



Environmental Stewardship

Why should we care for the earth?

Scripture Focus: Genesis 1; Psalm 104; Isaiah 11:6–9; Matthew 6:25–34; Romans 8:18–25

Article: “Environmental Wager,” by Andy Crouch, CHRISTIANITY TODAY

You can use this Bible Study on your own or as part of a group. Go to <http://todayschristianwomanstore.com/biblestudies.html> to download **free** resources on how to lead a life-changing Bible study and tips for getting the most out of participating in small group experience.

Should we care about climate change? Does pollution really matter to our faith? Isn't it all going to burn in the end anyway? Environmental issues can be a hot-button for Christians, often caught up in debates about politics and concern about New Age or pantheistic Earth-worship. But when we look beyond the controversies, what does the *Bible* say?

This Today's Christian Woman Bible Study will help you deepen your faith as you dig into Scripture, reflect on the truth of God's Word, and take action steps and live out your faith as you embrace biblical environmental stewardship. You can use this Today's Christian Woman Bible Study on your own as part of your personal spiritual growth, or you can use it in a group setting as you discuss God's Word with a community of friends and grow in faith together.

Connect

Option: If you'd like, begin your study with this interactive experience.

Break your group into smaller groups of two or three and ask them to make a list of what they feel are “The 7 Habits of Highly Environmental-Friendly People.” Tell the group they only have five minutes. After they are finished, give each group an opportunity to share their results.

Get Ready

Before the study, read the article “Environmental Wager” (included at the end of this study). Or, if you'd prefer, begin your meeting by reading the article aloud as a group.



Open Up

In *Science* magazine some years ago Lynn White Jr. argued that Christianity was largely responsible for the pollution ravaging our world today.¹ She said that while ancient civilizations

believe in a strong tie between the sacred and creation, Christians believe God is separate from the elements of nature—that he exists beyond creation. “In contrast to other religions, Christianity sees no gods rumbling in the thunder, no demons racing with the scorching wildfires, and no spirits rustling through the treetops,” White says. White also blames the divine command to “subdue” the Earth as the core reason why Christians “demote our environment to mere toys placed here at our disposal.”

- >> What stands out to you most from the article “Environmental Wager?” Why?
- >> Is White right that Christianity is inherently anti-environmental? Offer examples that support your opinion.
- >> How would you answer White’s charges against Christians? What about the mandate given to humans to subdue the earth—is it valid? Is it misused? How ought it to be used or understood?

¹ White, Lynn Jr. “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis,” Vol. 155, pp. 1203-1207.

Seek

Before launching into your time of Scripture exploration, pause as a group to pray. Express your desire to seek out God's truth in his Word and to seek guidance from the Holy Spirit during your discussion.

Discover

Christianity sees the world as the good creation of God.

Read **Genesis 1**.

God had an active part in creation. He formed everything out of nothing; all he did was speak. He created the boundaries for the waters and placed the stars each in their position. He created all of the plants and animals. After he was done creating, he declared it was "good." Then God made Adam and Eve in his own image and gave them responsibility, and it was "very good." The world is God's good creation.

In Genesis 1 there is a clear distinction between God and the created world. Sin and evil were not initially part of God's good creation; instead they are an aberration that contaminated it later, like a cancerous blight. Also, Genesis 1 also tells us that humans are made in God's image and that work has both dignity and purpose. Humans were meant to live and not die, and to live in community. We share an ongoing relationship of love and intimacy with our Creator.

- >> How do you observe the goodness of God's creation in the world around you? What are some examples of this God-made goodness that come to mind?
- >> How might this view of the world as inherently good and created by God promote environmental care? How do you think it affects the meaning of human responsibility for the world?
- >> How is a Christian practicing environmental stewardship different from a person who ascribes a spiritual character to nature?

God reaffirms care for and an interest in creation.

Read **Psalms 104**.

There is a serendipitous delight woven through this psalm. The poet has a clear eye for creation's glory. He watches the daily skies. He marks the changing seasons, and his vision telescopes out to sea.

All of this meteorological, biological, and astronomical investigation is deeply religious in character. The earth is not a laboratory for big business to exploit in hopes of windfall profits, nor is it merely a beautiful park welcoming frazzled city dwellers or summer campers. Rather, this world is the neighborhood of God and finds its life only in response to God.

This is an important theological doctrine. If God only saves souls and primarily cares about right creedal statements, then this world holds little interest for the Christian. But if God is vitally connected to the genetic codes of animals and plants, if God dances with the energetic ions, if God rides the clouds like wind racers, if flowers turn their heads toward God's glory to find light, then we would do well to pay attention to the things that move the heart of God.

>> What stands out most to you from Psalm 104? Why?

>> Imagine a garden carefully planned, thoroughly planted, marvelously tended, and at the height of its beauty—what would you think of the garden's creator? How does this idea relate to God?

>> We often think and talk about God's involvement in the creation of the universe—but we may rarely consider God's active involvement in continuing to create, sustain, and care for all he has made. What are some examples of God's continual creation, sustenance, and care of his world? Of life itself? Brainstorm several ideas.

God will redeem and restore his creation.

Read **Romans 8:18–25**.

God will not only redeem people, but he will also redeem and restore his creation. The entire world around us has been affected by sin. Not only are we groaning for freedom from death and decay, but

Optional Activity

Go outside as a group and read **Matthew 6:25–34** together. Take five minutes to go on a short walk as you all look for evidence in nature of God's care and love for creation. Then talk about these questions:

- *How does this passage show God's care and love for creation?*
- *What does this passage reveal to us about God's love for us?*

God loves us, but he also loves his creation and delights in it. And we, who claim to be children of the heavenly Father, ought to walk sprightly in his steps.

the environment is too! Because of *our* sin, creation was subjected to God's curse of death. Therefore, God's redemption is not only seen as a rescue from sin and suffering, but it is also seen as a recovery of creation's glory.

Read **Revelation 21:1-7**.

We often think of heaven as out there—as somewhere else—but Scripture actually teaches that God's ultimate plan is eternal life for us here, on Earth. The new heaven and new earth will be a place where God's home will once again be among his people. God forever destroyed death, sorrow, and pain, and he is able and willing to offer the springs of the water of life to all that are willing.

- >> How does knowing that “creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time” affect the way you view creation?
- >> How is the evil that is within people also experienced by the birds, trees, earth, and the rest of God's creation? What are some examples that come to mind?
- >> Praise God—creation will one day be released from this groaning! Read **Isaiah 11:6-9**. What characteristics will the new earth have? What dimensions of our current existence do you think will last into eternity?

Change

It might take quite a bit of time to change your overall perspective on the environment, but it's definitely worth the time to become better educated on the topic and to pray about it. Why? Because God loves his creation and delights in it . . . and we should too! A good place to start in becoming a steward of God's creation is with The Three R's: reduce, reuse, and recycle. Reduce the gluttony of our consumerist lifestyle by choosing to buy less, waste less, and live more simply. Reuse what can be reused rather than throwing things away, and recycle rather than extend the contamination of landfills.

- >> If your church asked you to write a creedal statement, theological pronouncement, or doctrinal summary on Christian environmental stewardship, what would you write?
- >> In light of all you've read and discussed, what's one attitude, action, or pattern in your life that you sense God is leading you to change?

Take Action

Choose one of the following steps you'll do after the study to apply God's Word to your life.

- ▶ Select one of the passages you read during this study and commit it to memory. Make a daily habit of meditating on that passage from Scripture, inviting God to impress his truth upon your heart.
- ▶ What commitments can you make to earth care? What specific ways will you reduce, reuse, and recycle? List these on a piece of paper and give them to someone else who can ask you in two months and in six months what progress you have made.
- ▶ Seek approval to begin a class at your church that could be offered once a year on environmental stewardship. Bring in those who can answer questions about the resources of this world and how they can best be cared for. End each class with specific steps that the class commits to taking as Christian environmentalists.

Commit

Break up as individuals and find a location where you can be alone—maybe you could even sit outside. Take ten minutes to journal your thoughts and responses to the topic of stewardship. Ask God to give you his eyes to see creation differently than you might have before.



Explore More

Want to dig deeper into this topic? Check out these articles and online resources.

- >> **Christian Conservationists** from TodaysChristianWoman.com
- >> **Going Green for God** from TodaysChristianWoman.com
- >> **How Far to Go with Animal Rights** from ChristianBibleStudies.com
- >> **How Green Should We Be?** from TodaysChristianWoman.com
- >> **Top 10 Ways to Celebrate Earth Day** from TodaysChristianWoman.com
- >> **Why Going Green is Good for Your Soul** from TodaysChristianWoman.com

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Environmental Wager

Why evangelicals are—but shouldn't be—cool toward global warming.

By Andy Crouch

The theory is taken for granted by nearly every scientist working in the field. But because it is difficult to confirm experimentally, a few vocal skeptics continue to raise pointed questions. The skeptics find a ready audience among evangelical Christians, with groups like Focus on the Family saying that “significant disagreement exists within the scientific community regarding the validity of this theory.”

I'm not talking about evolution. Or maybe I am.

The issue in question is not our distant past but our near future. The theory is the all-but-unanimous scientific consensus that human beings are changing the climate by emitting gigatons of carbon into the atmosphere, and that if we do nothing to change our behavior, the warming trend that has taken hold for the past century may well become a runaway gallop.

Prompt action could not only avert the worst consequences—extreme drought and ocean levels rising as much as three feet by 2100—but could actually open up a new era of prosperity through the development of new, more efficient technologies. Some evangelical leaders—including the editors of *CHRISTIANITY TODAY*—have called for action to address climate change. For many churchgoers, the issue seems murky, its complexity amplified by claims of “significant disagreement.”

There is in fact no serious disagreement among scientists that human beings are playing a major role in global warming. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, whose scientific working group was chaired for many years by the evangelical Christian Sir John Houghton, concluded in 2001 that “most of the warming observed over the last 50 years is attributable to human activities.” These conclusions, Houghton points out, were vetted by more than 100 governments including the United States: “No assessments on any other scientific topic have been so thoroughly researched and reviewed.”

Unfortunately, there is another politically loaded issue where scientific agreement has failed to convince the public. If evangelicals mistrust scientists when they make

pronouncements about the future, it may be because of the history of antagonism between biblical faith and evolution. As pro-evolution philosopher Michael Ruse points out in a recent book, evolution began as an alternative to Christianity before it acquired scientific respectability. It was evolutionism—a naturalistic worldview that excluded the biblical Creator—before it was science.

The resulting battle between evolutionism and Christian faith has had countless unfortunate consequences. Some Christians resorted to a wooden interpretation of the first pages of Genesis that was no better as science than evolution was as a worldview. More recently, some scientists have reacted with fanatical hostility to the questions that proponents of Intelligent Design ask about evolution.

But perhaps no result of the creation–evolution stalemate is as potentially disastrous as the way it has stymied courageous action on climate change. In May 2005, for a serious article about Intelligent Design that described one proponent’s books as “packed with provocative ideas,” the editors of *The New Yorker* chose the snippy headline, “Why intelligent design isn’t.” Rhetoric like that hardly disposes conservative Christians to trust the impeccably researched articles about climate change the magazine published earlier in the year.

All science is ultimately a matter of trust. The tools, methods, and mathematical skills scientists acquire over years of training are beyond the reach of the rest of us, even of scientists in different fields. Thanks to the creation–evolution debate, mistrust between scientists and conservative Christians runs deep. But those scarred by battles with evolutionists might still consider heeding the scientists who are warning us about climate change. As an evangelical scientist said to me recently, the debate over climate change is very much like Pascal’s wager, that famous argument for belief in God.

Believe in God though he does not exist, Pascal argued, and you lose nothing in the end. Fail to believe when he does in fact exist, and you lose everything. Likewise, we have little to lose, and much technological progress, energy security, and economic efficiency to gain, if we act on climate change now—even if the worst predictions fail to come to pass. But if we choose inaction and are mistaken, we will leave our descendants a blighted world. As Pascal said, “You must wager. It is not optional. You are embarked. Which will you choose then? Let us see.”

—Andy Crouch is executive editor for CHRISTIANITY TODAY and executive producer of CHRISTIANITY TODAY’S **This is Our City** project. This article was published by CHRISTIANITY TODAY in June 2005.

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