BEYOND STEWARDSHIP
New Approaches to Creation Care

Edited by David Paul Warners and Matthew Kuperus Heun
Foreword by Bill McKibben
Afterword by Loren Wilkinson

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Christian Perspectives in Science Seminar
Calvin University
Science Building 010
Friday, 6 September 2019

Beyond Stewardship asks: “What if God didn’t place humans on earth to be stewards of creation but something else?” and “If not stewards, then what?” These essays offer ways to think more carefully about the relationship we have with the nonhuman creation and to act more wisely as humans embedded within and dependent upon that creation.

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— Leslie Leyland Fields, author of the award-winning Crossing the Waters

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This book is paradigm-shifting and conversation-changing. What would it mean to think about environmental concerns in terms of reconciliation rather than merely stewardship or responsibility? Whether you’re just beginning to think about environmental discipleship or you’ve been passionate about creational justice for a long time, this book is a provocative primer.

— James K. A. Smith, Gary and Henrietta Byker Chair, Philosophy Department at Calvin College
Story

Efrain Chacon
Chacon Family Compound

Efrain Chacon with sons Marino and Rolando
Chacon Orchards

Hotel Savegre
PARQUE NACIONAL LOS QUETZALES

BIENVENIDOS

ALTITUD MÁXIMA: 3.019 msnm
EXTENSIÓN: 4.117 ha

SISTEMA NACIONAL DE ÁREAS DE CONSERVACIÓN
MINISTERIO DE AMBIENTE Y ENERGÍA
Javier Chacon, Monica Chacon, Raquel Chacon, Ana Li Warners, Rachel Warners
Need for Fresh Motivation

- Graph showing temperature in degrees centigrade (compared with 1960-1990 baseline) and atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO2 in parts per million).

- Chart illustrating species extinction and human population over time.
Another book?

1980

1991

2019
Limitations of Christian Environmental Stewardship

“As the authors of this book point out, stewardship is a limited idea, suggesting at best a dutiful sense of earnest commitment. For some reason, the word always gives me the nagging sense that it’s time again to mow the lawn. It is not particularly joyful. It misses the gospel call to love. Oh, and beyond that, it clearly isn’t working.”

–Bill McKibben, Foreword
Audience and Purpose

“The intended audience for Beyond Stewardship is Christians who have a passion for and concerns about God’s creation. Its purpose is to equip Christians to live better in the creation by helping us all think more intentionally about the relationship between humans and nonhuman creation in which we are necessarily and thoroughly embedded . . .

“. . . we urge readers to envision with us a future in which all Christians, as well as their churches and denominations, actively work towards a more sustainable world . . .”

—Heun and Warners, Preface
Themes
“We sit between the way the creation is (damaged) and the way the creation ought to be (flourishing), and we don’t know what to do.

“Beyond Stewardship is a book for Christians who are distraught by the lament of the Maker and compelled by the lament of the creation. It is for those who recognize their role as destroyer and find themselves on a path through lament to forgiveness, improved relationships, and recommitment to repair the damage they have done in the past and to do less harm in the future.”

—Matthew Kuperus Heun, Chapter 1
“First, all people must recognize the reality of environmental racism. Next, privileged people must develop empathy for and learn from the people most affected by environmental injustice. Then privileged people must admit and lament complicity in the formation and perpetuation of environmental injustice. Finally, restorative action must occur.”

—Gail Gunst Heffner, Chapter 11
Humility

“Christians who want to live in ways that promote the integrity, stability, and beauty of creation face these frustrating limits. We buy products from around the world, and these products have positive and negative impacts on God’s creation. At the same time, we can never have complete knowledge of these impacts, and therefore we can never make fully informed decisions. We are and always will be finite creatures.”

—James R. Skillen, Chapter 7
“[D]iscoveries of humanity’s intimate entanglement with microbial life complicate the theological idea that we are separate from and superior to the rest of creation. How superior to animals can we be if we depend on them to be ourselves?

“When we understand that matter matters for redemption, caring for the creation becomes a mutual stewardship wherein we acknowledge that the flesh that supports our biological and spiritual renewal needs us to return the favor. We move beyond mere stewardship to symbiotic stewardship as we embrace our creaturely dependence.”

—Aminah Al-Attas Bradford, Chapter 5
“Scripture does not ultimately call us to use and manage the creation. Rather, it calls us to be in intimate kinship with it.”

—Kyle Meyaard-Schaap, Chapter 4

“God’s human and nonhuman creatures fundamentally belong together. The strong bond that unites them is more like a loving family relationship than an instrumental relationship between a steward and a resource. The word *kinship* captures the nature of this bond.”

—Matthew Halteman and Megan Halteman Zwart, Chapter 9
“Humans should understand themselves as active participants within the creation and learn to live in affirming kinship with it. Acknowledging our interdependence with the nonhuman creation is necessary for the true flourishing of all creation.”

—Becky Roselius Haney, Chapter 10
More Themes

- We are Earthlings (Clarence Joldersma)
- Audience matters (Kathi Groenendyk)
- Names matter (Debra Rienstra)
- Stewardship → Earthkeeping (Steven Bouma-Prediger)
- Stewardship → Place-making (Mark D. Bjelland)
- Who gets to be a steward? (Dietrich Bouma)
- Walking through a world of gifts (David Warners)
Process
Observers

Randy Van Dragt
Ecosystem Management
Calvin University

Michele Loyd-Paige
Sociology
Calvin University

Bill Deutsch
Aquatic Ecology
Auburn University
BEYOND STEWARDSHIP

translated “steward” later in Genesis (43:16; 43:19; 44:1, 4) literally means “the man who is over” (ish asher al)\textsuperscript{16} or “the man who is over the house.” (Here the word man means male, not female.) In Greek, the most common term used is oikonomos (Luke 12:42; 1 Corinthians 4:1; 1 Peter 4:10), which means “someone who controls the affairs of a large household” (e.g., oversees service at the master’s table, directs servants, and controls household expenses; in short, a household manager). None of these references to stewarding involve the natural world specifically. However, there are several scriptural directives for how we are to engage the nonhuman creation. A complete reading of the Scriptures shows that we are to both serve and protect the nonhuman creation. Servants and protectors of the creation are likely to act quite differently than stewards of the creation.

\textbf{(See Bouma-Prediger, chapter 6.)}

\textbf{(See Groenendyk, chapter 2; and Rienstra, chapter 8.)}

In this case, the extrabiblical language and understanding of stewardship may be hindering our ability to think about and care for the creation well. If we understand that humans are simply stewards, the richness of our “job description” is lost, and we become merely managers of the creation. We narrow the scope of our responsibility and absolve ourselves of many other tasks with regard to the creation.\textsuperscript{17}
Resources for *Beyond Stewardship*
Appendix 1

Discussion Questions

Preface
1. Have you ever taken the time to consciously consider how much energy and other resources you use on a daily basis? Does it disturb you that our daily activities produce so much pollution?
2. Why do you think the Christian church isn’t leading the way in promoting and practicing environmental sustainability?
3. Do you have any preliminary responses to the perennial question “How shall we live?” What are you seeking from this book to help you answer that question? Are you receptive to learning new themes and principles for understanding the relationship between humans and the nonhuman creation?

Introduction
1. Do you often encounter people who are cynical or uncaring in the face of creation’s degradation? How do you respond to such cynicism? How do you think Christians should respond?
2. Have you heard about stewardship in church? What did the word mean? Have you heard other meanings of stewardship in other contexts? What is your personal understanding of the term stewardship at this point?
3. Have you noticed or considered the limitations of the Christian Environmental Stewardship (CES) paradigm? What do you think about the weaknesses and blind spots identified by the editors? Do you agree or disagree that CES is problematic? Why?
Podcast

Search for “Beyond Stewardship”
"The majestic ascent and orderly tea-covered landscape of southwestern India is mesmerizing. But the laborers are what end up capturing my attention on each visit to Valparai. Harvesting tea requires human power, and the engine of Indian tea plantations is poor Indian workers."
No More Room

written by Hannah Riffell
illustrated by Gabrielle Eisma
researched by Leah Knoor

http://calvin.edu/go/no-more-room
BEYOND STEWARDSHIP

Beyond Stewardship is intended to equip Christians to live better in this world by helping us all think more intentionally about the relationship we have with the nonhuman creation in which we are necessarily and thoroughly embedded. It responds to the questions “What if God didn’t place humans on earth to be stewards of creation but something else?” and “If not stewards, then what?”

The chapters in Beyond Stewardship were written by scholars from diverse disciplines who share a deep passion for a flourishing creation. Each chapter begins with a compelling story that draws the reader into new ways of thinking. Each author then looks beyond stewardship from the context of his or her own discipline and experiences. Some re-
Acknowledgements

- Authors
- Observers
- Janice Wharton (Intern)
- Susan Felch (Executive Editor, The Calvin Press)
- Calvin Center for Christian Scholarship (Workshop funding)
- Provost (Sustainability Major Project)
- Dean for Faculty Development (Course releases for DPW and MKH)
- Biology Department (Seminar series funding)
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