that I hear God’s voice.

Attune to His voice

Just like all His children, I have ignored or rejected His counsel. Actually, there were times when I could not even hear it! But that is not God’s fault. He was speaking. I was just not concerned enough to set aside the activities in my life that are really nothing more than distractions. Indeed, many are completely irrelevant to His hopes for me.

We are all “creations” of the same God, but tragically there are times we worship false gods. As His created beings, it should not surprise us that it is in the midst of His creation we can best hear His gentle whisper.

Relying upon the Rock

I am most content when I conduct my life according to the Counselor’s guidance I hear as I sit on my favorite praying spot—a rock along Cold Creek, near the Pisgah Forest in western North Carolina. It is through this conscious effort to strengthen my relationship with my Master, Jesus Christ, that I learn to live as He lived—in prayer and service to others. It is here on the rock, where I learn to hear, understand, and ultimately rely upon the Rock of salvation.

A simpler time

This favorite rock of mine does not sit in complete isolation. Next to it is the cabin that my uncle, my son, and some friends and I built with our own hands. At the other end of the fifty-seven-acre refuge are nearby neighbors whom we can count on, even on a cold February morning. The cabin and its environs beckon to a simpler time, a time before human inventions—both technical and institutional—deceived man into believing that there is no truth.

We have harnessed nuclear energy and can communicate instantly to any part of the world. Grocery stores in many places allude to unending plenty. With everything we need or want for physical comfort literally at our fingertips, we have deceived ourselves into thinking that it is only our own ingenuity and industry that has provided us with these conveniences, so we forget about God.

But a trip into God’s unspoiled creation testifies to the truth of the Gospel. Everything I see is His creation and provision. God has taught me valuable lessons through the days we have spent building and the nights we’ve spent under the stars—lessons that I have not, nor could have discovered any other way. He has taught me about His provisions, about the importance of developing and maintaining relationships, and about what is truly important in this brief life we enjoy as stewards temporarily inhabiting this planet.

SCRIPTURE:
1 Kings 19:11-12

The breeze moving through the trees, the occasional songbird ... the creek rolling over the stones, these are the only conversation. A symphony of the Creator's sounds sings directly to my soul.

The breeze moving through the trees, the occasional songbird, the crows and woodpeckers, the creek rolling over the stones, these are the only conversation. A symphony of the Creator's sounds sings directly to my soul. As unorthodox as it may sound, this is often my "church." As I marvel at the beauty, I worship. I am thankful for creation. As I consider the Creator, I am humbled.

Growing closer

It is Good Friday and we are on our knees planting potatoes. More importantly, we are growing closer to family, neighbors, and God. It is the fall harvest of the same potatoes, a reminder that it is not the local supermarket that is the source of our food. It is a gift of God.

Though this close connection to His creation clears my mind, it does not empty it. The distractions of everyday life do not erase my memory; they provide clarity—a kind of depth perception on life's challenges. It is as if I see myself from a heavenly perspective and recognize my humble position, and more importantly, the insignificance of any problems I am experiencing, in contrast to God's magnificence.

The key relationship

The appeal of the mountaintop is the seclusion it offers. When I am here, it is because I have sensed the need to commune, not with people, but with the Creator and His handiwork. Scripture is clear. Jesus expects us to be responsible stewards of everything He has given us—gifts, talents, resources, time:

"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done in the body, whether good or bad" (2 Cor 5:10).

We, because we are "commissioned" to make Christ known to the world, must first know Him (Mt 28: 18-20).

As I've grown older, I have concluded that the most important responsibility Christians have is to develop and maintain relationships that strengthen us and the Kingdom. The most important of these relationships is the one we have with our Savior.

No matter how hard I try, I can only focus on one conversation at a time. If I am not alone, I cannot listen to what God is saying to me through His Spirit. Yes, maybe I can hear Him when I am among others, but to really listen, absorb, and apply God's guidance in my life, I must listen for that gentle whisper. It is in His creation that I hear it best.

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God Planted a Garden views on Christian Ecology

*Dr. Will Eva, Editor
Ministry Magazine*

*This editorial was published in the
September 2001 issue of Ministry.*

Unexpected reserve

There is a strange, almost collective reserve among some Christians when it comes to championing the health of God's creation, particularly that of earth itself and its collective environment.

There is in the Christian community:

- A consistent concern for preserving the moral purity of the humanity God fashioned from the dust of the ground and into whose nostrils He breathed life
- A deep and far-reaching desire, especially among Seventh-day Adventists, to promote the physical health with which God created the human race
- A strong stirring of the conscience when animals, even wildlife, are not treated with kindness and care
- The principle of loving, respecting, serving, and preserving our fellow human beings who are God's workmanship, those whom, along with us, He made of one blood
- A deep and widespread appreciation for "the beauty of the earth and the glory of the skies"

However, we often hold back when it comes to connecting our faith with the ecologically informed respect so necessary for the preservation of a high quality of life in our industrialized, hyper-populated age.

Reverence for creation

In his stimulating article "The Theological Value of the Creation Account," (*Ministry*, March 2001, pp. 7-10), Greg King exposes the foundational theological suggestiveness, and even the definitude found in the first few chapters of the Bible. Without question, one of the most evocative theological features of God's creative magnum opus was the brilliant variety, balance, beauty, interaction, integration, and systemic coordination of His delicate yet resilient design and work.

The words used in Genesis to describe God's work reveal a reverence for, or at least an innate deference to, God's creative work. These words call for us as humans to live life on this planet with the deepest respect for the primeval activity of God and to obey the divine mandate to actively and properly "rule over" this work (Gn 1:26-28).

"Eastward in Eden"

The description of the personal act of God when He planted "a garden eastward in Eden" (Gn 2:8), of God placing "the man" in the garden "to work it and take care of it" (v. 15), and God bringing to Adam all the "beasts of the field and all the birds of the air," "to see what he would name them" (v. 19), implies the need for humanity to understand his environment and his God-given responsibility toward it.

God's act of simply putting Adam in charge of this magnificent garden is descriptive of His desire and commission for humanity to love, nurture, and care for what He crafted. Genesis 2:15-20 reveals the Creator placing the final and highest form of His creation—humankind—in loving charge of the rest of His handiwork.

SCRIPTURE:
Genesis 2:15

Discouraging the indifference

In the biblical account of God forming Eve and bringing her to Adam, we see a formative pattern of marriage that is applicable for all time. Yet we find it difficult to see the ecological mandate that is just as implied in the Creation epic.

I believe two things discourage the indifference that we traditionally may have luxuriated in when it comes to the environment. One is simply the multiplied effects of today's massive proliferation of human beings all over the globe. The other is our now largely worldwide, hyper-industrialized and mechanized culture whose many manifestations are hostile to the original edenic ideal.

Of course we should look to the time when God "will make all things new" (Rv 21:5), but if we were to merely take this attitude about our health, our moral being, our spiritual development or—for that matter—the viability of our marriages, we know what would happen.

Faithful to His mandate

We cannot be turned away from the calling to care for our world just because it is viewed as a "liberal" cause or because of extremists who give the ecology movement a bad name. Instead, we must seek to be more and more faithful to the original edenic mandate.

Is this mere activism? I don't think so. Coming close to God's creation; loving it, understanding it, caring for it, being responsible for it, speaking out effectively for it—this is what is important. How could we do any less?

Of course we should look to the time when God "will make all things new," but if we were to merely take this attitude about our health, our moral being, our spiritual development or—for that matter—the viability of our marriages, we know what would happen!

*"The heavens declare the glory of God;
The skies proclaim the work of his hands.
Day after day they pour forth speech;
Night after night they display knowledge.*

*There is no speech or language
Where their voice is not heard.
Their voice goes out into all the earth,
Their words to the ends of the world."*

—Psalm 19:1-4



A Theology of Tree-Hugging

*Nathan Brown, Editor
Signs Publishing Company
Warburton, Victoria, Australia*

As stewards of the earth, servants of all humanity, and disciples of Jesus, we must be agents of an all-embracing change in our world.

The natural world

In 1992, seventeen of the world's leading scientists—including one-hundred four Nobel laureates—met to consider the state of the natural world. They concluded their gathering with this warning: “A great change in our stewardship of the earth and the life on it is required if vast human misery is to be avoided and our global home on this planet is not to be irretrievably mutilated.”¹

While some may quibble about the edges of our looming environmental tragedies, the broad scale realities are increasingly beyond debate. Faced with the degradation of so many aspects of the natural world, it is significant that these eminent scientists—many of whom would be considered and consider themselves non-believers—should employ a term such as “stewardship” to describe our relationship with the world around us. It is a word that should awaken in Christians echoes of their God-assigned role from creation. Unfortunately, it's a warning that demands a change of attitude for too many Christians and Christian organizations.

At creation, God gave a charge to humanity: “Multiply and fill the earth and subdue it. Be masters over the fish and birds and all the animals” (Gn 1:20, NLT). To many people—both inside and outside Christianity—this is the assumed Christian attitude to the world around us: subdue and master; use and abuse. But this attitude ignores the more tempered and stewardly tone of the next chapter: “God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to tend and care for it” (Gn 2:15). It's a different way of interacting with the world.

Living carefully

Significantly, these gathered scientists called for a profound change, not just a fine adjustment. So much of how we live our lives is indefensible, self-centered, and simply wrong. In much of the Western world, and perhaps even more broadly, “we are engaged in a mania of consumption.... More and more people own houses that are larger and larger, and ever more crowded with stuff.”² And while some of us may espouse the fashionable garb of environmental concern, most of our lives deny the reality of God's creation and our responsibilities: “Much of our contemporary creative work seems to presuppose an absurd or meaningless world, a world in which particular acts matter very little or have no larger significance. Our practices, as when we engineer or modify habitats and organisms or when we produce substandard and therefore wasteful products, suggest we see the universe as ours to do with as we please.”³

Such an attitude is profoundly anti-Christian: “The scriptural view that the whole creation belongs to God and that our role within the creation is limited, but also ennobled, to that of steward or servant, seems to make little practical difference in the way many people order their lives.”⁴ Whatever attitude we may adopt or preach is worthless in the face of a contradictory practical living.

Yet we are enmeshed in a self-defeating and planet-destroying culture and economy. Responding as Christians to the ‘mania of consumption’ may not always be straightforward, but minimizing our participation as much as possible is a first step. Author, Dallas Willard suggests a useful attitude for personal living: “a gentle but firm non-cooperation with things that everyone knows to be wrong.”⁵ In the context of environmental degradation, there are some big picture issues that everyone knows to be wrong: “Economies built on destruction and exhaustion must be replaced with economies that model hospitality and care. We need to see that our economic lives give the most honest portrayal of how we understand salvation.”⁶

SCRIPTURE:
Psalm 148

Celebrating life: celebrating God

Before we get down to the serious business of environmentalism, perhaps our first task is to reclaim the wonder of creation. The Bible is filled with the celebration of the natural world—both by God, such as in Job 38-41, and people, such as Psalm 148. Jesus also drew from the natural world, examples of God’s goodness and care (i.e. Mt 6: 26, 28-30) commending both our reliance on God and an appreciation of the simple gifts that surround us with wonder.

Former prominent American agriculturalist Liberty Hyde Bailey recognized this unique relationship between a follower of Christ and the natural world, arguing that “a man cannot be a good farmer unless he is a religious man.” And possibly a good farmer—or those who live with such an appropriately steward-like attitude—is one most open to the religious aspect of life: “To live intimately and sympathetically with the earth is to see that we are surrounded and sustained by gifts on every side and to acknowledge that the only proper response to this unfathomable kindness is our own attention, care, and gratitude.”⁷

In much of the world, we live in an artificial, unsustainable, and thus unreal environment. We have cut ourselves off from the real world from which we draw our life. Sometimes the holiest, most profound, and most important moments in our lives must be watching a sunset, feeling the rain, listening to a chorus of frogs, or even hugging a tree. Such moments are celebrations of the abundant creativity of God.

“For God so loved the world”

As stewards of God’s creation—“those who are gentle and lowly” and as such “the whole earth will belong to them” (Mt. 5:5)—we should have an unrivalled global focus. We no longer need to ask, “Who is my neighbor?” (Lk 10:29). For we live with the increasing realization that we are all in this together: “There is, in practice, no such thing as autonomy. Practically speaking there is only a distinction between responsible and irresponsible dependence.”⁸ We must be alert to the prospect and reality of “vast human misery” and acknowledge that they are us.

We are undeniably mutually dependent. How we live in comparative affluence impacts directly and indirectly upon the lives of millions of others and upon the limited resources of our world. As Christian stewards we should be using the many choices in our lives, our consumer power and our political voice, to work against the blind disregard of environmental responsibility in much of the world.

When Jesus said “For God so loved the world...” He used the widest possible meaning of “the world” (Jn 3:16). This includes all the people of the world, and may well also extend to the natural world. Such an all-encompassing view of salvation is suggested by Paul’s assertion that “all creation anticipates the day when it will join God’s children in glorious freedom from death and decay” (Rm 8:21). In light of such texts, even those who see some kind of apocalyptic sense in the destruction of our natural world must ask themselves whether God has some bigger purpose.

Christian tree-hugging

Christianity is often seen in opposition to ecology. In many intellectual circles, Christianity is looked upon as being synonymous with capitalism, consumerism, Westernism, industrialism, imperialism, and even militarism. In reality, Christianity should be at the forefront of protest against these destructive attitudes and practices.

As stewards of the earth, servants of all humanity, and disciples of Jesus, we must be agents of an all-embracing change in our world.

Environmental activists have often been lampooned as tree-huggers. But if that’s what is needed to reforge a sense of connectedness to the natural world and precipitate the urgent steps that will follow from a renewal of that realization, perhaps Christians should be setting the example. As Christians, we can out-hug any tree-hugger. But it’s not just about the tree. When we realize it’s about the tree, the life it supports, each of our fellow tree-huggers and ourselves, and all the work of an all-loving Creator—then tree-hugging and all that the term has come to represent will be rightly regarded as most significant acts of worship.

1 “World Scientists’ Warning to Humanity” <www.ucsusa.org>.

2 Thomas Hine, *I Want That: How We All Became Shoppers—A Cultural History*, HarperCollins, p.158.

3 Norman Wirzba, *The Paradise of God: Renewing Religion in an Ecological Age*, Oxford University Press, 2003, p.14.

4 Wirzba, pp.14-15.

5 *The Divine Conspiracy*, Fount, p.313.

6 Wirzba, p.20.

7 *Ibid*, p.72.

8 *Ibid*, p.77, quoting Wendell Berry.



Stewards of Creation

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at Conservation International*

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WA great responsibility when it comes to ecology, the Christian's responsibility is even greater than that of the non-Christian. Our calling to environmental ethics begins with the strong history observed throughout the Bible.

We face many global issues today, but some of the most pressing involve our environment. Environmental issues no longer concern a few—they concern many—and they affect *everyone*. Facing a past in which we have taken advantage of nature and exploited what it has to offer has wreaked havoc on our earth for generations still to come. Advances in science and technology and enormous population increases have placed incredible pressure on our resources. Increasing wastelands and depleted forests, changes in climates, droughts, floods, fires, and threatening pollution are exhausting our natural environment at an alarming rate.

Christians are not known for leading out in conservation projects or environmental education. Most environmental programs and advocacy groups are not affiliated with Christian churches. As Christians, it is vital that we be concerned with the welfare of the individual, but we often overlook the environment in which that individual *lives*. What happens when he or she gets sick from extreme pollution or from eating contaminated fish? Where should we stand on such issues?

Sadly, it has taken devastating environmental crises like the ever-increasing “hole” in the ozone layer, the

loss of numerous plants and animals, and disastrous climate changes to arouse “the need to revive a theology concerned with Creation as well as redemption” (S. H. Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature*, Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 192). Yet some Christians believe that direct involvement in environmental issues will detract from Christ's command to spread the gospel. They argue that government and other specialized organizations, not the church, should deal with these issues.

Dust to dust

Adam was made from the dust of the earth. And God tells us that in this present world, when we have lived life, we will return to dust (Gn 3:19). In that sense, we belong to the earth just as much as the earth belongs to us! Further, the covenant that God made with Noah after the flood was really a covenant with *all* creation: “I will remember my promise to you and to all the animals that a flood will never again destroy all living beings ... that is the sign of the promise which I am making to all living beings” (Gn 9:15-17).

God takes stewardship seriously. He loves His creation and He calls us to respect and care for the earth. When He returns He will reward those who have reverence for Him, great and small (Rv 11:16-18). Christ's return is also designated as the time “to destroy those who destroy the earth”! That's quite a consequence for the actions we have become accustomed to in neglecting our natural environment.

A community approach

In his book, *God's World: A Theology of the Environment*, Ken Gnanakan uses Christ's command to love God with all our hearts and our neighbor as ourselves to remind Christians that, ideally, love for God “should lead us to a deeper dedication to our Creator” and must also “draw us into a more wholesome relationship with creation” (p. 174). The command to love one another will move us away from an individualized ethic and lead us toward a community approach, where we see the needs of others being as important as our own!

We Christians need to develop a biblically-grounded attitude toward nature (Ibid, 4). We believe God created the world and cares for it, and He wants us to be concerned for it. Psalm 24:1 asserts that “the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof” and, therefore, should be treated with respect for Him. Not only did God establish ownership of the earth at creation, He has plans for a renewed earth. There is a sustaining relationship between God and earth which shows continuing creative and re-creative processes even today (Ibid, 34).

A complete health message

The Adventist church's concern for and powerful message about health has made it famous around the globe. Many of our hospitals are able to boast “the best” or “the most” for issues relating to excellent patient care. In his 1995 lecture given at Loma Linda University—“Conceptual Foundations of Our Health Message”—Jack Provonsha, MD, PhD, speaks of the history of healthcare in the SDA church: “If one worships God, it necessarily follows that one will respect His Creation, of which the human body is the very epitome. It is an affront to God to abuse His Creation.”*

“Adventists have done well to express their worship of God through taking care of their physical and mental health. But there is another issue these days that has a similar message. Concern for the environment around us, which actually figures so

prominently in personal and social health, is also one involving respect for creation, and thus for the Creator. At creation man was given responsibility for his environment, ‘to dress and to keep it.’

“The trouble is, most of the world’s environmental problems are too complex for individuals or small groups to handle. Cleaning up earth’s rivers, lakes, and skies will involve enormous expenditures of effort and money, and there are no quick fixes. It will call for massive and persistent effort applied by groups and governmental leaders over the long haul to make a difference.

“The tragedy is, we know what to do to clean things up, to restore our damaged ecosystems, and to prevent further despoiling. What is missing at every level of society is the collective will to do it ... to bring health and healing to our living environment again calls for worship of its Creator. It is an essential part of the Adventist health message.”

Sabbath and the environment

What sets the Adventist Church apart from most Christian denominations is the observance of the Seventh-day Sabbath—the final day of creation week in which God Himself rested. The fourth commandment reminds us “the seventh day is a day of rest” dedicated to God. On that day no one is to work: “neither you, your children, your slaves, your animals, nor the foreigners who live in your country” (Ex 20:9-10, TEV). We have been given the seventh day of the week as a day of rest, not only for ourselves, but for the earth as well. The Old Testament calendar allowed for a seven-year cycle where every seventh year the land received a sabbatical and remained fallow for one year—a year of rest (Lv 25: 2-6).

A second and equally significant belief we hold is the importance of each member’s role in Christian stewardship: “We are God’s stewards, entrusted by Him with time and opportunities, abilities and possessions, and the blessings of the earth and its resources. We are responsible to Him for their proper use. We acknowledge God’s ownership by faithful service to Him and our fellowmen and by returning tithes and giving offerings for the proclamation of His gospel and the support and growth of His church. Stewardship is a privilege given to us by God for nurture in love and the victory over selfishness and covetousness. The steward rejoices in the blessings that come to others as a result of his faithfulness” (*Seventh-day Adventists Believe ... A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines*, Review and Herald Publishing, 1988, Ch. 20).

God asks us to partner with Him to care for the earth. We ought to do everything we can to maintain life on all levels, keeping the ecological balance intact. Stewardship results in many blessings—the blessings of contentment and joy for each member—and it reaps blessings for the Church as a whole, strengthening the body of Christ.

Renewing our vision

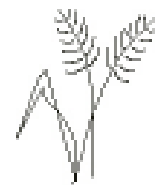
“The Seventh-day Adventist Church came on the scene in the latter half of the nineteenth century at a time of great conceptual and social excitement. A time when people were interested in nature and nature’s God in matters of health and disease. Under the guidance of God, a called people were committed to the task of selecting and developing and organizing the best worldwide system of health and healing which gave this movement a voice of authority in this dimension of the movement’s ministry” (Provonsha).

It is vital ... that we be concerned with the welfare of the individual, but we often overlook the environment in which that individual lives! What happens when he or she gets sick from extreme pollution or from eating contaminated fish?

It is again time for God’s “called people” to commit to the task of environmental stewardship—to assist in the development of systems of conservation and education that will be a testimony to our desire to care for God’s creation.

*Dr. Provonsha’s lecture is available online at: <http://www.llu.edu/llu/bioethics/prov98.htm>.

To learn more about Sarah’s work, visit <http://www.biodiversityscience.org> or email her at s.bath@conservation.org.



The Rabbi's Heartbeat

*Reviewed by Claire L. Eva, Assistant Director
General Conference Stewardship Department*

This new, inspired and artistic volume by Brennan Manning could become a Christian classic. This reviewer is on the third read through. Manning has a way of expressing the heart and soul of Christian faith; probably because he speaks authentically and honestly, with a passion for the compassion of Christ.

The Rabbi's Heartbeat is concise, yet full of meaning. The title may be familiar, as it is one of the chapter titles from Manning's newly revised *Abba's Child*.

Manning says, "Define yourself radically as one beloved by God. This is the true self. Every other identity is illusion" (p. 40). This volume will help the reader internalize what it means to be the beloved of God. It exposes how we, as Christians, are tempted to put forth the "imposter" within: "Living out of the false self creates a compulsive desire to present a perfect image to the public so that everybody will admire us and nobody will know us."

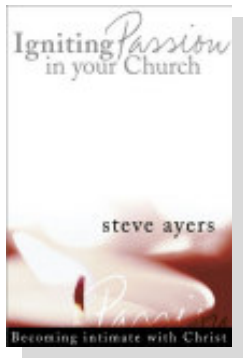
The author shares: the value of solitude, the dynamic power that flows from living in the "present riseness of Christ," sharing through acts of love, and so much more. This is a book that will bring meaning and grace to your life and to those you love.



by Brennan Manning
NavPress
Colorado Springs, Colorado
2003 US\$ 16.99

Igniting Passion in Your Church

*Reviewed by Benjamin C. Maxson, Director
General Conference Stewardship Department*



by Steve Ayers
Group Publishing
Loveland, Colorado
2002 US\$ 15.99

Steve Ayers writes from his own conflict with the contemporary church. Though he loves God's people, he struggles with the institution called the church—the business, the organization, the image. Steve tells how he fell in love with the church through his passion for Christ. Using the metaphor of a love relationship and courtship, the author explores practical ways for helping the church fall in love with Jesus Christ.

This book is full of practical counsel coming from a fascinating perspective and a powerful image. The goal is to connect people through relationship—a three-way relationship. In his words, "We are connected to God through Jesus Christ. We're connected to one another in Jesus Christ. Then, because we are married to Jesus, we're to connect to the world."

This is a refreshing book to read that points us back to basics. It calls us to the practice of loving God and loving each other.

Conspiracy of Kindness

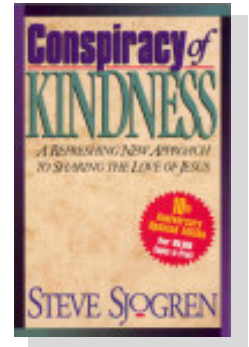
*Reviewed by Claire L. Eva, Assistant Director
General Conference Stewardship Department*

The subject of the book, *Conspiracy of Kindness* by Steve Sjogren, could best be described as “servant evangelism.” The author defines servant evangelism by using this formula: “servant evangelism = deeds of love + words of love + adequate time” (p. 22).

In other words, Steve Sjogren and the members of his church, Vineyard of Cincinnati, believe that loving deeds performed by unassuming Christians do more to convince people of the love of God than all the words in the world.

Says Sjogren: “So many of us feel like failures when we try to share our faith—all but the few who can really do it well.” But Christians who have entered into “servant evangelism” have new hope and inspiration for sharing with others. “Instead of just telling the gospel, we are *bringing* the gospel to people. Our society expects to be preached at by enthusiastic Christians. It is almost shocking to unbelievers when we break that expectation by offering simple, practical demonstrations of God’s love” (p. 31).

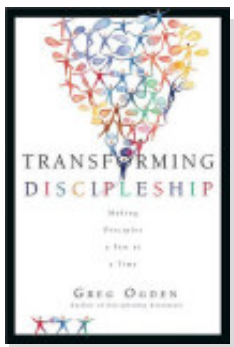
This is an essential book for those churches and individual members who are serious about wanting to share their faith with those around them—a book for those who truly want to make a difference in the world for Christ.



by Steve Sjogren
Servant Publications
Ann Arbor, Michigan
2003 US\$ 12.99

Transforming Discipleship

*Reviewed by Benjamin C. Maxson, Director
General Conference Stewardship Department*



by Greg Ogden and
Gregory J. Ogden
InverVarsity Press
Downer's Grove, Illinois
2003 US\$ 12.00

Ogden continues on the path he blazed when he wrote *The New Reformation*. This time he focuses specifically on discipleship. While his model includes structure and curriculum, his focal point is on a covenantal relationship in a triad. Within this grouping of three individuals, a peer discipling process develops.

The author explores the current need for discipling within today’s church. He shares research by George Barna, as well as personal experience, to analyze the lack of maturity in the life of the individual Christian. He states: “The irony is that in our attempt to reach the masses through mass means we have failed to train people the masses could emulate.” Then he identifies Christ’s method and shows how Scripture provides a model for our ministry.

This book is packed with practical help for developing a discipling strategy in a local congregation. The author’s experience provides a rich knowledge base to enhance today’s church. He makes discipling doable for the average church.

New brochure available—

“It Really is Yours!”

Would you like to know what you receive from Jesus Christ when you accept Him as your Savior? Then you won't want to miss this new brochure in the “It Really Is ...” series from the General Conference Stewardship Department.

This colorful drop-down pamphlet describes fifty blessings that flow from Jesus' gift of salvation. Unwrap the gift with us and discover just how gracious a gift our salvation is. For details, see our website at AdventistStewardship.com.

editorial

*Claire L. Eva, Assistant Director
General Conference Stewardship Department*

Throwaway Society

I was stuck in traffic. Caught behind a young woman driving a dusty red Firebird. As I watched her using the slow pace of traffic to make up for lost time—eating and fluffing her drying, permed hair—she rolled down the car window and, to my amazement, threw a banana peel onto the highway. “Hey!” I thought. “How in the world can she do that?”

Her act was disturbing, but it got me reflecting. We live in a throwaway society. Not just banana peels in wrong places, but when it comes to the technological “progress” of the last half century, we almost throw away more than we keep.

Milk used to be delivered in eco-friendly glass bottles, and if you lived in rural surroundings, it may have come directly from the cow. In many places we throw away tons of plastic every year—from every imaginable product. Good home cooking has a sparring partner—processed, packaged, ten-minute meals. Interestingly, the packaging often costs more than the food inside. Just think of all those colorful trapping dollars that go into the giant trash tubs we use!

Our babies wear paper diapers and stacks of paper are consumed at an all time high, despite technological tactics for filing electronically. Where *are* all the trees coming from? Why all this waste? We have become superfluous, self-indulgent consumers and God's creation is groaning beneath the weight of our excesses.

Some years ago, there was a television commercial that made me weep, no matter how many times I viewed it. It depicted a Native American looking at what used to be a lovely, crystal stream, now polluted with debris. But that isn't what made me cry. Rolling down the face of the man—his bold, bronzed face—was a tear. He was first to realize what such a negative transformation meant. But I “caught on.”

Of course, that is just a faint shadow of the One who really knows what it means. We need to keep “catching on,” to keep seeing the world from God's perspective. Pray that we will, before it is too late. Let us take up our responsibility as stewards of His beautiful creation.

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Exploring partnership with God

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