

# The essential Christian practice of creation care discipleship with Steven Bouma-Prediger

## TRANSCRIPT

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**NOTE: This transcript was AI-generated and has not been fully edited.**

[00:00:00] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Welcome. You're listening to the Denison Forum Podcast. I'm Dr. Mark Turman, executive director of Denison Forum and host for today's conversation. Let me just share with you again that the Denison Forum exists to create Christ centered content that mobilizes and equips believers to be transforming in their environment for the flourishing, the biblical flourishing of everyone.

That's our goal. That's our desire. We hope today's conversation helps you in that direction. Today we're having a very interesting conversation with Dr. Stephen Bouma Prediger, who holds a Ph. D. in Philosophy from the University of Chicago. He is also the Leonard and Marjorie Maas Professor of Reformed Theology at Hope College in Holland, Michigan.

He oversees the Environmental Studies minor and co chairs the Campus Sustainability Advisory Committee there at Hope College. In addition, he has taught theology and ethics at Western Theological Seminary and is a board member of the Au Sable Institute for Environmental Studies. Dr. Prediger has authored or co authored six books, including *Earthkeeping and Character, Exploring a Christian Ecological Virtue Ethic* and the book for *The Beauty of the Earth: A Christian Vision for Creation Care Today*. We're going to talk to him about his newest book called *Creation Care Discipleship: Why Earth Keeping Is an Essential Christian Practice*.

I know this is a lively topic in our culture today. All you have to do is mention the words climate change and you're in for lively conversation with whoever you're talking to. We'll touch upon that topic as well as what the Bible says in other contexts and in other ways about how Christians need to live as responsible citizens of this world, inhabitants of this world, how we can not only experience the revelation of God in the created order, but also how do we steward and manage it for the glory of God.

I hope you'll join us for this whole conversation. It's an incredible and enlightening experience. Thank you for being here.

Well, good morning, Steve, and welcome to the Denison Forum Podcast. We're glad to have you with us.

[00:02:19] **Dr. Steven Bouma-Prediger:** Great. Great to be with you.

[00:02:22] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Steve, if you wouldn't mind there'll be some people maybe that are not familiar with you and your work. Can you kind of tell us a little bit of your story, maybe some of your faith journey and then how you got interested particularly in this area of ecology, of combining ecology with Christian faith and discipleship. And then we'll jump more into the book that we're going to talk about, but tell us a little bit of your own personal story.

[00:02:47] **Dr. Steven Bouma-Prediger:** All right. I grew up in a Baptist church. And I'm very grateful for that instilled in me, I think a lifelong quest to know God better and to serve Jesus and whatever I way I could. As an adolescent in high school, I kind of walked away from the church a bit. And in college at Hope College in Holland, Michigan, where I currently teach have been here for 30 years now, Christian liberal arts college.

I rediscovered my faith in certain ways. I was free to ask questions and people were faculty members in particular were able to provide answers. So I sort of recommitted myself to the Christian faith in ways that I had not done because people weren't answering my questions when I was a inquisitive high school student.

And I found both inside the classroom and outside the classroom here at Hope that people were willing to take my questions. Hey, bring your questions on. So that's part of what I've been doing here as a faculty member in the religion department for the last three decades, teaching courses that help students I hope feel free to ask questions about religion in general and the Christian faith. in particular.

One of the summers between, let's see, it would have been my junior and senior year, I worked at a Christian summer camp run by the Reformed Church in America, just south of Chicago. And the director at the time, also a Hope College graduate, a generation earlier than me for some reason, still unknown to me paired me up with another counselor and the two of us led a canoeing trip in the Boundary Waters Canoe Wilderness of Northeastern Minnesota. I was a football, basketball, track runner through high school and in college, and I had zero experience leading wilderness trips. But again, for some reason, Paul Ransford, peace to his memory said Pred, that was my nickname, short from Prediger, I want you to co lead this wilderness trip.

Well, that... started for me what's been one of my passions in life, which is leading wilderness trips. So I did it that summer. And then in 1980, I and some other folks founded an organization called the Wilderness Adventures, sponsored and financed by the Reformed Church in America. And for four summers, I and a group of other instructors, including my wife led wilderness, backpacking, canoeing, rock climbing, whitewater rafting trips all over the country.

Here in Michigan, upper peninsula in particular, but also canoeing in the boundary waters backpacking, rock climbing in the front range of the Rockies, backpacking, whitewater rafting in Western North Carolina, Nantahala National Forest, just south of Great Smoky Mountain National Park. And then eventually in the Adirondacks of upstate New York.

So I spent four summers full time leading these wilderness trips with mostly high school kids. And then started graduate school. I did a master's in philosophy at a quirky little Christian think tank called the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto, Ontario. And my wife and I both did master's of divinity degrees at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California.

And then I did an MA and a PhD at the University of Chicago. We moved back to Chicago, would have been 1987. My wife's from that area. And then I took a job teaching at North Park University in Chicago, right in the city, in the North side, taught philosophy for four years. And it was during that time that I sort of resurrected those Wilderness Adventures trips.

I started taking students to the boundary waters. A colleague of mine, Cal Cater and I took a group of students on spring break to backpacking in the Grand Canyon. And then I came to Hope in 94, and again, I resurrected the Mayterm courses, three or four week intensive courses that I taught way back in the early 80s, and I've been doing that now for, well, 30 years, a group of 11

students four instructors, me and three of my friends associated with Camp Fowler, RCA Church Camp in Upstate New York, um, for the last, yeah, 30 years in May, we'd go 10 days out in the wilderness, backpacking, canoeing, kayaking, whitewater rafting.

That's in the middle, the beginning and end of that three or four week course was class time here at Hope, learning about ecological theology and ethics, and that was the title actually of that class. So we study Christian ecological theology and ethics with a good chunk of that being a wilderness in the middle of that course.

My doctoral dissertation I went to the University of Chicago, PhD program was going to write on something very esoteric in epistemology knowledge theory and so on, but I switched my topic. To ecological theology and ethics in grad school and my doctoral dissertation, which has a very long title I won't bore you with but I converted into my first book called *The Greening of Theology* and here's here's what it looks like American Academy of Religion Saw fit to publish it.

I looked at the ecological models of three contemporary thinkers, Rosemary Radford Ruther, Joseph Moltmann. And then a friend of mine from the University of Chicago who also wrote and did research on Sittler, we together co edited this book published Bless Their Hearts by good old Erdmann's Publishing House in Grand Rapids, *Evocations of Grace, Writings on Ecology and Theology and Ethics* by Joseph Sittler, who's probably the most important Christian eco theologian that no one's ever heard of before, so. So Peter Bakken and I, with this book, tried to make Sittler's work more available to more people. So it's a collection again of Sittler's best writings on eco theology. Joseph Sittler was writing about why Christians ought to be earth keepers and caretakers of creation in the 1940s, long before the 60s and 70s hit and a lot more voices were added to that conversation.

So he was really a pioneering ecological theologian. And then the book that most people know me for, *For the Beauty of the Earth, Christian Vision for Creation Care*, is now out in its second edition. This is, if people know anything about me, it's probably from that book, which I use and other people use in classes on, you know, on ecological issues and the intersection of Christian faith and ecology.

Then I've got *Somewhere here*. Yeah, this is the second newest book. Now, *Earthkeeping and Character: Exploring a Christian Ecological Virtue Ethics*. So, what habitual dispositions do we need to try to cultivate individually in our families, our communities, our educational institutions? What virtues do we need to try to cultivate to make the earth a better place? And what vices do we need to try to extinguish?

And then most recently, this monograph, *Creation Care Discipleship*, where I try to make the case, as the subtitle of the book indicates, why earthkeeping is an essential Christian practice. So all that to say is that summer camp counselor experience many years ago shaped my life. It was God's way, providentially, of moving me into this field of both teaching and research of the intersection, again, of ecology and theology and making the argument, as I've been doing in talks and presentations and books for, what, 45 years now on why earthkeeping is an essential Christian practice, again, to quote the subtitle of the most recent book.

[00:10:42] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Thank you for framing that for us because this is such a big important area. And just kind of give you, share some of my background a little bit after pastoring for 35 years, but even three or four years before I became a Christian in my late teens, I was with some church leaders, one particular Presbyterian minister, and we were out doing something together, and I was eating a fast food hamburger, and I was finished, and I was rolling down the window to throw all of my trash out of the window of the car that he was driving.

And he said, what are you doing? Just as I was about to release the bag, I said, I'm getting rid of the trash. He said, no, you're not grabbed my arm, grabbed the bag and said, that's not the way we take care of the world. And that's really the first obvious glimpse I had into a theology of ecology, if you will.

And what does it mean to be an earth keeper. And it's grown some from there. And I like, I would imagine most people listening to this podcast, hopefully all people love being outdoors. They love creation. In my own thinking, I believe that God has at least four big books. He has the book of Revelation that comes through his son, the incarnation of Jesus.

I think he has that in the church in the people of the church. That's one of his biggest books. I think he has obviously Scripture and then the book of creation. I remember some of the older theologians saying that creation might be God's first book to us as a revelation of himself. But explain, one of the great things about your book and this particular book is the accessibility of this book that , it is something that people can easily pick up and start to gain a framework of what you're arguing for. It builds on the previous works that you mentioned a moment ago, but an important part of discipleship, but also something for Christians to really get their mind around because today any conversation that involves climate change is like a lightning rod that has been really captured and taken away and really I'd love for you to speak to this, how the popular cultural way of talking just about that term really goes awry from a biblical understanding of what it means to steward and care.

In your book, just one example, in the book, you... You use the word earth keeping which I'd love for you to talk about why you use that term and then you talk about how dominion that we

talk that we learn about in the book of Genesis the early chapters. There's a big difference between dominion and dominance. So maybe we start right there. Why the word earth keeping?

[00:13:37] **Dr. Steven Bouma-Prediger:** That's a great issue. When I taught philosophy, well, and I teach religion courses now, theology and ethics in particular, I tell my students, whoever defines the terms, wins the argument. You let me define the terms of any hot button issue, I guarantee you I will win the argument. So language, in other words, the words, terms, phrases we use is incredibly important.

I love the term earth keeping. I first bumped into it when I read Lauren Wilkinson and Friends, 1980 book on earthkeeping, that later got updated in a second edition, Earthkeeping in the 90s. Lauren taught at Regent College for many, many years, now retired, is an old friend, he and his wife, Mary Ruth. I love that term because it summarizes for me what the Bible teaches about who we are. We're earth keepers. Genesis 2. 15, we're called to avad and shamar, serve and protect.

[00:14:32] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Hmm.

[00:14:33] **Dr. Steven Bouma-Prediger:** Now, everyone focuses, tends to focus on Genesis 1, where we're made in God's image. Yes, we're made in God's image, and we're called to have dominion, but dominion does not mean domination, even though that's how it's been interpreted by many people, including many Christians, for many years.

We are to rule and have dominion, but let's think about this. How does God rule? How does God, in Christ, as a human, rule? He serves, right? Proper dominion means service. So if we put Genesis one and Genesis two together as we must, cause they're next door to each other. We need to read both so called creation stories, the Genesis 1: 1 to 2: 4 and then 2: 4 and beyond.

We read both those stories. Somehow we got to put together serve and protect with dominion. And my way of doing that and others is simply to say dominion means serving and protecting, so again, to avad and shamar, protect, shamar is used in other places in the Old Testament and again, so earth keeping is, I think, one of the better ways to think about what our calling is as humans.

So yes, we're made in God's image, but that doesn't mean dominion equals domination. We're called to serve and protect. What does that look like? We have examples of that. I talk about that in Creation Care Discipleship in my new book. But again, getting a , proper biblical understanding of our terminology and who we are as humans and what our calling is, is I think absolutely crucial.

When I give talks in places, especially, I mean, I'm an evangelical and I'm also reformed. Both, I think those go together. When I talk to evangelical groups, I'm actually talking at a local church this Sunday, teaching a Sunday school class. I basically start with Scripture, because who can argue with, again, that book?

There is the book of nature, which often has been overlooked, as you just mentioned, but we can learn a lot about God by carefully observing the world in which we live. But of course, the primary source is the Bible, and if we have the eyes to see, I mean, from Genesis to Revelation, the Bible begins with rivers and trees.

That's one of the chapters actually in the

[00:16:53] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah, yeah.

[00:16:54] **Dr. Steven Bouma-Prediger:** you know, I mean how many sermons have you ever heard? I have heard none I've given that sermon I've never heard anyone else Preach a sermon helps people see the Bible begins and ends with rivers and trees Genesis 1 and 2 Revelation 21 and 22 So, and there's a lot of other stuff in between so we need, I think, to become more aware of the biblical, um, what, descriptions of who we are as humans.

We're adam from the adamah. There's a pun in the Hebrew there that, of course, we miss in English translation. In Genesis 2, adamah is dirt, soil. We're dirt creatures. Also, made in God's image, Imago Dei, we need to emphasize both of those. Those go together. We can't just focus on being made in God's image and forget about the fact that we're earth creatures.

So, that we're earth creatures, made in God's image, earth keepers, and earth keeping, just seem to me to be... really good terms to use, language to use to describe the biblical calling we have as humans. Not just Christians, but as humans to care for creation.

Now I'll throw on top of that the crisis that we're a part of, and I use that language. The language I read now, I have the unfortunate self imposed task of keeping up on ecological degradations of various sorts, including climate change. Now, though, the language I'm reading is climate crisis, climate emergency. And , you know, it was 80 degrees yesterday here in Holland, Michigan, at about 43 degrees north latitude in October.

This is unheard of, crazy weather all over the place, whether it's too much rain, too little rain. I mean, This isn't an accident. This is now the scientists, at least the ones I know and read about, are saying that the crazy climate is a result of, quote, climate change, and we ought to be concerned about our home planet.

We have only one. And especially concerned as Christians, this is a point that's often not mentioned, About the effects that these changes are going to have on those people who are most vulnerable and most impoverished. I'm going to do just fine as a middle class American. I mean, I've got a house, we've got an air conditioner in one of the couple of the rooms and you know, I'm doing just fine.

I can adapt. But a lot of people there are well hungry people on our planet if lined up shoulder to shoulder would go around the earth at the equator seven times. That's a lot of hungry folks. And I give that statistic to my students, their jaws drop. They have no idea that the line of hungry people is that long at the equator multiple times.

And if we're Christians concerned about caring for those who are impoverished. You know, just from a kind of social justice point of view, we ought to be concerned about ecological issues, too. Is there enough water? So, I mean, there are those issues, in other words, are integrally related so called social justice issues and so called environmental issues.

And again, I don't like the word environment or environmental because that tends to assume that we humans are not really part of the environment. The environment is out there somewhere. We're separate from it. so that's why I like the term ecological from the Greek word oikos, where we get eco, the prefix, economics, ecology.

It's all about the oikos, which means our home planet. It means house. Oikos means house. Here's our home planet. We as Christians ought to be taking care of what God has created, which is, again, creation care is a lovely term because creation implies a creator. And we're called to care for what God has created.

Yeah.

[00:20:48] **Dr. Mark Turman:** of terminology around climate change, you know, and, but you can also see how the world is at least our part of the world is trying to grapple with it some, you know, I'm not a fan follower of this, of the Yellowstone series, but really the backdrop of that very popular, you know, Kevin Costner series has to do with these issues, right?

It has to do with issues of dominance. It has issues around earth keeping and earth care. And so you even see it in that context. But like I said it's easy to get into a pretty heated argument just by raising the term Climate change. How do you respond when people hopefully people of goodwill are the people that we're talking with and engaging with, but the idea that, hey, you know what the world is always changing ecologically as it of course it is.



And we know what, we just really don't have that much longitudinal information. We just haven't been gathering weather data and climate data and all of that. Maybe what we're seeing right now is not a crisis, it's just the next kind of evolution, churning of what ecology does all the time.

Like I said, I know there's a lot for us to learn about what's going on with the climate, with ecology on a broad scale, but what do you say to those that say we just don't have enough information to be calling this a crisis right now, we just need to continue to learn ... And do our best efforts at taking care of the earth. Is that a legitimate response?

[00:22:24] **Dr. Steven Bouma-Prediger:** Yeah. If I'm talking with someone, it's clear to me that they're. They're not going to accept claims about climate crisis, climate emergency, climate change. And I say are you a Christian? They say, yes. Do you have a Bible handy? Okay, let's open up the Bible. What does the Bible say? I just try to, again, regardless of whether the earth is going to hell in a handbasket or not, what's happening with climate change, let's just look at what Scripture teaches.

And the Christian tradition. And it's more than Francis of Assisi, it's, you know, the patron saint of ecology, according to the Roman Catholic Church, and I think rightly so. Lots of other people, John Calvin, Martin Luther, more contemporary folks the Christian tradition itself and the Christian Bible, again, have a lot to say if we have the eyes to see about caring for creation.

So I just usually pivot away from getting into a debate about the climate science. And simply say, Genesis 2. 15, we're called to serve and protect the earth, all kinds of psalms talk about the wonder and the beauty of creation. Psalm 104 is one of my favorites. 148 talks about non human creatures praising God.

So what are we humans doing to help those creatures praise God? Are we, you know, helping those creatures to flourish? Or are they being diminished? Three species going extinct today, by the way. That's another one of those terrible ecological... statistics. Three species go extinct today on average. I wrote an earlier book, I didn't show you that, on why Christians ought to support the Endangered Species Act, which has actually had a really positive effect.

There's a lot of good news there because of that law that was signed into it active law signed by Richard Nixon, Republican president, way back in December of 1973, that now other countries are trying to emulate to try to save habitats and species that are nearing extinction or threatened. So, all I have to say is that I pivot away from heated debates about climate science, typically and just talk about the biblical and theological rationale we Christians have for being caretakers of creation, earth keepers, good stewards, whatever language you want to use.

[00:24:45] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah, I love that. And I love the the emphasis on the calling to serve and protect. You point out in your book how that's the unofficial motto of just about every law enforcement agency. And so, you know, even the world just in a general way has picked up on that calling, even if it's not for many of them, either individually or organizationally grounded in scripture or grounded in faith, still that sense of this is the best of what being a human being is, is to serve and to protect.

Even this morning, I was reading in my regular Bible reading, 1 Kings 12, where Rehoboam rejects that idea in favor of power and of dominance, and it ends up costing him the kingdom. But and I love what you're talking about in terms, as you open the book, about trees and rivers. And like I said, so many people, especially when we're younger, but all the way through our lives, we just love creation.

We love being out in creation. We love experiencing it. And hopefully , as again, you point out stewards and as earth keepers rather than being simply seeing ourselves as consumers and you know, pilfering basically creation for our own desires. But you know, emphasis on trees and rivers.

I was preaching recently on the story of Zacchaeus. And, very few times do you see anybody climbing a tree but Zacchaeus is the most important, right? And right there in the middle of Jesus's story, the story of scripture starts in a garden. It ends in a garden.

Jesus does his first miracle in a garden at a wedding. And then you see Zacchaeus climbing a tree. So, trees and animals and as you point out in your book, we're about 70 percent water and water really, really matters. So many people listening to this podcast have probably been prayerfully or financially involved in trying to help other people get clean water, which is fundamental to any community thriving.

I had a engineer, civil engineer from Great Britain tell me doing mission work, you know, about 80 percent of the world's diseases are waterborne diseases. So if you can get people clean water, you can radically change their life and their community in a huge way. Right. But in these conversations, what do you think is the biggest challenge to creation discipleship that you're encountering?

Hello.

[00:27:18] **Dr. Steven Bouma-Prediger:** I think it's a two word answer that comes to mind. Ignorance and apathy. A lot of people are just ignorant about the world, the needs of the world, what you were just discussing. We all have an intuitive sense of the importance of water, but how

that plays out, again, as you said, disease vectors of various sorts, mosquitoes, you know, giving people malaria.

Well, mosquitoes need water. They flourish around especially water that isn't running, right? There's an article in New York Times, I think yesterday about this and so ignorance about how the world works. I have a whole book I have my students read in a couple of my classes simply describes how the world works.

It's right here somewhere here we are The Wondrous Workings of Planet Earth and it's got all these lovely It's mostly pictures in drawings of different things, different parts of the world, different ecosystems. Students love it because they can't put it down. It's really very graphic and it helps them understand how the world works.

How can we care for the world if we don't know something about how it works? And ecological illiteracy is huge. When I ask students, you know, to name trees where they grew up or where's your water come from? Where's your garbage go? Most of them don't know either of those questions. They don't know is it well water if it's city water? Where's it come from. Here in Holland, Michigan I'm surrounded by the Great Lakes, 70 percent of the Earth's surface fresh water. We don't have a water problem here. It's fresh water. There's plenty of it. But everywhere I travel, I mean, water is a huge, huge issue.

And again, it has these it's not just drinking water, but again you know, is it clean? Or not, is it habitats for insects, again, that may be disease vectors of various sorts. So, decreasing our ignorance and increasing our knowledge of how the world works is crucial. And apathy is the other, and ignorance and apathy, indifference, people who just sort of, you know, ho hum, that's not my job, or what can one little old person do?

That's a common comment I get. You know, the problems are indeed very large, seemingly intractable, and people just kind of throw their hands in the air, metaphorically speaking, and say, what can one little old person do? So I have a number of ways I try to approach that, including in the book stop being one person.

That's Catherine Hayhoe's, a famous Christian climate scientist. So her response, stop being one person, find one other person or two other people in your church or school or neighborhood and grow that to, you know, a bigger group. But I also comment and say, you know, you never know what good one person actions can do.

I mean, ahead of time, did You know, all kinds of people in the last 20, 30 years think back to the Civil Rights Movement, for example, did MLK know exactly what he was doing in the late

fifties, you know, one person started a whole movement. He had no way of knowing that ahead of time,

Yet God can use us in ways that often we don't realize.

So, yeah, stop being one person. Find other people who are like minded and interested in creation care. Maybe start a small group at your church. But also do that one thing. Do it because it's the right thing to do. Don't be a consequentialist. This is a point I make in the book. Assuming that you should do something only if there's a high probability of positive or good consequences.

Jesus wasn't a consequentialist. The saints of the church aren't consequentialist, they, that's not the moral rubric they use. They simply do what they do because it's the right thing to do and let God deal with the consequences. And again, God can do surprisingly positive things with the little things that we do if we simply do the right thing.

[00:31:20] **Dr. Mark Turman:** I love the example you point out in the book of Rosa Parks that just by refusing to move to the back of the bus that day was an action that had consequences well beyond anything she likely could have ever imagined in that moment. Right? But it was what is the most biblical, right thing I can do today in any of these areas?

One of the things , Steve, I like about the book is, you say this in a very clear and compelling way, which is, this is important, but you're not belligerent in what I would call, Or the way I would frame this, there is a call in this book to become curious and to become curious in a way that starts to combat that ignorance and to attack some of that apathy that you just talked about but it's really an invitation to discover an invitation to explore and I'm thinking back to my own experience with Christian camping, with going into these various places I'm going on kind of an outdoor adventure to Montana in a few days.

And I've never been to that part of the world just because I want to go and see that part of the world. So, what I love about the tone of this book, and I would like you to speak to that a little bit, is just how this is an invitation and a call to curiosity without being belligerent or harsh. Talk about how that comes through in your writing, and particularly in this book.

[00:32:55] **Dr. Steven Bouma-Prediger:** That's a great question and observation, and that was my intention, is to, yeah write the book as an invitation for people, and , rather than a reader feeling like something's being foisted upon them, uh, that it's a burden, this is an invitation to explore the world, learn more about it, and come to love it and care for it.

And all that as a way of praising and worshiping God as a part of one's spirituality. We often tend when thinking about spirituality to think it's, you know, separate again, a kind of dualistic separation of the spiritual from the material, heaven from earth, and so on. But again, I go back to the Bible.

Heaven comes down to earth in Revelation 21, 22. We don't go up to it. And it's not just souls floating around in heaven. It's, we are embodied. I mean, the apostles creed, we believe in the resurrection of the body and of life. everlasting. So we need to somehow recapture that emphasis within our tradition that, you know, bodies are not bad.

They're broken now, but they, the resurrected body of Jesus and the bodies that we'll have in heaven are their bodies, even though they're purified bodies. But again, there's a corporeality to the eschatology, the view of the future that we Christians have that I think is lost often.

And I found this through experiences leading trips that you take people who otherwise are either ignorant or indifferent, you take them out into the world, the natural world, and you know, hug a few trees, or at least identify some, and look at some critters and they become, and talk about the weather, and you know, all kinds of natural phenomena. They become more interested in those things.

They learn more about them. They feel more confident about knowing how the world works. They come to see that we humans play a crucial role in either serving, protecting and restoring or degrading our home planet. And again it, is perceived not as an onerous burden that's sort of foisted upon them, but simply as a calling they can live into in a lot of different ways.

So it's something attractive. And again earthkeeping, care for creation, spurs their own curiosity. Okay. I've learned this about the pinus strobus, the white pine is the Michigan state tree. What other trees can I learn about? What trees are on my, you know, near where I live, whether I rent or own apartment or a house.

So what you're talking about, you know, getting people to, be curious about the world in which we live and learn more about it, I think, is crucial. As well as, okay, so they're looking at the book of nature, but then also looking at the book of Scripture and saying, yeah, isn't it interesting the Bible begins and ends with rivers and trees?

What does that mean for what it means to be a follower of Jesus, to be a disciple? So that's again where my argument that creation care discipleship is an essential Christian practice. It's not just, you know, something these people do, these tree hugger Christians, and everyone else can just keep, you know, ignoring creation.

No it's part and parcel of what it means to be a Christian, not some sort of add on or ad hoc kind of activity.

[00:36:22] **Dr. Mark Turman:** and if we understand Scripture well, as I think about what you've written and what you're talking about, is if we understand Scripture well, this is an opportunity for us to reclaim a very important part of our belief and of our theology and reclaim it away from the extremist on either end of the spectrum, as so often is the case.

And I love what you're talking about. Just interwoven connection between the spiritual and material parts. It reminds me of Jesus coming in on Palm Sunday, where he says, look, if all these people are quiet, the rocks are going to cry out. And in fact, the rocks and everything else are always crying out.

Right. And just to try to bring this down to where all of us live, right. Some of us are mountain people. Some of us are beach people. Some of us are river and lake people, but everybody has their spot where they go and they usually go there on vacation and it takes their breath away and they're filled with a sense of awe,

[00:37:24] **Dr. Steven Bouma-Prediger:** Yeah.

[00:37:25] **Dr. Mark Turman:** if they're not people of faith, particularly.

I haven't yet been to the Grand Canyon. It's on my list, but you know, they tell me you can't walk up to the edge of the Grand Canyon without losing your breath. Right. And we've had, we have those experiences. I mean, I had that experience earlier this week, watching a sunset. And you'll hear particularly Christians say when they get to one of those places, one of those experiences that might be the night sky, or it might be one of those special places.

They're like, I just don't understand how anybody can not believe in God when they look at this, right? And that's what we're referring to. That's what we're talking about. One of the things I wanted you to comment on briefly before we wrap up today is how you point us to listen to the wide voices within Christianity from the Pope to Calvin to other modern day voices within the evangelical church. Why did you decide to put that part in this book? Silence. Silence.

[00:38:40] **Dr. Steven Bouma-Prediger:** Literally to the edge of the rim and the jaws just dropped. It was this ooh and ah, I mean it was that was the response of people, something that majestic, as you say, some, for some people, it's the night sky when they see literally thousands of lights in a place where there isn't a lot of light pollution, like the Boundary Waters, or if it's clear, it's just an awe inspiring thing, and it is sort of one of the arguments for God's existence, a

kind of cosmological argument that how could this all be an accident? I mean, this kind of, you know, beauty and complexity. So anyway, that's just I think a common response people have to this expression of awe and wonder in the face of something majestic like that in the natural world.

[00:39:26] **Dr. Mark Turman:** My pastor used to say on a regular basis that you can see the glory of God through the microscope and through the telescope.

[00:39:33] **Dr. Steven Bouma-Prediger:** Yes, that's great. Now, what was your other question?

[00:39:38] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. So why the voices from across the spectrum of Christianity? What are you trying to help us understand when we listen to some of the things that the Pope has written and said, some of the people from the Eastern Orthodox Church, people from the evangelical tradition? Why did you include that part in this book?

Silence.

[00:40:00] **Dr. Steven Bouma-Prediger:** Well, I think it's crucial for Christians, whatever tradition we're from, whether Roman Catholic, we're listening to the Pope's encyclicals, and a new one is out, I think, today or tomorrow, coming out, a new statement by the current Pope, the Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomew I is written on this, and of course a lot of Protestants from liberal Bye.

Bye. to conservative. And I'm focusing especially on evangelical voices. I think it's just important for Christians, wherever they situate themselves, to see that they're not the only Christians who feel called by God to serve and protect and restore creation. And again, I tend to associate this as, you know, something more liberal Christians are up to, but that's simply not the case.

aGain, Roman Catholics of all kinds, liberal to conservatives, same with Eastern Orthodox, Greek, Ukrainian, Russian, Orthodox folk, and all kinds of Protestants. Including a lot of evangelicals have been talking about creation care for a long time. Evangelical Environmental Network, for example, has been around for 30 years.

National Interreligious Task Force, which includes the EEN, along with Roman Catholics and more liberal Protestants, has been around, again, for a long time, decades. So, there is literally this ecumenical movement, right? The whole church is involved in one way or another in trying to become better earth keepers.

I think it's important for people often because they feel isolated and lonely. It's just, you know, it's just we liberal Methodists or we, you know, earth keeping catholics or whatever. No it's literally all over the world and all throughout the church. So I wanted to make sure that I gave attention to that.

So hence the chapter on learning from the global church. And again it's not just the church in terms of, you know, the three different branches, Roman, Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, but it's the global church. We folks here in North America can learn a lot from our sisters and brothers south of the equator.

So, and we in the, yeah, the so called Western culture can learn a lot from folks in other parts of the world. So it's geographic diversity as well as sort of, Christian diversity. So in my travels and teaching in various other places, I've learned a lot from being in Belize and being in New Zealand and so on.

Christians there, brothers and sisters in Christ, I think are way ahead of us in some of those places, way ahead of us here in North America. And we have much to learn from them. And often that requires putting aside our often implicit sense that we're You know, we're from the United States or whatever, Canada, that we know more than they do when in fact they're way ahead of us and we have much to learn.

So we need to exercise a little humility and being open to learn from people who have much to teach us about being earth keepers or caretakers of creation.

[00:43:07] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. It's a good word. It's a, yeah, it's a really good word. I would imagine that there are people listening to this podcast who didn't even know that there was an evangelical group organized to care and to focus on what it means to care for the world well, so that like, even that's probably a piece of news that people didn't realize.

As we kind of wrap up our conversation today, just again, highly, highly recommend this book. The title is officially Creation Care Discipleship, Why Earthkeeping is an Essential Christian Practice. Steve, what gives you hope? I just today is trash day in my neighborhood, and in, in my very fast growing Dallas suburb, we do have a fairly robust recycling effort, you know, and just this, even just wrapping your brain around the idea that there's no such thing as living in a throwaway world.

Anything you throw away has an ongoing life and comes back somewhere around, either in a positive or maybe a detrimental way. But, you know, it's just good to, Go down the street, you see all kinds of recycle bins and people are recycling their Amazon boxes and their plastic water bottle, hopefully, and all those kinds of things.



There are some good things that have come about and there are some real positive efforts. So what gives you hope in this environment?

[00:44:31] **Dr. Steven Bouma-Prediger:** That's a great question. And for someone who teaches at Hope College, I ought to know something about hope, um, which is confident expectation of some future good. That's the generic definition of hope. I talk about the virtue of hope in my book on eco flourishing and virtue. You just gave an example. I mean, imagine that even in Texas,

[00:44:52] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yes, that's

[00:44:53] **Dr. Steven Bouma-Prediger:** some would say, right?

People are recycling. How can that be? And you've noticed that that wasn't happening probably 10 or 20 years ago, but now it is same thing all over other parts of this country. So there's a very Good tangible example of how recycling is on the uptake. More people are doing it. More cities, townships, counties, states are providing funding for it and energy and resources.

More groups are demanding it in various cities and places. So that's one reason for hope is just looking around and seeing that things are changing in certain very practical ways for the better. And I mentioned some other things in the book, but within the Christian church, there is more, despite what I was just saying about ignorance and apathy, indifference.

There are more Christians involved in earthkeeping, more organizations, more opportunities to get involved with other Christians locally, nationally, internationally. So I think the church is slowly, waking up to its calling to be servers and protectors and restorers of God's creation, earth keepers, to use my favorite term.

I see this with the younger generation of students and I'm not the only person, you know, the 20 something early 30 something generation is much more attuned to, I think creation care issues of various sorts than than Other, older generations, and I'm, that gives me a lot of hope that my children and the students I typically teach, 18 to 22 year olds, are very committed to this, much more so.

My courses are full, teach God, Earth, Ethics, Ecological Theology and Ethics, Environmental History and Philosophy. Those courses have more students in them, more student interest in those topics than they did even 5 or 8 or 10 years ago. So kids today they're growing up in a world where many of them so my sociologist friends tell me they're very nervous and anxious

about the world they are inheriting from us much so that some newly married couples are deciding not to have children because they don't want to bring children into a world like this.

I wish I was making this up, but I'm not. So I think there's just more awareness of our need to be good earth keepers with folks in their 20s and 30s, and again, that gives me hope that especially the Christians among that crowd will again sort of embrace the best of our tradition, maybe hear more sermons on why the Bible begins and ends with rivers and trees from those of us in positions of leadership aNd, and take that calling to be earth keepers very, very seriously.

[00:47:47] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah, that's a good word. And it also kind of intersects with another thing. We've done some significant research recently around Gen Z and what's important to them. And, you know, one of the leading voices in that conversation says, you know, the best thing you can do for this emerging generation that has lived so much of their life with and through a just go outside and do anything that doesn't involve a screen.

And so a couple of good things happen. You cut down on digital addiction and you get people to discover an incredible world of wonder that's just outside their door. So it serves both purposes in that way. And a lot of good can come out of that. Steve, thank you again. Thank you for the time and the conversation.

Thank you for this great work. I want to remind everybody again. This most recent book by Dr. Stephen Bouma Prediger is called Creation Care Discipleship: Why Earthkeeping is an Essential Christian Practice. Steve, thank you again for this book and thank you to our audience for listening with us today.

I hope they'll go out and read this and other works that you have done. I hope they go outside and discover in a fresh way.

[00:48:58] **Dr. Steven Bouma-Prediger:** Preach it brother.

[00:48:59] **Dr. Mark Turman:** a. It's not 105 degrees in Texas anymore. And so we are seeing a little bit of moderating of the temperature. And so go outside, whether you're a night person, day person, go find a sunrise or a sunset and learn a little bit more about your world and how you can take care of it.

And as we always say on our podcast, if this has been helpful to you, please rate, review us and share this with family and friends. We hope it's an encouraging conversation. And Stephen, we look forward to another conversation with you in the not distant future, I hope.

[00:49:31] **Dr. Steven Bouma-Prediger:** Thank you, Mark. Thank you. God's blessings on your work.

[00:49:34] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Thank you. Same to you.