



BLESSED EARTH

Serving God, Saving the Planet

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Hope for Creation: An Earth Day Preview

Six years ago I was looking for someone to publish the book that would eventually be called *Serve God, Save the Planet*. I had never published a book before. Nancy and I were brand-new Christians -- and we believed in taking care of the planet. At the time I knew no one else who shared this particular theology. The one publisher I sent the manuscript to wavered as to whether or not to get involved with "religious environmentalist."

At the same time I wrote an editorial called, "Should Christians Celebrate Earth Day?" The piece was published in the *San Diego Tribune* and subsequently picked up by multiple publications. A ministry was born.

Much has changed in the following five years. The book was published by Chelsea Green, and then by Zondervan. Emma and Nancy wrote books as well, and we all moved to Kentucky. The nonprofit Blessed Earth was started and has grown exponentially. Now, on the eve of the 40th anniversary of Earth Day, we are launching a nationwide simulcast -- the largest gathering ever of the Church united to celebrate our role in caring for the planet.

For many Christians, however, the question still remains, "Should we celebrate Earth Day?" It's a good question, and those who ask it often do so for legitimate reasons. For instance, will Earth Day eventually lead us to worshipping trees? Although groups in the past have seen the majesty, beauty, and longevity

of trees and mistaken them for God, that is generally not the case today. We are far more likely to put governments, technology, and progress on the altar than an oak tree.

I have traveled far and wide in the past five years, and I have seen one religious group that regularly worships trees. They bring trees inside their homes on an annual basis. They sing songs to the trees. They place bright objects on the branches, and put small statutes of their god underneath. Of course I am humorously describing the celebration that takes place every December 25th. The point of this observation about Christmas is to help us distinguish between a symbol and what it symbolizes.

Many who decorate Christmas trees are not believers in Christ. Does that mean that it is wrong for believers to celebrate Christmas? Similarly, many who do not believe in God celebrate Earth Day. Does that make it wrong for the Church to pause and give thanks to our Creator one day a year?

Consider these words of the 24th Psalm as translated in *The Message*, "God claims Earth and everything in it. *God claims the World and all who live on it.*"

If this scripture is to be believed, it would seem that not only do the Christmas trees of believers and nonbelievers belong to the Lord, but the 40th Anniversary of Earth Day does as well. And so my thinking after five years about this is

not *Should Christians celebrate Earth Day?* but rather *What has taken us so long to do something fantastic to honor the Maker of this beautiful planet?*

Blessed Earth has been working for over two years on a project designed to remedy this oversight. We could not have done it without the help of God and many other dedicated partners. Now it's time for YOU to take the next step. Organize your church or school to be with us for the simulcast on the evening of Wednesday, April 21st. No politics. No agenda. Just a time of worship, learning, and prayer and a compelling visual treat from the makers of *NOOMA*. It doesn't matter if you are a group of 3 or 3,000. Once you sign up on the Blessed Earth website, we will send you everything you need to make your gathering a success.

YES! Christians should celebrate our almighty Creator this Earth Day. We want to show the world what Christians are for: loving God and loving our neighbors by caring for His creation. Sign up at www.blessedearth.org and pass the link along!



Your brother in Christ,

Matthew Sleeth, MD
Executive Director

Creation Care Scripture

"But the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea."

Habakkuk 2:14

Creation Care Tip of the Month

Feed the birds! Make an inexpensive investment in a bird feeder, especially in the winter. Not only will you find joy in watching the variety of birds that appear at your feeder, but you'll be reaching out a hand to some of God's most beautiful creatures in your own backyard.



Letters from You

MY JOURNEY INTO CREATION CARE

Finding Christian community and purpose in God's creation

By **Anna Clark**
Contributing Writer

When I first heard Matthew Sleeth speak in 2005, I had no idea that I would someday write a book on creation care. If you had told me that I would be writing at all, I think I would have been shocked. A native of Dallas, a town made famous for displays of conspicuous consumption, I was a conventional shopper, a PR exec, and a lapsed churchgoer. Not exactly someone cut out for ministry. In fact, the only thing about me that wasn't conventional was a deep and abiding sympathy for the walrus. I can't explain this love for large bumbling sea creatures any more than my husband Mike can explain why he loves college football. It just is.

Having read for years about habitat loss, pollution in the oceans, and melting sea ice, I used to spend my spare time signing petitions and writing letters to my legislators. But after having my first child in 2005, my anxiety about the things that I could not control escalated into anger. What kind of world had I brought my daughter into and why did I feel so helpless to change it? So I made two decisions that thoroughly shook up my conventional life. I returned to church after 20 years away and I joined the Sierra Club.

Going back to church was mildly comforting, but it wasn't enough to revive my dormant faith. Frustrated, I channeled my desire to better the world into environmental activism. In fact, it was only because of a Sierra Club volunteer project that I went to hear Dr. Sleeth speak in the first place. Our group had divvied up the topics for a presentation that we would deliver to parenting groups. The others suggested I see what this author Matthew Sleeth had to say about faith-based environmental stewardship. We hoped that putting the Christian perspective into our presentation would persuade a few more people to listen to us. Little did I know that listening to Dr. Sleeth would sway me back to Jesus.

Dr. Sleeth was someone who turned my assumptions upside down. Here was an evangelical Christian who was also a medical doctor, proving that



smart people can also believe in the Bible. Here was an environmental advocate who steered clear of policy, quoting scripture instead. Having just begun to read the Bible myself, I gained an appreciation for the relevance of Jesus' teachings through Dr. Sleeth's example. Through the changes in himself and his family, I saw with my own eyes that living a life according to God's laws is not only easier on the environment, it's better for families.

After reading *Serve God, Save the Planet*, I started making some of these changes in my own life. We cleared our home of toxins and started buying organic foods whenever possible. I started a sustainability consulting business. We built a green home, the second LEED-certified residence in Dallas. We planted a garden. I even transferred my membership to a local community church where we could walk on occasion. In my new church, with the help of our pastor and some wonderful new friends, my faith began to flourish. I began to write and speak on sustainability and creation care. Looking back, I can't say at what point my journey in living green turned into living for Christ. In so many ways they are woven together, just as it should be.

I still think of the plight of the walrus, but I am happy to report that my sadness and helplessness have been replaced by contentment and contribution. Understanding that no amount of activism can erase sin from the world, I've discovered that the best way to make the world better is to begin with myself and then share what I've learned with others. From here forward, I'm blessed to continue this journey alongside other creation care writers in this wonderful community called Blessed Earth.

Anna Clark is president of EarthPeople, a sustainability consulting firm. She is an author, speaker, and blogger on green living and leadership. Anna lives in Dallas with her husband and two toddlers in one of the first LEED-certified Platinum residences in Texas. Visit www.annamclark.com for more on all things green.

Prayer & Praise

- Healing of the land, long-term foresight, and Godly wisdom in healing the Haiti nation
- To exceed our goal of 100 schools, 1,000 churches, and 1,000,000 viewers partnering on the April 21 simulcast
- Strength, endurance (and good Internet connections!) for the many people now working hard on the Blessed Earth simulcast
- Praises for completion of the 12-film creation care series -- Hope for Creation and Hope for Humanity. Thank you to Dot&Cross, creators of the *NOOMA* films, for partnering with us to create this visually stunning series with state-of-the-art graphics and a compelling message. More like *The Matrix* than your typical church curricula, we can't wait to share it with the world!
- Partnership with Dr. Joel Hunter's Northland Church (Orlando), one of the most technologically advanced and the twelfth largest church in the US, as host of our simulcast
- Partnerships with Asbury Theological Seminary, Different Drummer, Dot&Cross, Zondervan, HarperOne, and many denominations for the simulcast -- thank you for lifting the load!

SPEAKING EVENTS



FEBRUARY 2010

Georgetown College

Georgetown, KY

Feb. 09

**Full speaking calendar available at BlessedEarth.org.*

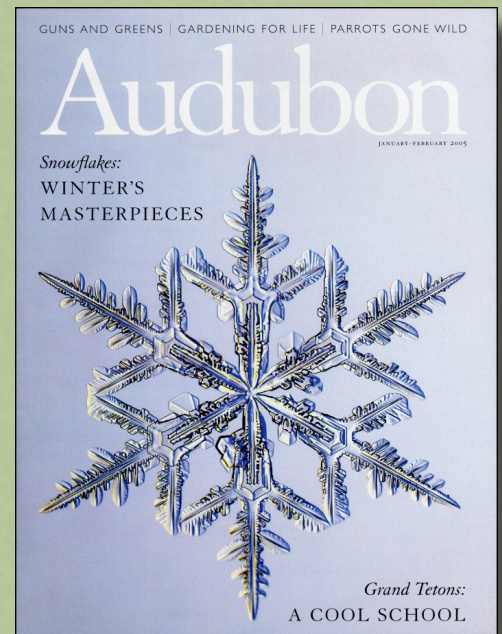
To request a speaking event, contact speaking@blessedearth.org

Blessed Earth Resource of the Month
Audubon Magazine

From the Audubon Society is the much respected Audubon magazine, a beautifully constructed bi-monthly magazine featuring stories, photos and other information about birds across the planet.

Look for Audubon at your local library, or share a subscription with a friend or close neighbor.

<http://audubonmagazine.org/>



OUR MISSION

Blessed Earth is an educational nonprofit that inspires and equips faith communities to become better stewards of the earth. Through outreach to churches, campuses and media we build bridges that promote measurable environmental change and meaningful spiritual growth.

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