

Chapter 1 – What is Creation Care?

We live in interesting times. From genetic engineering to instantaneous global communication to changing sexual ethics, today's world is radically different from that of previous generations. These changes have compelled the church to engage with a host of new questions, and seminary students now face many issues, challenges, and opportunities that would have been unimaginable only a few decades ago. One of the most critical questions facing the church today centers on the role the church should play regarding the modern environmental movement.

Environmental destruction undoubtedly presents one of the most pressing global dilemmas of the twenty-first century. Issues such as air and water pollution, deforestation, loss of biodiversity, and industrial toxicology not only give rise to concerns regarding human health, economic vitality, social justice, and biological ethics, but also bring up vital theological questions, such as:

- Does God care about species loss?
- What should a Christian approach to the use of natural resources look like?
- How do my purchasing decisions impact my global neighbors?
- Is there a connection between our stressed, busy lifestyles and our spiritual fatigue?

Understanding the connections between our actions and their corresponding social and environmental consequences is essential for engaging in dialogue on such questions.

Equally important, though, is comprehension of the theological principles and the biblical basis for taking care of God's creation. This "creation care" approach, as we will most often refer to it, puts critical social and environmental issues under a theological microscope to develop a practical, missional, biblically-based Toolkit. The Toolkit aims to assist seminaries in implementing policies, practices, and procedures that help them become better stewards of the earth.

The Seminary Stewardship Alliance (SSA) Toolkit is divided into nine parts. Part 1 addresses the question, "What is creation care?" We begin with an introduction that details why we should care, followed by a brief overview of the biblical foundation for creation care and some key creation care terms and principles.

Part 2 of the SSA Toolkit highlights some important first steps in starting a creation care plan on your seminary campus. We address creation care leadership on campus, as well as how to identify key stakeholders and form a stewardship team. We also discuss forming a creation care plan and institutionalizing creation care across the campus.

Parts 3 through 9 break down creation care into seven key sectors across campus, including curricula development, community and spiritual life, administration and planning, energy, dining services, building and grounds, and waste reduction. Each sector provides specific action items, ideas, and opportunities—a framework for broadening the scope of creation care initiatives across campus.

Why Care?

Why should we care about creation? With so many other pressing global and theological issues, why should we prioritize caring for the planet?

First, we should care about creation because it brings glory to God. From the very beginning of scripture we see that God created the natural world and called it “very good” (Gen 1:31). Psalm 96:13 says, “Let all creation rejoice before the Lord.” Throughout scripture we see praise to God coming from trees, fields, the heavens, the seas, the sun, the moon, the stars, the clouds, ocean creatures, lightning, hail, snow, mountains hills, wild animals, cattle, birds, and much more. If these parts of nature bring glory to God, then who are we to carelessly destroy them? Why care? Because caring for God’s creation means caring for that which brings him praise and worship.

Second, we care about creation because doing so helps other people. The second part of the Great Commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself. The majority of world problems today are either in part caused or exacerbated by environmental degradation. Polluted drinking water is a major cause of disease around the world. Coal mining leads to increased cancer risk, respiratory problems, birth defects, and other health issues for area residents. Deforestation in developing countries leads to erosion, soil loss, and poor crop production, which all play a significant role in poverty, hunger, and human trafficking. Caring for God’s creation produces positive results for people. Conversely, neglecting our call to care for creation directly contributes to human suffering. Why care? Because God calls us to put the needs of others before our own.

Third, environmental issues are ethical issues and provide an opportunity to draw others toward God. The way that we treat the earth reflects our values. Is it right for us to use up the entire world’s supply of nonrenewable resources in just a few centuries, leaving none for future generations? Are there moral implications for the human-induced elimination of species created by God? Am I acting rightly toward my neighbor if my actions cause his or her quality of life to be decreased in order to maintain my standard of living? These ethical questions directly correspond to environmental issues. By acting out our values of love, compassion, humility, and self-sacrifice, we have an opportunity to “be Christ” to a needy world. Why care?

Because as Christ-followers we aim to do what is right and wish to point others to God through our actions.

Fourth, we should care because God told us to. One of the first commandments in scripture is to tend and keep the garden (Genesis 2:15). Over and over throughout scripture, our role as stewards of God's creation is clear. Why care? Because God's Word calls us to care.

While there are many other possible answers, these represent a basic overview of some of the more significant responses to "why care?" We will leave it up to you, our seminary partners, to explore other responses with your students and in your scholarship. As Christians, we have a unique opportunity to positively impact the world with a message of hope through biblically-based environmental stewardship. This stewardship values God's creation, looks to the needs of others, seeks to respond ethically to environmental issues, and responds in joyful obedience to God's call to care for the earth.

A Biblical Foundation

Many excellent books have been written expositing the biblical basis for creation care, so we will keep this section intentionally brief. Below you will find a short list of some key biblical passages, organized around theological concepts, which point to our call to care for God's creation. For a more thorough examination of this topic, see Appendix B.

- God created everything
 - Genesis 1-2
 - Nehemiah 9:6
 - John 1:3
 - Colossians 1:15-16
- God owns everything
 - Deuteronomy 10:14
 - I Chronicles 29:11
 - Job 41:11
 - Psalm 24:1-2
- God loves his creation
 - Genesis 1:31
 - Genesis 9:9-10
 - Psalm 145:9-16
- Creation reveals the Creator
 - Job 12:7-10
 - Psalm 19:1-4
 - Romans 1:20
- Creation praises the Creator
 - Psalm 96:11-13

- Psalm 148:1-10
 - Isaiah 55:12
- God sustains the creation
 - Psalm 65:9-13
 - Psalm 104:10-14
 - Colossians 1:17
 - Hebrews 1:3
- Humanity is responsible for stewarding creation
 - Genesis 2:15
 - Leviticus 25:2-5, 23-24
- Humanity should not defile the land
 - Isaiah 5:8-10
 - Romans 8:22
 - Revelation 11:18
- God redeems creation
 - 2 Chronicles 7:13-14
 - Acts 3:21
 - Romans 8:19-21
 - Colossians 1:20

Key Terms

In order to avoid miscommunication, we have defined below several key terms used throughout the Toolkit. Because some phrases are often associated with certain agendas and politics, we wish to make clear what we do—and do not—mean when we use the following terms.

- **Creation care** – Creation care simply means taking care of God’s creation. Although closely related to the phrase “environmental stewardship,” we have more often chosen to use “creation care” because of its theo-centric implications. For our purposes, the term “creation” refers to the natural world and implies God as the source of it all.
- **Stewardship** – While the term stewardship is used in many contexts (time, money, talents, resources, etc.), this document uses it primarily to refer to our role as caretakers of God’s creation.
- **Environment/al/-ism** – Although the term is often associated with certain political agendas and belief systems, we employ it only in its most literal sense; in this document, “environment” merely refers to the created, natural world and “environmentalism” is the care for it.
- **Sustainability** – We will primarily use this term to refer to the responsible use of natural resources to meet current needs while passing along a healthy planet for future generations.

- **Climate Change/Global Warming** – Absent from the SSA Toolkit is any mention of global climate change (sometimes referred to as global warming). Our Biblical call to care for God’s creation remains the same regardless of one’s beliefs about global climate change.