

Why Care?

from Blessed Earth: Serving God, Saving the Planet

Why should we care about creation? It's a good question. After all, aren't people more important than nature? Doesn't taking care of the earth distract from sharing the Gospel? What about Revelation, the rapture, and the return of Christ? Isn't earth care just a liberal political issue? Shouldn't I be more concerned about other causes? These questions, and others, point to common Christian concerns surrounding environmental issues, and when viewed from a political or philosophical perspective, they appear to hold some weight. However, if we turn the conversation on its head and approach it from a biblical perspective, we see an entirely different viewpoint.

First of all, 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, small creatures, 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 greatest commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself. The majority of major world problems today either have direct environmental causes or environmental issues have exacerbated them. Polluted drinking water is a major cause of disease around the world. Coal mining leads to increased cancer risk, respiratory problems, birth defects, and many more health issues for area residents. Poor irrigation methods, changing climate conditions, and deforestation all lead to increased desertification, which, in turn, contributes to global poverty, hunger, and ethnic warfare. Deforestation in developing countries leads to erosion, soil loss, and poor crop production, which all play a significant role in urbanization, poverty, hunger, and human trafficking. The stories go on and on, but the bottom line is that caring for God's creation produces positive results for people. Likewise, 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 needs.

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. Has God given animals an inherent value, or are they merely resources for us to use? 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 are ethical questions that directly correspond to environmental issues, and like it or not, the world is watching to see how Christians respond to them. By acting out our values of love, compassion, humility, and self-sacrifice, we have an unprecedented 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. In creating us in his image, God gave us a great privilege, and a great responsibility. Why care? Because God's Word calls us to care.

While there are many other possible answers that could be given to the question "why care," these represent a basic overview of some of the more significant responses. We will leave it up to you to explore the others. Through our faith in Christ, and because of a scriptural foundation that not only values, but actually commands care for creation, Christians certainly hold 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 our call to care for the earth.