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Evangelicals

Magazine | Spring/Summer 2022 | Vol. 8, No. 1



When Recycling Isn't Enough

JESSICA MOERMAN

The church
has left
the building.*

*Your building is home base, but the hands and feet of Christ move beyond brick and mortar. As you adapt to connect people through online worship, lead small groups in living rooms, and mobilize teens to plant a community garden, we adapt with you.

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...longer life expectancy,
...increased world conflicts, heart problems,
...more war, foreign energy, lung disease,
...my child's asthma, higher grocery bills,
...poor health, polluted air, an unsafe climate, war,

THE COSTS OF FOSSIL FUELS ARE BIG, BUT WHAT'S EVEN BIGGER?

...premature births, health complications, dangerous
...a tainted legacy, an uncertain future, anxiety,
...higher risks, unstable prices, increased costs,
...energy dependence, fatalities,
...more smog and soot, dirty air,



EVERYTHING WORTH DEFENDING

Join us in defending God's creation. (Psalm 24:1)



Evangelicals

The Magazine of the National Association of Evangelicals



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Nearly two-thirds of evangelical Christian leaders say they have heard a sermon on their responsibility to care for God's creation, but many wish they heard more biblical teaching on the topic.

Your NAE

For more resources and opportunities, visit [NAE.org](https://www.nae.org) anytime, anywhere — on your phone, tablet or computer.

PODCAST

Today's Conversation provides opportunities for you to hear from leading thinkers, theologians, activists, culture-makers and more.

EVENTS

Our breadth and diversity of partners allow us to organize unique gatherings that encourage and enrich leaders in the evangelical community.

MEMBERSHIP

We are the largest and most established network of evangelical Christians in the United States. Our membership includes 40 denominations and thousands of churches, schools and nonprofits. Together we serve a constituency of millions.

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Evangelicals magazine comes to you as one of many NAE resources to help leaders and their communities navigate complexity with biblical clarity. NAE member institutions can receive bulk subscriptions for their ministries at no charge. More at [NAE.org/membership](https://www.nae.org/membership). To receive a personal subscription, we invite you to partner with us at [NAE.org/give](https://www.nae.org/give).

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With Support From **Brotherhood Mutual**

The National Association of Evangelicals has long considered caring for creation part of the responsibilities that God gave humankind in the very beginning. We are not the owners of creation; rather, “the earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it” (Psalm 24:1). Christians acknowledge creation care as an act of discipleship; we are stewards of the earth, summoned by God to “work it and take care of it” (Genesis 2:15).

In this Evangelicals magazine issue, we wanted to dig deeper. We wanted to be challenged in our understanding of our role as stewards of the earth. We wanted to be inspired by how caring for creation can open doors for ministry. We wanted to consider how our theology informs our policies. We wanted to reflect on what our consumption practices reveal about our posture. We wanted to broaden our perspective of the environmental impact on people and ecosystems around the world.

So, we brought together voices that challenge us to greater reflection and greater action. These authors love God and love the beautiful world he has created. They remind us that God is not only redeeming his people, but is also restoring the whole creation (Romans 8:18–23). As the redeemed people of God, we are called to follow our Risen

Lord and to restore creation as we prepare for our Lord’s return. Just as we show our love for the Savior by reaching the lost, we show our love for the Creator by caring for his creation. And in caring for his creation, we also reach those the lost and help vulnerable communities.

Concern for the environment has become so aligned with partisan politics that Christians have been frequently paralyzed on the topic. Theology has also impacted our action — or lack of action — on creation care. This magazine offers biblical clarity that reorients our hearts and minds toward worship of our Creator. Worshiping our Creator leads us to deeper care for all of his great works. 

Leadership Lessons From Ukraine

“ It’s sometimes hard to gauge in real time whether any given moment, no matter how dramatic, is truly culturally or historically significant. Not every viral video matters, and we’re quick to create (and forget) both heroes and villains. But there is something about [Ukraine President] Zelensky’s stand that is different. There’s something about it that’s penetrating far beyond his country’s borders and touching the hearts of Americans across the political spectrum. It means something real, something we should remember.

...In these circumstances it is breathtaking to witness actual courage. It’s even more breathtaking when that courage is both moral and physical. He’s not just speaking against evil, he’s quite literally standing against evil — when evil seems to possess all the power, and virtue feels so weak. And this reminds us of something important about leadership. It’s one thing to say, ‘I will lead you.’ It’s another thing entirely to say, ‘I am with you,’ and to demonstrate it by laying your own life on the line.”

David French, in the article, “When the Man Meets the Moment,” at The Dispatch



Black Churches for Racial Equality

“ There is a broad consensus among Black Americans of all faiths that predominantly Black churches have played a valuable role in the struggle for racial equality in U.S. society. Roughly three-quarters of Black adults surveyed say that Black churches have played at least ‘some’ role in helping Black people move toward equality — including three-in-10 who say Black churches have done ‘a great deal.’”

Pew Research Center’s study “Faith Among Black Americans”

Evangelical Renewal Movement

“ The future of the Christian church is not going to look like the past. Today many of the most dynamic sectors of the faith are in immigrant communities — in Korean, African and Hispanic churches, for example. In the decades ahead the American church is going to look more like the global church.”

David Brooks in his New York Times’ column, “The Dissenters Trying to Save Evangelicalism From Itself”

COVID's Impact on the World

“As believers, we can be the one for the one and the voice for the many. We can be the voice by calling on our national governments to ensure that vulnerable children and families are not left behind but receive the support they need, so they can ensure that every child can grow up in a family environment.”

Thomas Schirmacher, secretary general of the World Evangelical Alliance, on the recent CDC report estimating that more than 7 million children lost a parent or caregiver due to COVID-19

“From 1990 until 2015 we witnessed a consistent downward trend of global poverty rates, from nearly 36 percent to just 10 percent of people at the extreme poverty level living on just \$1.90 a day. COVID-19 changed everything, and today 97 million more people were pushed into poverty as a result of COVID-19. Globally, ‘three to four years of progress toward ending extreme poverty are estimated to have been lost.’”

World Relief's report, “COVID-19 Impact on the World's Poor”

Roe being overturned won't make abortion illegal. States will act to protect unborn babies or abortion rights. Congress may act. NMW, we must better support women w/ unexpected pregnancies.

Kelly Rosati @KellyMRosati

On their 80th anniversary, we lift up the @NAEvangelicals' mission to bring evangelicals together for the common cause of the gospel. #ComingTogether
Santiago "Jimmy" Mellado @jimmellado

Being on the board of @NAEvangelicals is one of my favorite privileges as National Commander of The #SalvationArmy. It's so important that we come together as people of faith to have a positive impact on the world.

Commissioner Kenneth G. Hodder @natlcommander

Really appreciate this opinion piece by SBC President @EdLitton, @NAEvangelicals' Walter Kim, and @USCCB's Bishop Dorsonville. They highlight the importance of a pathway to citizenship for Dreamers, immigration reform & border security. tinyurl.com/2p98rnd2
Chelsea Patterson Sobolik @ChelsPat



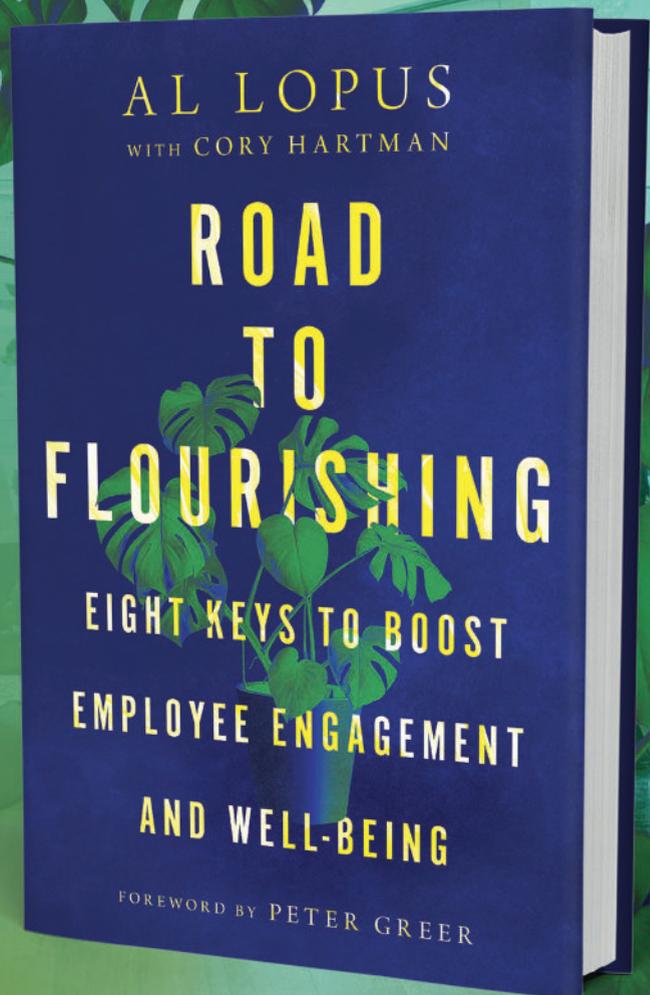
WHAT MAKES A **FLOURISHING** WORKPLACE?

Insights from Best Christian Workplaces CEO Al Lopus

“Reading this one book could be the most important thing you can do this year for your employees and your bottom line.”

RICHARD STEARNS,

president emeritus of World Vision US



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EVANGELICAL CALENDAR

Please join the evangelical community at these events hosted by the NAE and its members. **Your prayers are welcome too.**

Many of these events include downloadable resources for promotion and participation.

JUNE 24–25, 2022

Together 2022

Dallas, TX

Pulse

[Together22.Pulse.org](https://www.together22.pulse.org)

Join thousands at the Cotton Bowl Stadium for Together 2022. More than a large conference, the aim of Together is to activate a generation to share Jesus and be sent home with the courage, community, and tools to share the Good News.



SEPTEMBER 7–9, 2022

Chaplains Training Workshop

Boston, MA

Evangelical Chaplains Commission

[EvangelicalChaplains.org](https://www.evangelicalchaplains.org)

The Chaplains Training Workshop is open to NAE chaplains and candidates, as well as chaplains from NAE denominations. The sessions highlight faithful approaches to ministry flowing from gospel integrity and the Great Commission. We also provide training on religious freedom and religious accommodation issues, as well as other practical issues impacting chaplain ministry today.



SEPTEMBER 28, 2022

See You At The Pole

National Network of Youth Ministries

[SYATP.com](https://www.syatp.com)

Since 1990, students have gathered around their school's flagpole to pray for their school, friends, families, churches and communities.



OCTOBER 4–5, 2022

Flourish

Nashville, TN

National Association of Evangelicals

[NAE.org/flourish](https://www.nae.org/flourish)

Flourish, a new conference of the NAE, will offer Christian pastors and leaders a space to have hard conversations on the toughest issues facing the Church today. At Flourish, they will hear dynamic presentations, experience guided table discussions, be mentored by a seasoned evangelical leader, and receive transformative resources.



JUNE 26–29, 2022

Crisis Publishing Initiative

Chicago, IL

Evangelical Press Association &

Magazine Training International

[CrisisPublishing.com](https://www.crisispublishing.com)

Christian journalists, editors, publishers and bloggers from around the world will gather to discuss how best to meet the challenges of reporting on a world increasingly impacted by crises of all kinds, from terrorism to pandemic to natural disasters.

AUGUST 29–31, 2022

Summer Executive Retreat

Colorado Springs, CO

Accord Network

[AccordNetwork.org](https://www.accordnetwork.org)

Executives of relief and development organizations will gather to learn from another and encourage each other in their ministries.

SEPTEMBER 28–30, 2022

Counting the Cost

Orlando, FL

Missio Nexus

[MissioNexus.org/counting-the-cost](https://www.missionexus.org/counting-the-cost)

The Missions Leaders Conference provides leaders from the North American missions community a place to catalyze relationships, share ideas, and network with leaders in global missions.



WORTH NOTING

✓ Praying & Acting on Behalf of Ukraine

When faced with a crisis like the war in Ukraine, our instincts as evangelicals are to pray and to help. Many evangelical denominations, organizations and churches shared prayer points and organized prayer gatherings among their networks, lifting up the many needs of those impacted by the war in Ukraine. In addition, many member institutions of the National Association of Evangelicals mobilized to be the hands and feet of Jesus for the vulnerable and displaced.

In addition to offering prayer points and highlighting ministries active in Ukraine, the NAE engaged in efforts to advocate for Ukrainians. The NAE joined with 177 other organizations in a letter to President Biden and his administration seeking Temporary Protected Status for Ukrainians currently in the United States so that they would not be forced to return to Ukraine during this perilous time. Through the NAE Advocacy Center, many NAE friends wrote to the administration and

congressional leaders advocating for this provision, which was granted in March.

Along with about 100 other Christian leaders, NAE President Walter Kim reached out to Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill, asking him to speak out against his country's invasion of Ukraine. The NAE continues to pursue efforts that may contribute to just peace in Ukraine and Russia.



Access prayer points for Ukraine at [NAE.org/pray-for-ukraine](https://nae.org/pray-for-ukraine).

Check out a list of ministries supporting Ukrainians in need at [NAE.org/how-help-ukraine](https://nae.org/how-help-ukraine).

Listen to the podcast with David Beasley on How Conflicts Impact Food Supply at [NAE.org/beasleypodcast](https://nae.org/beasleypodcast).

✓ Policies to Help Families

Help wanted: long hours, no pay, very rewarding. That's a good summary of the job parents take on when they welcome a child into the family. It's the most important responsibility any parent will ever have. Parenting is an expensive job, costing around \$272,049 per child just through high school.

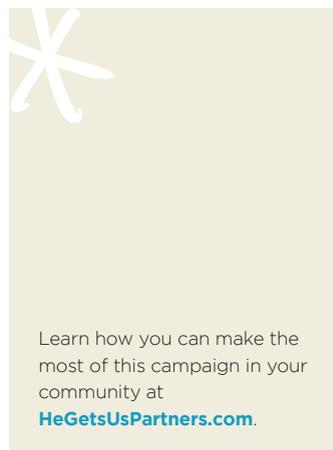
One in six American children live in poverty. Many will struggle as adults. The causes and solutions are complex, but the right public policies can help. In 2021, a temporary increase in the Child Tax Credit lifted 40 percent of poor children above the poverty line. If made permanent, it would have generational impact.

Pro-life advocates know that most expectant mothers cite the cost of raising a child as a prime reason for choosing abortion. The improved Child Tax Credit is a powerful tool for fighting poverty and potentially saving lives. The NAE believes it should be made permanent.

Join the NAE in advocating for making the improved child tax credit permanent and fully available to the neediest families at [NAE.org/take-action](https://nae.org/take-action).

✓ He Gets Us

He Gets Us is a \$100 million ad campaign designed to create cultural change in the way people think about Jesus and his relevance in our lives. The campaign, which includes TV commercials, online ads and billboards, will target millennials and Gen Z with a carefully researched, and market-tested message about Jesus Christ: He gets us.



Learn how you can make the most of this campaign in your community at HeGetsUsPartners.com.

✓ Awaiting a Landmark Abortion Decision

In December 2021, the U.S. Supreme Court heard a landmark abortion case, *Dobbs v. Jackson*. As of this writing, the decision has not been announced. The case focuses on the question of whether all pre-viability prohibitions on elective abortions are unconstitutional.

In an amicus brief in the case, the National Association of Evangelicals argues that the U.S. Constitution does not create a right to an abortion of an unborn child before viability or at any other stage of pregnancy. The Supreme Court's 1973 choice in *Roe v. Wade* to set viability as a point at which restrictions on abortion are permitted is arbitrary and unworkable. If *Roe v. Wade* is overturned, decisions on abortion policy would be placed on citizens and the state legislatures they elect. The NAE will be monitoring the case and its implications for safeguarding the sanctity of life.



Download the NAE amicus brief in *Dobbs v. Jackson* at [NAE.org/court-briefs](https://nae.org/court-briefs).

✓ Stories From the Border

Steve Eng, advocacy director of the National Association of Evangelicals, visited the U.S.-Mexico border earlier this year. He captured his reflections in a four-part article series. The series includes a powerful video interview of Kelly Knott, director of the El Paso Migrant Center, and photos from the trip. The series highlights the needs at the border and the work that evangelical ministries are doing to love and serve those who are caught between nations.



View the Stories from the Border series at [NAE.org/border-stories](https://nae.org/border-stories).

✓ Flourish Event to Equip, Empower Church Leaders

Today's cultural moment is marked by considerable complexity — polarization in our politics, the public disgrace of high-profile evangelical leaders, ongoing challenges of racial injustice, confusion around sexuality, and more. Many are confused and discouraged wondering what the gospel has to say about it all. Furthermore, the evangelical identity has been scandalized by the ways it has been used for political or ideological purposes.

Flourish, a new conference of the National Association of Evangelicals, will tackle these issues with wisdom and grace, and will offer a way for us to move forward together. Participants will experience dynamic presentations from leaders like Rebecca McLaughlin,

Nona Jones, Ed Stetzer and Curt Thompson; guided table discussions; mentoring by a seasoned evangelical leader; and transformative resources and connections on each topic.





Cullen Rodgers-Gates is director of development and membership at the National Association of Evangelicals.

Rooted in Scripture, Caring for Creation

How One Church Cultivates Stewardship in Their Community

“You mean, we can talk about this in the church?!” Jenney Rice regularly hears this shocked reaction from young adults at Vineyard Columbus when they learn of the church’s commitment to creation care and environmental stewardship.

Rice observes, “Creation care is a way for us to draw young people into the church, and it gives them a different image of the church than they are expecting. Suddenly, they see that the church can speak with relevance to issues about which they and their peers care deeply.”

Rice is the pastor of community outreach at Vineyard Columbus — a multi-site church in Columbus, Ohio. A couple years ago, the church was introduced to the Evangelical Environmental Network (EEN), which triggered a series of conversations about what God might be calling the church to be and do in the area of creation care. Eventually, an interest group was formed with Rice as the leader.

Marqus Cole is the director of engagement and church outreach at EEN. Cole shares that EEN has three overlapping areas of emphasis: Scripture, science and society. “First, we want to get back to the basics of what our Christian vision of creation care is and program around that. What is the story in Scripture that God is telling us about his identity as Creator and our role as image bearers? Grounding people in Scripture is key. Second, it is critical to understand the science. Third,

how can we as Christians relate to wider society as change makers and people of peace?”

Vineyard Columbus embodies this three-fold calling. According to Rice, one reason why a creation care initiative has taken root at Vineyard Columbus is due to consistent teaching on God as Creator and the dignity and value of everything God created. In addition, evangelical scientist Katherine Hayhoe’s book “Saving Us” has been instrumental





for the interest group in exploring creation care as an important aspect of gospel witness.

Second, Vineyard Columbus has implemented practical steps to care for the environment that demonstrate an understanding of the science, including LED lighting upgrades at multiple sites, hand dryers in most bathrooms to reduce paper usage, bottle filling stations to reduce the use of plastic bottles, and motion sensors in certain buildings to reduce electricity. Other activities being considered are nature hikes for the congregation and potential collaboration with a climate researcher at The Ohio State University.

“We want to be a good neighbor, so we are intentionally inviting the community to join us in this effort.”

However, it is the third element — engagement with wider society — that clearly animates Rice in her passion for this work. Vineyard Columbus recently began leasing a plot of land for a new community garden five minutes from their largest campus and just two minutes from a food pantry operated by the church. But it is more than a garden; it is a genuine partnership with the community.

“We want to be a good neighbor, so we are intentionally inviting the community to join us in this effort.” As Rice describes it, this newest effort involves a holistic approach

that seeks to care for the environment, address food insecurity and encourage Sabbath rest. As congregants cultivate the garden together with their neighbors, the food that is grown will source the nearby food pantry to serve the needs of the most vulnerable in their community. Keeping the Sabbath allows congregants to reduce their negative impact on the environment, as all creation rests.

Rice sees Jesus’ ministry as the model for engagement. Just as Jesus started with only a handful of disciples, so the church started with a small interest group, and is gradually expanding through ongoing conversations and invitations. EEN assists through training and coaching.

“This is the way missionary work should happen — equipping the community of believers and then blessing them to move freely into action as the Holy Spirit leads. Rooted in Christ, we seek to find common ground with others, as peacemakers,” she said.

If the humility and faith with which Rice tells the story is any indication, Vineyard Columbus is a living testament to David’s words in Psalm 24:1: “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it; the world, and all who live in it. ❷

The Vineyard USA is one of 40 denominations that make up the National Association of Evangelicals. The NAE also includes thousands of churches, schools and nonprofits (such as the Evangelical Environmental Network) who believe that together we can make a greater impact for the gospel of Jesus Christ.

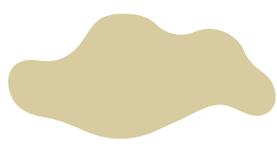


When Recycling Isn't Enough

JESSICA MOERMAN



Jessica Moerman is vice president of science and policy at the Evangelical Environmental Network, a climate and environmental scientist, and co-founding pastor of Grace Capital City Church in Washington, D.C.



From the outset, God made us in his image to carry out an awesome assignment: to take responsibility for everything he lovingly made (Genesis 1:26; Genesis 2:15). Deputized as stewards of the work of God’s own hand, this means we must take good care of each other and the rest of creation (Psalm 24:1). As evangelicals, our commitment to Scripture means we must take this assignment seriously and carry it out to the fullest extent God intended.

Evangelicals are generally very strong in personal discipleship and individual responsibility, but we often stop there. Our approach to creation care is particularly emblematic of this. Individual actions like recycling and gardening come easily. But as individuals and in our churches, we shy away from environmental solutions at the policy level and in the public square.

Our hesitancy to take public action on climate and environmental issues runs counter to the biblical authority God has given us, counter to church history, and counter to what is required of us as evangelicals to defend life.

Walking in the Authority God Gave Us

Good stewardship of our personal resources is key to our assignment as caretakers of God’s creation. Creation care, first and foremost, is a discipleship issue. We honor God not only by the giving of our first fruits but by taking good care of the rest. In this way, our stewardship actions are both holy and sanctifying.

Our stewardship actions are also prophetic, pointing towards a creation fully restored and reconciled in Jesus (Colossians 1:20). As Nazarene pastor and bi-vocational waste manager Caleb Cray Haynes writes in his book “Garbage Theology,” recycling and composting declare that nothing in God’s creation is “waste.” As we use our consumer power to choose products, transportation and energy that are less polluting, we point towards the ultimate healing and restoration of both ourselves and creation (Romans 8:19–22; Revelation 21:1–5, 22:1–5). Each new tree planted is a glimpse of Eden restored and the tree life whose leaves bring healing to the nations (Revelation 22:1–5).

But when we limit our authority to home recycling and swapping out light bulbs, it begs the question: Is this all God had in mind when he put us in charge of everything he made? History shows us that public environmental action is not a radical new idea for the Church but actually part of our legacy.





American Environmental Movement Born in the Church

As historian Mark Stoll details, the American conservation and environmental movements were birthed out of the Church. Their foundations are theological, sparked in large part by John Calvin’s teachings on creation. Calvin considered creation a “dazzling theater” of God’s glory and the “most perfect way of seeking God” second only to the Bible. He believed handing creation down to the next generation “as we received it, or even better cultivated” a core moral responsibility.

Calvin’s doctrine of stewardship fueled four centuries of Christian environmental care in the public square. Stoll traces the origin of conservation to the Puritans, who passed down ordinances to preserve forest resources, regulate timber cutting, and maintain healthy soil and farmlands as anti-poverty measures. As Proverbs 13:22 instructs us to leave a good inheritance to our “children’s children,” they made policies setting aside common land specifically reserved for future generations.

Future generations of public servants took this legacy to the next level, advocating for and establishing the U.S. Forest Service and National Parks system. President Theodore Roosevelt called conservation “a great moral issue.” Stephen Tyng Mather, the first director of the National Parks Service, was a member of one of America’s greatest ministry families. Mather, who advocated before Congress for creation of the National Parks system, said, “our job at the Park Service is to keep the National Parks as close to what God made them as possible [...] and leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.”

Creation Care as a Matter of Life

Today we face some of the greatest environmental threats in human history. The Church’s inaction on these problems not only risks our public witness but also threatens the health and lives of those Scripture specifically calls us to love and serve (Matthew 22:39, 25:45).

As a scientist, I find the human cost of climate change and pollution staggering. According to a 2021 Harvard University study, pollution kills nearly 9 million people each year worldwide — more than AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, and acts of war and violence combined. In the United States, the American Lung Association reports that more than 40

percent of Americans live in areas with unhealthy, polluted air, causing up to 350,000 Americans to die prematurely every year.

The tragedy of air pollution and climate change is that our most vulnerable neighbors are the ones most severely impacted.

Today’s worst pollutants aren’t always visible in the air. Microscopic soot particles, spewed by traffic and emitted from traditional power plants, go into our bloodstream and get lodged in our brains, hearts and lungs. Medical research links prolonged exposure — even at low levels — to strokes, dementia, heart and lung disease, asthma and more.

The tragedy of air pollution and climate change is that our most vulnerable neighbors are the ones most severely impacted — this includes children, elderly, pregnant women, the poor, people of color, people with chronic illness or disabilities, outdoor workers, and many more.

Unborn babies and young children are among the most at risk. Air pollution contributes to 20 percent of newborn deaths worldwide, according to the 2020 Global State of the Air Report. Breathing unhealthy air has a similar effect as smoking during pregnancy and is linked to stillbirth, premature birth, and higher risk of developing life-long illnesses like asthma. Black and brown mothers and babies are exposed to pollution at higher rates.

This was all heavy on my mind while pregnant with my second son this past year. I did all I could to reduce my exposure to unhealthy air, but it was impossible for me to control the air outside my home. Clean air, pure water and a safe climate are public resources and thus require public protection. As evangelicals committed to defending life, we must rediscover and reclaim the mantle as leaders of public stewardship.

Scaling Up to Multiply Impact

Wise public action comes from the outflow of personal discipleship. Similarly, public climate and environmental stewardship is simply a matter of taking our personal actions



and inspiring others to join us in action — whether that’s our family and friends, our churches, our businesses and our local community, or at our statehouses and in Congress.

For example, upgrading our home to be more energy efficient is wise environmental and financial stewardship of our personal resources. It reduces not only our carbon footprint but also our energy bill by hundreds each year. How much greater would the impact be if we invited our churches and neighbors to do the same?

Improving the energy efficiency of our church buildings means greenhouse gas reductions are measured in tons and energy savings in the thousands — cost savings that can be put towards church missions. According to the ENERGY STAR for Congregations program, if all of America’s 370,000 congregations increased their energy efficiency by 20 percent, it would save nearly \$630 million for missions and other priorities. It would also prevent more than 2.6 million tons of greenhouse gas emissions — equivalent to erasing traffic emissions from 480,000 cars or planting 60,000 trees.

Finally, how large would our impact be if we advocated to our elected officials for smart legislation that lowers the cost barrier for churches to do energy efficiency upgrades and gain access to similar financial assistance that businesses have long enjoyed through tax credits? This is exactly what many of us and other multifaith partners did, creating a first-of-its-kind grant program at the U.S. Department of Energy for houses of worship and other nonprofits. This grant program is set to open for applications in early 2023.

Wise climate action and anti-pollution policies are “benefit multipliers” whose impact goes far beyond good environmental stewardship.

Beyond Environmental Stewardship

Acting locally to help low-income households access energy efficiency funds from utility companies and other sources is not just for the climate — it means increased family stability as the threat of eviction from failure to afford bills is reduced; it means healthier children as home weatherization upgrades improve indoor air quality and remove toxic mold.

Climate and anti-pollution solutions are also acts of restorative justice. Creating green spaces and removing sources of pollution sited intentionally in Black and brown neighborhoods are key steps in addressing decades of historic and unjust community disinvestment due to redlining.

By reducing the severity of climate-fueled drought that causes crop loss and food insecurity, climate solutions are anti-hunger and anti-poverty solutions. They are central to preventing displacement, human trafficking, and refugee crises triggered by drought-exacerbated civil unrest and war, like we witnessed in Syria, or by extreme weather disasters, as witnessed in Honduras after it was hit by two monster category-4 hurricanes in the span of two weeks that left communities in utter devastation.

Although we may not always agree on specific policy proposals or prescriptions, taking our creation care practices into the public square is essential to walking in the full authority God has placed in our hands as stewards of his entire creation and faithfully shepherding the ministries, mission and people God entrusts to us. **1**

What Should We Do?

Here are just a few ideas to consider:

1. Pray for wisdom: Pray for discernment when sorting through confusing messages about climate change. Pray for the poor and vulnerable who are most impacted. Pray for our church and government leaders as they process opportunities to care for creation.
2. Make lifestyle changes: Live more simply and use energy more efficiently. Consider buying organic, recycling responsibly, composting, switching to renewal energy sources and less polluting vehicles, and living with restraint.
3. Give generously: Contribute to evangelical creation care organizations as well as ministries that are helping vulnerable communities become more resilient in the face of climate change and other environmental disruptions.
4. Advocate for local energy efficiency: Encourage your church, school and other buildings to use renewable energy sources and to save money through lowering energy use.
5. Support policies that promote responsible care of God’s creation: Urge government leaders to decrease carbon footprints; reduce pollution; support energy efficiency standards, clean (or low pollution) transportation, and sustainable agriculture; provide safe drinking water; encourage responsible use of natural resources; and protect wildlife and their natural habitats. Write to national leaders directly at [NAE.org/take-action](https://nae.org/take-action).





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The Biblical Mandate for Creation Care

What does the Scripture have to say about environmental stewardship? Is this a political issue or a moral issue? As Christians should we be concerned, or should we be investing our time in things more “eternal”? Do we have responsibilities toward *this* earth as citizens of the kingdom of Heaven? Or should we simply be setting our sights on the *New Earth*?

This is obviously an important question, a relevant, and contemporary question, but as I have travelled, and spoken, and written on this topic in Christian circles for the last decade, I have found that the Church is largely paralyzed on this topic. Why has the Church, the historic moral compass of our society, gotten so lost on this topic?

One reason is politics. It is evident that in our highly polarized context, supposedly, if you are pro-life, you cannot also be pro-environment; if you are a patriot, you cannot also be a conservationist. So, if you are a Christian, you cannot also be an environmentalist. In too many circles, environmental concern has been filed away as an issue *belonging* to a particular political party and has been judged guilty by association. But we know as members of the citizenry of heaven, holiness isn't defined by earthly politics. Rather, there's only one set of politics the Christian should be concerned about, and those are the politics of the kingdom of God.

A second reason some are not engaged is common to many issues of social justice — we the wealthy, Western elite are largely sheltered from the impact of environmental degradation on the global community. We don't *see* how unregulated use of land and water decimates the lives of the marginalized. We have not witnessed the sterilization of the fertile fields of Punjab India at the hands of unrestrained industrial agriculture or the impact of untreated industrial

waste and sewage on the Ganges River. Closer to home, very few of us have seen the backroads of Eastern Kentucky and West Virginia where mountain-top removal coal mining has rendered the lives of the “least of these” a living hell. So, we struggle to understand the issue of creation care as a part of our mandated care for “the widow and the orphan.”

But perhaps most influential is the theological belief embraced by many in the Church that the created order is bound only for destruction. The resulting assumption is that it is ethically appropriate to use the earth's resources as aggressively as possible to accomplish what really matters: the conversion of souls. As a result, many evangelicals have inadvertently dismissed the issue of environmental stewardship as peripheral (or even alien) to the theological concerns of the Bible.

In my most recent book, “Stewards of Eden: What Scripture Says About the Environment and Why It Matters,” I make the case that our rule of faith and praxis, our Bible, has a great deal to say about this topic. And what it has to say is that creation care is an expression of the character of our God.

Creation

Let's begin at the beginning. In the great blueprint of creation, God's people are gifted with a land grant, the garden of Eden, and instructed to cultivate and protect it. “Then Yahweh



Hear more from Sandra Richter on What the Scripture Says About the Environment at NAE.org/richterpodcast.



Elohim took the human and put him into the garden of Eden to tend it [lě'obdâ] and to guard it [lěšomrâ]" (Genesis 2:15).

As the stewards of Eden, Adam and Eve are instructed to rule as they have been ruled. They are also reminded that their land grant could be revoked if they failed to abide by the stipulations of God's covenant. They did fail, and they lost the garden. But redemptive history reports that God's expectations regarding his land and creatures remain.

Israel

Similar to Adam and Eve, Israel is offered a land grant (the land of Canaan) — a land grant which they too will lose if they fail to adhere to God's covenant. And perhaps surprising to us, the law codes of ancient Israel speak directly to sustainable agriculture (Exodus 23:10–12), humane animal husbandry (Deuteronomy 5:14–15, 25:4), and care for the wild creature and its habitat (Deuteronomy 22:6–7). Even environmental terrorism in warfare is addressed and forbidden (Deuteronomy 20:19). Not a value system one would expect from the subsistence economy of an embattled Iron Age kingdom!

Israel was of course tempted to ignore these laws (in fact we have good evidence that they did ignore these laws), but the laws are recorded all the same. Why? To instruct us that in God's government neither personal economic security, economic expansion, nor even national defense were viable excuses for the abuse of the land or the creatures who lived upon it. It was never okay to take from the land everything that a populace could. Rather, Israel was commanded to leave enough that the next generation might flourish as well.

All of these Old Testament laws of land, trees and creature communicate the same idea and the same principle: the land and its creatures belong to God, not us. God cares for them, and he expects his people to do the same.

The New Covenant

There are those who would argue that there is no environmental concern to be found in the New Covenant, or worse, that the New Testament is actually opposed to the distraction of environmental concern. Doesn't 2 Peter 3:10 say that "the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up"? If the created order is bound for destruction, isn't it logical to use the earth's resources as aggressively as possible to bring as many souls as possible into the kingdom?

If it were true that the created order was bound only for destruction, then yes. But when read according to their intended Old Testament lexicon, these images in Peter (and Thessalonians) are recognized as the standard Old Testament images of the Day of Yahweh — the judgment and deliverance of Adam's world from the curse, *not* annihilation.

Indeed, Romans 8:19–21 teaches us that it is not only humanity who waits anxiously for "the revealing of the sons of God," but all of the created order as well. For what do we hope? "[T]hat the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God" (verse 21). The hope of our salvation is not merely the resurrection of the children of Eden, it is the resurrection of Eden as well. **E**



The Human-Earth Relationship

What a Consumption Mentality Reveals

You’ve probably heard the term “throwaway society,” a way of life driven by the production of more and more things that we use up quickly and throw away. When most of the objects we use are disposable, we easily apply this mentality to other aspects of our lives. Are relationships “disposable”? Is the church I attend “disposable”? Is the marsh in our neighborhood “disposable”?

In Genesis, we see that God made humans in his own image (1:27) — part of creation, yet somehow set apart, having “dominion” over creation. “Dominion” has often been interpreted to mean “domination,” as if we can do whatever we want to the planet. And humans throughout history have certainly exploited the planet for our consumption, as if we were the only ones that mattered.

Our Place on Earth

But a closer, fuller interpretation of the Bible tells a different story about humans and our place on earth. Starting with Genesis 1–2, we see that God lovingly and purposefully created the world. God imbues creation with his own creativity, empowering humans and other creatures as partners in the work. God calls creation good.



Liuan Huska writes on the intersection of environment, culture and religion, and is a board member of A Rocha USA.

Then, in Genesis 9, after Noah’s flood, God makes an everlasting covenant with the earth and its creatures. Later in Job (38–42), we see a breathtaking vision of God as maker and sustainer of the universe, where even things that appear to be “wild, repugnant, and dangerous,” such as the Leviathan (sea monster), have a place.

Finally, in Revelation (21–22), we see a vision of God’s good future, which includes the city of God coming down — God making his home among us — and a renewed heaven and earth. Within the arc of the entire biblical story, we get a sense of God’s ongoing love for the things he has made, and his desire to see creation thrive, not be destroyed.

The meaning of “dominion,” if we understand Jesus to be the truest example, is one of service. For Jesus, to rule is to serve.

The meaning of “dominion,” if we understand Jesus to be the truest example, is one of service. “For Jesus, to rule is to serve. To exercise dominion is to suffer, if necessary, for the good of the other,” writes religion professor Steven Bouma-Prediger. This definition of true ruling illuminates God’s further call to humans in Genesis 2:15 to “work and keep” the earth. In other words, humans are called to serve and protect the earth.

A Gift Economy

Have you ever been in an apple orchard during harvest season or stumbled upon a Juneberry tree heavy with sweet, ripe fruit? When we receive these gifts — from God and not of our own making — our hearts fill with gratitude. Gratitude, in turn, fosters relationship and responsibility. We receive the gifts of the earth, and we are compelled to ask, “What can we give in return?” We want to nurture as we are nurtured.

A gift economy, writes Robin Wall Kimmerer in her book “Braiding Sweetgrass,” stands against our modern market economy, where there is no gratitude in the exchange, only a sense of “I bought this. I deserve it.” Receiving God’s good

gifts spurs us to share. The abundance is not just for us, to be stored away as security for the future in an act of isolated independence. When we share in the abundance, we build relationships of reciprocity, forging deeper security as an interdependent community.

Kimmerer tells the story of an anthropologist who asked a hunter in the Brazilian rainforest where he would store the meat from a sizable kill that was more than his family could eat. The hunter was puzzled by the question.

Store the meat? Why would he do that? Instead, he sent out an invitation to a feast, and soon the neighboring families were gathered around his fire, until every last morsel was consumed. This seemed like maladaptive behavior to the anthropologist, who asked again: given the uncertainty of meat in the forest, why didn’t he store the meat for himself, which is what the economic system of his home culture would predict. “Store my meat? I store my meat in the belly of my brother,” replied the hunter.

Honest Reflection

The immensity of our ecological problems can be overwhelming, leading to paralysis and despair. One place to start is with honest reflection on our own beliefs and practices. Our culture of consumption forms in us a “disposable mentality” and a sense of being in competition with the rest of the natural world.

This paradigm assumes we live in scarcity and, as a result, must hoard what we have, accumulating more and more. But, through the creation story, we understand that the living world is filled with God’s extravagant gifts.

Our habits reflect the truth we believe and the stories we tell. What stories are we telling in the ways that we treat the things God has given us? Are we lockstep with the “throwaway society”? Or do we live in a way that recognizes an abundant, good world that God wants to restore with us? **E**

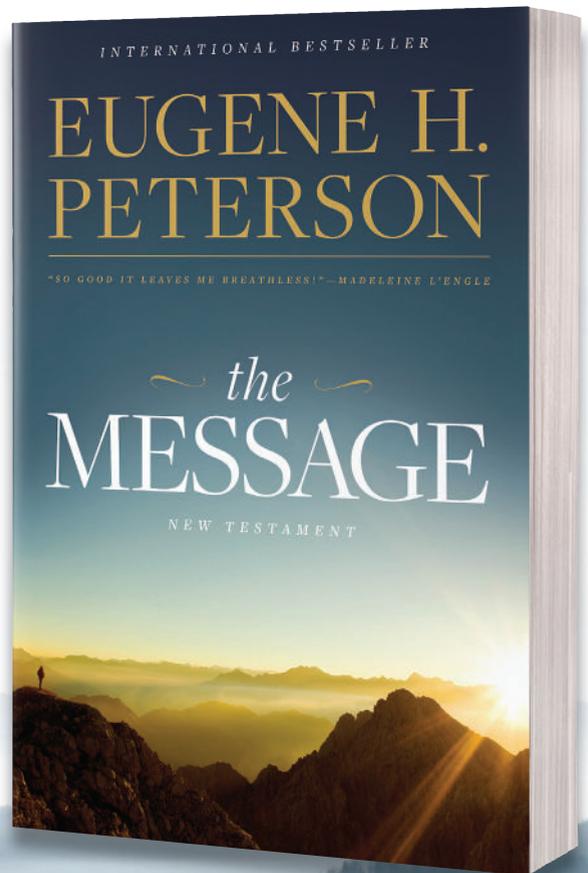
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More Creation Care Sermons, Please

Nearly two-thirds of evangelical Christian leaders say they have heard a sermon on their responsibility to care for God’s creation, according to the January/February 2022 Evangelical Leaders Survey. Many leaders regret the lack of biblical teaching on creation care and stewardship in some pulpits.

From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible offers rich theological insights on our calling and responsibility as stewards of God’s beautiful world,” said Walter Kim, president of the National Association of Evangelicals. “Caring for creation is a fundamental part of Christian discipleship that should be woven into the normal cycle of biblical preaching.”

One leader who is doing this is Kevin McBride, senior pastor of Raymond Baptist Church in Raymond, New Hampshire. “Each year I take the opportunity around cultural events such as Earth Day to bring the biblical voice to bear on creation care concerns,” he said. McBride notes that in recent years helpful resources have become available to pastors through groups that focus on the intersection of faith and science.

Some leaders noted that while they have not heard an entire sermon on creation care, they have heard creation care themes integrated into sermons on other topics.

“Evangelicals are rightly known for our commitment to biblical authority,” said Kim. “Pastors who preach the whole counsel of God will inevitably address the Bible’s repeated commands to imitate God in caring for all that he has made.”

Leaders who have not heard creation care sermons include Jim Lyon, general director of Church of God Ministries (Anderson, IN). “I have not heard anything even remotely connected to this area of conversation that is so prominent in the public square. I regret this blank page in the pulpits of our churches. The fault lines are controversial and politicized, of course. For some, the attendant issues are not central to the gospel and, therefore, off the table. Again, I wish it were not so,” he said.

Kim added, “Evangelical leaders do not want sermons on trendy topics disconnected from the biblical text. But preaching on creation care reflects a deep commitment to God’s revelation both in Scripture and in creation.” **E**



Loving the Least of These

How Climate Affects the Poor

Bangladesh is a river delta the size of Wisconsin. Most of its territory is less than 30 feet above sea level; consequently, water and flooding are major facts of life. But the frequency and severity of weather extremes — major cyclones, killer floods and drought — are escalating.

Peter Vander Meulen, director of the Christian Reformed Church's Office of Social Justice, shares the story of one Bangladeshi farmer. Alliuddin owns less than three acres of land and successfully manages multiple small, irrigated vegetable plots to produce enough food and income to feed, house and clothe his family. He uses irrigation water from the small branch of a stream with its source in the hills of Assam. In past years this stream had been a reliable source of water throughout the long dry season, but now it resembles a shallow, seasonal stream. Due to changes in rainfall patterns (shorter, more intense bursts of rain resulting in huge but short-duration runoff), once-perennial rivers are showing signs of becoming seasonal, and precious soil is eroding.

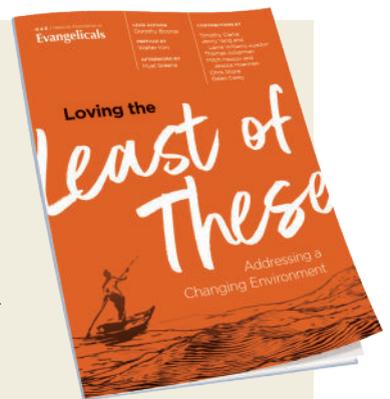
If Alliuddin's irrigation source dries up before his vegetables are harvested, he has only a few options. With funds, he may find an alternative water source, such as a shallow or deep motorized well. But the pace of change and the addition of other factors such as deforestation in the jungles and hills of India make these transitions more difficult.

From more than 500 million small farms around the world, farmers like Alliuddin produce around a third of the world's food. If Alliuddin and the farmers on similar small farms cannot cope with a changing climate, the world's

food supply, along with the lives of millions more, will be threatened.

Stories like Alliuddin's illustrate how hard it is for the poor to deal with changes in the environment. The impact on the poor can be summarized as four main problems: (1) Poor people are more affected by disasters, particularly in health outcomes. (2) The costs of prevention and survival (mitigation and adaptation) are higher relative to their income. (3) They are more likely to be displaced, and (4) they are more likely to be affected by ensuing conflicts.

Natural disasters leave us heartbroken for those affected. We are concerned that continued and intensified environmental change will threaten the lives and well-being of more and more people, and particularly the most vulnerable. The NAE published *Loving the Least of These* in 2011. A revised version with updated science and examples will be released this summer at NAE.org/lovingtheleast.



Problem	Impacts on the Poor	Examples
Disasters	<p>The poor become more vulnerable after disasters as they often have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • no savings to deal with crop or home loss; • livelihoods more likely to depend on ecosystem resources; no flood or other disaster insurance; and • health risks (see below). 	<p>Hurricanes Ida and Harvey wiped out many small coastal communities. Some of those with poor residents could not afford to rebuild.</p>
Health	<p>Increased climate-change-related health problems result from both abrupt disasters and gradual changes. Such environmental changes result in health problems that stem from heat waves, spread of diseases, increased parasites, air pollution, droughts and floods.</p>	<p>Poor children are more likely to have asthma, which is made worse by increased heat.</p>
Costs of Adaption	<p>Those impacted by poverty are less likely to have reserve funds to allocate to adaptation efforts. If they choose to spend money on adapting to or preparing for changes (such as building cisterns, moving a settlement, or adding technology to save energy or water), they do so at the sacrifice of other necessary items, such as food, education or health care.</p>	<p>Erratic rain over the last decades has forced farmers in Kenya to adjust. Farmers now plant almost anytime it rains, because they don't know if the rains will continue. Still the additional costs for extra seed do not guarantee crop success.</p>
Costs of Mitigation	<p>Preventing greenhouse gas emissions means changing the way the economy is structured. New technologies are first available to the wealthy, only later to poorer people. Lowering greenhouse gas emissions could easily come at the cost of recent gains in global human development. Sharing of technology, resources, and costs is necessary.</p>	<p>The cost of food rises when fuel prices rise, a phenomenon illustrated by the 2022 global rise in food prices following the beginning of the Russia/ Ukraine war, although the cause of fuel limitation was not a switch to renewable fuels as it would be in climate change prevention.</p>
Conflicts	<p>Lack of resources leads to violent conflicts over territory and goods.</p>	<p>Nomadic herders, fishermen and farmers in Nigeria clash over resources such as land and water.</p>
Displacement	<p>Disasters, resource limitation, and conflict can cause massive displacement of people within and between countries. Sea level rise is causing the relocation of coastal groups and islanders.</p>	<p>Coastal Alaskans leave their homes as the sea takes back their land. Solomon Islanders are also relocating as their islands disappear.</p>





Worship the Creator

“In the darkness, something was happening at last. A voice had begun to sing.... There were no words. There was hardly even a tune. But it was, beyond comparison, the most beautiful noise he had ever heard. It was so beautiful he could hardly bear it.” So begins the account of Narnia’s creation in C.S. Lewis’ “The Magician’s Nephew.”

We have all experienced that almost unbearably beauty of creation. Perhaps it was the wonder of seeing the stars as a child with an unfettered imagination. Or maybe in a moment of spiritual or emotional exhaustion, you breathed deeply on a walk in the woods and discovered that, in turn, the Spirit of God breathed hope into your life.

Praise is more than some vague compliment, “God, you are really nice.” The adoration of God recognizes the authority of God. And this praise of divine majesty is not the sole domain of humanity: “My mouth will speak in praise of the Lord. Let every creature praise his holy name for ever and ever” (Psalm 145:21). We may not fully understand how creation praises God or how God may receive such praise, but we share a companionship with all the cosmos in the praise of God. We were made to join creation in a chorus of praise to God.

But alas, as with all things in this world, sin has blighted our stewardship of creation. We can respond by joining indigenous peoples, refugees, immigrants and pilgrims in the following prayer from the “Lift Up Your Hearts” hymnal (created by the Christian Reformed Church in North

America, a member denomination of the National Association of Evangelicals):

Creator, forgive us.
The earth is yours and everything that is in it. But we forget.
In our arrogance we think we own it.
In our greed we think we can steal it.
In our ignorance we worship it.
In our thoughtlessness we destroy it.
We forget that you created it
To bring praise and joy to you.
That you gave it as a gift, for us to steward,
For us to enjoy,
For us to see more clearly
Your beauty and your majesty.

For the believer, the care of creation is fundamentally not an expression of politics but an act of worship, whether in adoration, repentance or stewardship. **E**

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