



Christ, Creation Stewardship, and Missions

How Discipleship into a Biblical Worldview on Environmental Stewardship can Transform Both People and Their Land

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Introduction

Recently in Kenya I was being briefed by a fellow partner in ministry. He had been holding one of our regular “God and Creation” workshops in a village called Mbau-ini, just a few kilometers from Rift Valley Academy and the Kijabe Medical Center, which happens to be one of the largest mission complexes in the world. More than 150 missionaries live and operate out of the greater Kijabe area, serving not only the local people but staffing one of the best hospitals in the country and one of the largest boarding schools for missionary kids in the world.

The topic that day focused on the acute problem of deforestation, and how Christians should be among the first people to respond to such a problem. Once carpeted by a lush cedar and African olive forest, which fed streams out into the Rift Valley, many kilometers of the Kijabe escarpment now lie denuded of that forest cover, and the streams have dried up. As this partner spoke with passion about the biblical foundations for creation stewardship, and how we can honor Christ through that stewardship, one of the community members raised his hands. He was obviously excited about the teaching that he was receiving. In fact, it was the very first time he had heard such a teaching. But he had a question to share which he voiced with a sense of urgency. “*Why is it that for all these decades the missionaries right here have never told us that God was concerned about how we managed the forests? Why have they just watched this destruction taking place all this time?*”

As sobering as this question is, it is one that we as Christians and as evangelical missionaries cannot ignore. Kijabe is home to the Kikuyu people, and by mission standards it is a “reached” community. Thousands have accepted Christ, a bible school exists, and churches of several denominations were planted decades ago. These churches have grown and now dot the escarpment in several directions. A large majority of the population now attends church, but the destruction of the forest has continued unabated. The critical supplies of wood and water that the forest provides are running out. Fortunately a consensus is finally growing amongst this Christian community. The truth that people can and should glorify God through the proper care of creation is a message that has been planted, and it is beginning to germinate. Frequent discussions are now being held about finding ways to protect what remains of the original forest, and about the rather difficult challenge of successfully planting new trees.

What this story illustrates is an all too common problem that exists across much of our world. While it points to the unfortunate reality that followers of Christ have often neglected the “environment” as an important realm of life, it also points to a promising and very powerful solution. When God is put back into the center of our perspective on creation transformation can take place, both in the hearts of people and on the land which sustains them.

The Problem

A World Desperate for Christ-centered Leadership on Creation Stewardship

As Great Commission Christians enter fully into the 21st Century the dwindling forests of Kijabe is just a microcosm of a growing reality that we must contend with. In many parts of our world, and particularly in a place like Africa, countless communities are facing some environmental situations that are unprecedented in history. Critical problems that affect a wide range of 3rd world settings often include the following: Deforestation, general land degradation and erosion, overgrazing, the loss of biodiversity, a warming and drying climate, and growing hardships in obtaining consistent supplies of food, fuel, and water. All of these issues come together to cause increased hardship and suffering for people, perpetuating poverty, hunger, disease and death.

What is probably most disturbing about these trends is the speed at which they are taking place. If we use Kenya as an example, conditions are changing much faster than most people realize. In the brief period of just 30 years (from 1973 to 2003) the government estimated that it had lost 55% of its remaining woodland and forest cover.¹ With the demand for wood on the rise due to a growing population, this trend not only continues to this day, but it is accelerating in some areas, especially when drought strikes. This plight affects other nations in East Africa as well.

The consequences that such issues hold for the human side of this picture can often be seen most vividly in the realm of agriculture. Deforestation and farming on steep slopes leads to soil erosion and a loss of precious water resources. As the challenge of coaxing food from the ground becomes more difficult, declining harvests inevitably lead to discouraged farmers. Tables 1 and 2 below provide a representative sample of the actual figures reported by older farmers in Kenya. Informal surveys conducted in a variety of other locations over the past several years by Care of Creation Kenya (CCK) have shown that these are not isolated cases, but that such figures are being commonly reported by many of our agricultural communities.

Table 1: Rangwe Community

Crop	Avg. yields early 80's to early 90's	Avg. yields 2005 to present	% yield compared to early 80's & 90's
Maize	12 bags/acre	4 bags/acre	33%
Sorghum	6 bags/acre	1 bag/acre	17%
Beans	1 tin sown yielded 20 tins	1 tin sown yields 6 tins	30%

Table 2: Tiekunu community

Crop	Avg. yields early 80's to early 90's	Avg. yields 2005 to present	% yield compared to early 80's & 90's
Maize	30 bags/acre	7 bags/acre	23%
Beans	20 bags/acre	5 bags/acre	25%
Potatoes	100 bags/acre	10 bags/acre	10%

***Note:** In rural Kenya large gunny sacks are commonly used to measure yield. One “bag” of maize, weighs 90 kilograms. 30 bags/acre for example, translates to 2.7 metric tons/acre.

There are two critical things we should take note of here. The first is the obvious reality that numbers like this point to growing hardship for farmers, for their households, and for whole communities. But the corresponding and even more critical observation we must make is to

recognize how central agriculture is to the vast majority of people in Africa, and to people in other parts of the 3rd world, which have often been significant focal points for evangelical mission efforts. In a place like Africa small-scale agriculture is the single most common vocation on the continent. The very fabric of local cultures, languages, people groups and entire nations are defined by and revolve around what we call “farming.” This is how the greatest proportion of people in Africa make their living. Why then have Great Commission Christians, eager to spread the gospel, all but ignored this reality. We plant churches, we train pastors, we teach theology, but we say little or nothing about farming.

Perhaps other questions which would help emphasize the problem I am highlighting could be presented as follows:

- Why are the farming systems, water resources, forests, and livelihoods of people falling apart when there are so many Christians?
- As Christianity has grown by leaps and bounds in many parts of Africa, like it has in Kenya, why have the environmental and agricultural problems grown just as quickly?

It is easy to recognize that the crux of the problem lies not within the deforestation in and of itself, or within the actual problem of soil erosion. The roots of the problem go much deeper. They lie in the simple but critical fact that the hearts and minds of people (and of societies) are corrupted by sin, and they lack a moral and spiritual conviction to be good stewards of creation.

For several years now, as we have worked together with my Kenyan counterparts, we have made it common practice to pose the following question to our Christian brothers and sisters, and particularly to Christian farmers: “*What does your faith in Jesus Christ mean for your way of life as a farmer?*”

If I am correct, this question puzzles you as the reader in the same way that it puzzles the average farmer who is a member of a local church. In almost every case there are two typical answers that we receive to this inquiry. The first is usually a look of bewilderment, followed by a statement along these lines: “I have never considered such a question before.” The second response is often an honest confession that simply admits “I don’t know what my Christian faith means for farming.”

Such a statement should come as a wake-up call to us who are part of the evangelical missions community. We must recognize the significance of this tragedy. While agriculture is the economic mainstay for the majority of communities across Africa, most Christian farmers have little or no meaningful connection between their faith in Christ and their primary vocation in life. What they study and learn at church on Sunday mornings often has little or no bearing on the daily activities of life on their farms during the rest of the week.

What this ultimately reflects is the reality that the broader body of the evangelical church has had little to say on this topic. All too often we have left the “environment” off the list of priorities altogether. As a result we are poorly equipped to provide sound biblical teaching and meaningful leadership on a topic that is increasingly desperate for such leadership. Our worldview on agriculture or the environment is often dominated and defined more by politics and by secular economics than it is by Scripture.

When farmers in Kenya who have attended church for more than ten years admit that their pastor has never preached a sermon related to agriculture, we must recognize that reality as a

serious tragedy. In the same way, when a group of evangelical and missions-minded believers in North America admit something similar about their own pastor, or about their own denominational leadership, that too is a tragedy. Let us humbly acknowledge that the world today desperately needs God-centered leadership on creation stewardship. As we consider how God might be moving to bring an exciting and refreshing change to the evangelical church, by broadening the scope of what we should be doing in missions, let us reflect on what Joseph Sittler once said.

“When we turn the attention of the church to a definition of the Christian relationship with the natural world, we are not stepping away from grave and proper theological ideas; we are stepping right into the middle of them. There is a deeply rooted, genuinely Christian motivation for attention to God’s creation, despite the fact that many church people consider ecology to be a secular concern. ‘What does environmental preservation have to do with Jesus Christ and his church?’ they ask. They could not be more shallow or more wrong.”²

The Opportunity

Creation Stewardship Linked With Missions is a Field Ripe for the Harvest

What the quote by Joseph Sittler points to is a tremendous opportunity to update and to embrace something new into our traditional mode of thinking about missions. There is a new tool we need in our toolbox, and this addition, this embracing, has the potential to bring countless benefits to people around the world in a way that glorifies God, and particularly to the poor.

As environmental concerns gain more attention on the world stage, as drought, deforestation, water scarcity and other such issues scar landscapes and bring greater suffering to many, how seriously has the evangelical church considered the potential beauty of integrating two things into one cohesive whole? What if we combined efforts to fulfill the Great Commission with tangible efforts to bring healing to creation as well? In my own thinking this concept virtually bursts forth with beauty. It is an opportunity filled with countless possibilities and a field that is ripe for the harvest. This new frontier should be explored to the fullest extent possible.

Let us begin this exploration, as briefly this paper will allow, by recalling the words of our Lord in Matthew 28:19-20.

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”

We need to take note here that Jesus did not command that we go out and make mere converts. He called us to make disciples whose lives would change the world. Discipleship transforms people, communities, and entire nations, and in a world that changes over time, that discipleship will need to be applied in fresh new ways to new circumstances and situations. What would discipleship into a biblical worldview on creation stewardship look like? Have we ever considered the potential this might have for transforming people and for changing our world?

As church leaders and missionaries who are dedicated to making disciples of all nations, and who are committed to expressing the fullness of the gospel, I trust we can all agree that the time

has come for a “theology of creation” to be incorporated as a robust component of our discipleship. Unfortunately, one of the biggest challenges that we face in doing this, and in doing it well, is that we ourselves have yet to be disciplined on this issue. We often lack the biblical foundations and conviction to preach, teach, develop bible studies or provide similar direction that would guide us towards God-honoring attitudes and behaviors in response to the environmental problems of our day.

While this particular weakness in the church deserves more attention, let us put that aside for the moment and consider the potential that exists if the church was providing powerful leadership in this arena. Christ certainly desires and deserves to reign supreme as King in every aspect of our lives, and how we care for creation should be included in that list.

Imagine a world where churches and ministries of all kinds were able to provide concrete and sound theological guidance to this issue, which would also stimulate the pursuit and promotion of sound scientific and practical solutions, and the ability to lead the world by example. Imagine mission agencies of all kinds committed to a Christ-honoring creation stewardship ethic, which refused to be content with simply handing out relief supplies when hunger or famine struck. Imagine these agencies committed to a much larger vision, a vision which led them to work hand in hand with local communities to restore watersheds and to rebuild degraded landscapes in order to prevent hunger or famine from afflicting people in the first place. Paul Brand, the famous medical missionary to India once said something profound which points us in this direction.

“I would gladly give up medicine and surgery tomorrow if by so doing I could have some influence on policy with regard to mud and soil. The world will die from lack of soil and pure water long before it will die from lack of antibiotics or surgical skill and knowledge.”³

In a world where environmental challenges are emerging almost everywhere we go, where hunger and poverty are commonplace for such large numbers of people, it is time that we turn to God and request that He helps us to adopt and implement a much bigger vision. As part of our “mission” efforts we should do everything possible to train and build up Christian leaders and responsible communities who see creation through God’s eyes; who recognize it as a wonderful gift that needs to be nurtured, not only for the sake of feeding their own families but for the sake of fulfilling Christ’s command to love their neighbor. This is very consistent and fits in well with God’s call for us to share the good news of Christ and to make disciples of all nations.

As we design strategies to reach the lost, as we train and build up those who will lead the local indigenous church, and as we work with those who are brand new believers in Christ, here are some questions we might want to consider in the context of our evangelical mission efforts.

- If Christ desires to change people into His likeness, how should that transformation be lived out in terms of environmental and agricultural stewardship? How would it be demonstrated in the life of a farmer or pastoralist, the life of a fisherman, or in the life of a businessman?
- If we are to be models to the people, so that we might present a real life example that demonstrates and teaches the gospel in a way that brings about the kind of transformation that we speak of, and which is characterized by a biblically-based commitment to creation stewardship, how would that change our mission strategy? How would it change our approach to such farmers, pastoralists, fishermen, or businessmen?

- In a community where women collect wood from a dwindling forest, or where men are discouraged as productivity of their farmland declines, how should a local pastor be trained, and what role should he play in leading his community to address these problems? How can missionaries and Bible schools best prepare a pastor for this kind of role?
- For the missionary called to serve an unreached people group struggling with chronic hunger, what type of education would best prepare that missionary for this kind of situation? What priorities should be emphasized by the mission agency to reflect a holistic gospel that would bring both spiritual healing to the people and physical healing to their land?

As we think of the wonderful possibilities that exist by integrating creation stewardship as a meaningful component of our mission endeavors, here are a few examples that fuel my own enthusiasm.

Great potential exists for discipling existing believers

Around the world countless Christians from all walks of life are poorly equipped to apply their faith in a way that provides meaningful answers and solutions to environmental concerns. Equipping them with the biblical and moral foundations for creation stewardship will lead to a transformation of both perspective and behavior. When God's convicts the heart of people, widespread change can take place. Imagine, for example, the beauty of a group of Christian farmers who go out and put their faith into action on the ground, because God has convicted them to become excellent stewards of their land.

Great potential exists for stemming the tide of poverty and for saving the lives of millions

When the land mourns and becomes impoverished, people also mourn and become impoverished. As Christians we know that we serve a God who has called us to bring mercy and justice to the poor. When we integrate creation stewardship as a meaningful and long-term component of our efforts to show mercy to the poor and to restore the production of food supplies, the impact will be felt for generations to come. Isaiah 58: 6-11 gives us ample reason to move in this direction. *“Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen.....Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter.....If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness... You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail.”*

Great potential exists for opening doors to unreached people groups

There are countless communities around our world that we might consider as being “unreached” or as “marginally reached.” There is little or no presence of the church, and in many cases these communities are facing the serious impacts of environmental decline. A mission strategy designed to bring healing to the creation by striving to replenish the wood, water, and food supplies needed by the people is a strategy that will be met with open arms. Christ's love demonstrated practically will quickly break down potential barriers, cultivating a wealth of opportunity to share the Gospel with a people much more receptive to receiving that Gospel.

Great potential exists for drawing in people who would otherwise shun the church

There are also considerable numbers of people in our world who are part of the environmental movement, many of whom have rejected the Church because we have been so quiet on this topic. When we begin providing a meaningful and visible response to the issue, and when we offer thoughtful teaching and discussion of the topic in our churches, our witness to these

potentially energetic allies will be dramatically strengthened. Better yet, a biblically-based creation stewardship ethic can bring to these people a very powerful foundation which supports the passions they already possess, but which can also guide them into expressing those passions in a way that brings glory to God.

Great potential exists for enlisting today's young people into missions

One thing is very evident in today's upcoming generation. Christian young people around the world are far more concerned about environmental matters as compared to their parent's generation. This groundswell of interest holds tremendous promise, and the critical task before us is to channel that energy in the best direction possible. The concept of combining missions with caring for creation opens up new doors and huge possibilities. People who never thought of themselves as being eligible for "missions" in the traditional sense can in fact be very eligible to serve as missionaries.

What I hope these examples illustrate is that the frontier is wide open. It is an exciting field ripe for the harvest. By embracing our long forgotten role to care for creation not only will this brighten the testimony of the Church, not will it bring hope to the hungry, but it has the potential to provide one of the most promising answers to one of the most pressing issues of our time.

As we consider this in the context of missions, we need to gladly recognize that a new type of missionary should be added to the team. For decades we have seen wonderful work accomplished by the hands of medical missionaries, agricultural missionaries, and by those who train pastors, plant churches, or who translate the scriptures. While that good work must continue, it is time to add to those collective efforts and broaden the vision. Integrating creation stewardship into missions can help us rediscover the beauty of holistic ministry that does not separate the spiritual from the physical.

Our world today desperately needs Great Commission missionaries with expertise in forestry, fisheries, and sustainable agriculture. It needs godly men and women who are trained in appropriate technology, wildlife conservation, water resource management, environmental education, and other similar fields. And since God is the author of both science and the Bible, these missionaries should receive sound training theologically, scientifically, and socially, so they can effectively demonstrate the fullness of Christ's love to the hurting people of our world.

The Biblical Basis for Creation Stewardship

Putting God/Christ Back into the Center of Our Perspective

In several places I have highlighted the critical need for the Church to both develop and implement a biblical worldview on creation. This worldview, once planted, would then serve as the seed out of which a Christian environmental ethic could be cultivated and grown. But so far we have only alluded to what that worldview might look like. What are some of the basic but essential concepts that would comprise this worldview?

Given the limited length and scope of this paper it will be difficult to give a thorough overview, but as an introduction let me draw on just a few of the biblical principles that we regularly use in our training of church and community leaders. I will highlight two concepts on the general idea

of caring for creation, and two concepts which outline a biblical view of agriculture, since farming has been a recurring theme thus far. For a more thorough introduction to these and other principles, please refer to Appendix 1 regarding additional resources.

Brief introduction to the biblical basis for creation stewardship

Principle 1: We care for creation because Christ my Savior is Christ the Creator

If we were to develop a theology of creation, if we were to build a biblical foundation supporting the argument that Christians should be excellent stewards of creation, what would be the critical, essential, and indispensable scriptures that would help us to build that foundation? In my own view Colossians 1:15-16 would serve as one of the most important places to begin because it reveals a most fundamental and transforming truth. Constructing a biblical worldview on creation and a God-honoring response to the environmental crisis must begin with keystone passages like this one.

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created; things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible....all things were created by him and for him.”

The truth this verse reveals may appear to be simple at first, but when examined thoughtfully it is stunning and profound in light of the topic at hand. If we were to ask “*Why should we care for creation?*” the first and most primary answer is the fact that Christ our Savior is Christ the Creator! The very Author of our salvation is also the Author of creation. When unpacked, absorbed, and assimilated to its fullness, this reality serves as a most important cornerstone, and it opens up a whole new perspective that many Christians have not paused to consider.

We should care for creation not merely because it is a good idea, but because of the epic, magnificent, and overwhelming truth that we owe absolutely everything to the One who made it all. This Savior, this Creator, gave His life for all of mankind. And for those of us whom claim Him as Lord, He is the very centerpiece of our lives. He stands before us as our cherished, most beautiful, and most treasured possession. In the light of this truth the gross inconsistency of the attitudes and behaviors which often inflict harm upon creation become glaringly obvious. We cannot claim to legitimately love our Savior while at the same time participating in the careless abuse or destruction of what He has created. We must recognize the unavoidable fact that when we tarnish Christ’s creation, we also tarnish the name of Christ.

But that is not all. When we read the closing phrase of this verse, which says all things were created “for him”, we must carefully digest the meaning of those two words. What those final words reveal is the primary and supreme reason why creation exists. And this reason provides creation with a value far beyond what we might assign in purely economic terms. The essence of creation’s purpose, the essence of its inherent value, is that it was made to stand as a testimony of Christ’s beauty. All things were created for His glory! A very well known Christian leader named Jonathan Edwards once wrote a statement which supports this truth.

“We have shown that the Son of God created the world for this very end, to communicate Himself in an image of His own Excellency.....When we behold the light and brightness of the sun, the golden edges of an evening cloud, or the beauteous rainbow, we behold the adumbrations of His glory and goodness, and in the blue sky, of His mildness and gentleness.”⁴

So three things come together here that must be preeminent in our thinking. Christ is the cornerstone of our faith, He is the Creator of all things, and all things were created for a divine purpose – “*for Him.*” These realities are essential to a proper and biblical worldview about creation. And since Christ exhorted us to love our neighbor as ourselves, we must give careful regard to how our treatment of creation may affect others. Caring for creation, therefore, finds its firm foundation in the person and work of Christ. The bottom line is this: If we have a passion for Christ and for sharing His love with to broken world, we should also have an enthusiastic commitment to care for His creation.

Principle 2: We care for creation because it is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God

Imagine that you are part of a Christian community where a lake no longer sustains your people because of overfishing, or where cattle can no longer thrive because of overgrazing, or where crop yields are dropping each year as time goes by because of soil and water erosion, or where the river that passes by your town is so polluted that people cannot swim in it. Would we as Christians ever stop to ask, “What is God’s will for our community in these situations?”

Most of us can agree that Christians have rarely asked this kind of question. But the interesting irony is this: When it comes to other issues of life we regularly ask this type of question. Most of us go to great lengths to pray and to discover God’s will in matters like choosing the right marriage partner, selecting which church to join, how to deal with a friend who has hurt us, or whether a new job opportunity is something that we should pursue. We gladly bring these decisions to the cross and ask, “God, give me wisdom. What should I do in this challenging circumstance? Direct my thoughts and help me understand what Your will is in this matter.”

I think the point is clear. If we are eager and able to prayerfully pursue God’s will in the matters of life just described, we should be just as eager and willing to prayerfully pursue God’s will in matters pertaining to a creation that groans. How God would want us to best handle the often complicated issues surrounding many environmental issues are the kinds of questions that we should be bringing to His throne all the time.

As the Apostle Paul reminds us in Romans 12:2 our perspective about life in Christ, and how we live, should be radically different compared to the patterns that we see in the world.

“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is, his good pleasing and perfect will.”

When it comes to our perspective of creation, how does that perspective match up with the world’s way of thinking? Are we conformed primarily to the pattern of this world, or are we conformed primarily to a pattern that has been defined and directed by God’s word and by His will for our lives? Are we making substantial efforts in “testing and approving” what God’s will might be when it comes to the environmental crisis, or do we form our opinions, decisions, and actions based on the trendy and often man-centered values of today?

Here is the question we should be asking on a regular basis: “God, what is Your will for us as Your people living on this part of Your creation?” In a prayer like this we see the beauty of humility, we see a quest for guidance from above, and we see biblical truth. A prayer like this agrees that conforming to the “*pattern of this world*” cannot provide the solutions needed for the environmental problems of our day. We need God’s help on this one. So our hope is in God, and in people whose hearts and minds have been conformed to the mind of God.

Brief introduction to the biblical basis for agricultural stewardship

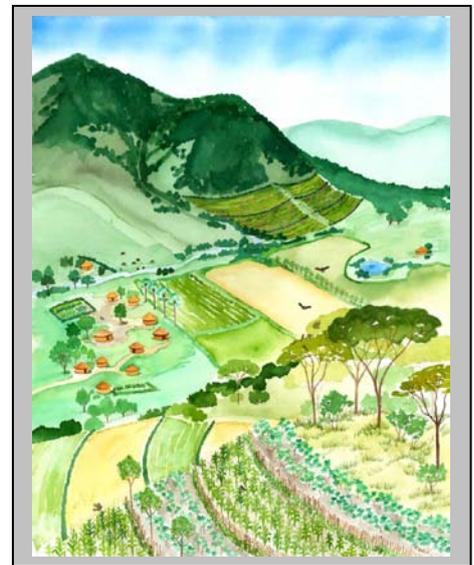
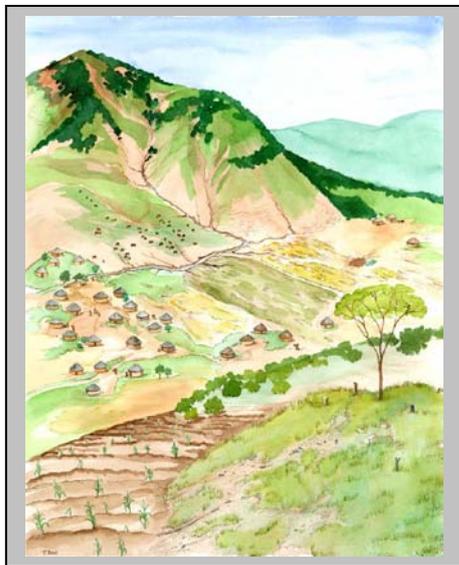
Earlier in this paper we highlighted the plight of farmers in East Africa and we also posed the following question: “What does a person’s faith in Jesus Christ mean for his/her way of life as a farmer?” Additional follow-up questions we might want to ask could include:

- How does God fit into the picture of agriculture?
- Does the Bible have anything to say about farming?

If we were to conduct a survey amongst Christian farmers using questions like these in a place like Kenya you can already conclude what that survey would reveal. God is as distant from farming as the moon is from the earth. The Christian faith in a Christian country like Kenya has little if any meaningful impact upon the actual practice of agriculture. But before we despair, there is a glimmer of hope.

Principle 1: How we do agriculture should glorify God and reflect our commitment to Christ

Take some time to examine the diagrams illustrated below. Look at them carefully and then consider the questions underneath them.



Which community is the Christian community?
Which community is honoring God in their use of the land?

In every case where we have presented these images, Christian farmers they quickly and almost instinctively select the second image. While most of them have never considered such a question before, their swift response reveals a concept that is imbedded deep within. In their heart of hearts they know that God expects something better.

The differences that we see in the second image - the contouring on the slopes to prevent erosion, the forest still intact on the hillside, the trees planted in the village and in the fields, the pasture that is still in good condition, and the pond and the stream that still flows - all help to illustrate a simple but very fundamental concept that we must embrace. The beauty of a healthy, productive, and well cared for agricultural landscape can be a testimony to the beauty of people

whose lives have been changed by Christ. If Christianity is taking root in a place like Kenya, then surely something should be taking root in our farming landscapes as well. Our gardens and farms should bear tangible witness to the fact that we are committed to Christ. If the gospel can heal and transform people, then surely it can heal and transform how we farm. This kind of renewal in thought changes the heart, which then changes how we relate to our land.

To continue developing this concept of honoring God in our use of the land we should also consider the implications of a passage like I Corinthians 10:31 which teaches:

“So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God.”

What clearly emerges here is that we as Christians should be reflecting the goodness and greatness of God in absolutely everything that we do? Yes, it is a high calling, and yes it may seem impossible to achieve, but that is exactly what we should be striving to accomplish. The conclusion is unavoidable. If God desires that we honor Him, even in the smallest things of life like eating or drinking, then how much more should we be willing to honor Him in how we care for His creation? In keeping with the spirit of this Scripture we could easily modify the passage in a way that applies directly to the farmer, and expand it to fisherman, the pastoralist, and so on.

- “So whether you grow vegetables or grain or produce orange juice do it all for the glory of God.”
- “So whether you harvest wood from the forest to make furniture or to cook your food, plant new trees in their place for your neighbor, for future generations, and for the glory of God.”
- “So whether you fish for a living or mend nets, encourage your community to maintain the sustainability of that resource by obeying the fishing regulations, for the glory of God.”
- “So whether you tend sheep or goats or use the resources of the grasslands, utilize them carefully and wisely, for the glory of God.”

Principle 2: Farming is a noble way of life because God was the First Farmer

One reality that is very true in a place like Africa is that farming is often perceived as being the lowest possible occupation that one should pursue. The discouragement that farmers face in terms of their crop yields is a discouragement that is being passed on to the next generation. Parents often urge their children to get a good education so that “you don’t have to be a poor farmer like me!” Hope grows faint if farming is increasingly seen as a futile and fruitless way of life. What this reveals is that poverty must be understood in two ways. The “poverty” of poor production from the land also leads to a “poverty” of the heart and mind.

We need to recognize the true significance of the physical and emotional stress that inflicts many small scale farmers across the world. A worldview that belittles farming as a way of life is not only dangerous, it is decidedly not biblical. Neither is it helpful as Christian leaders, local farmers, missionaries, or other segments of society consider the challenging task of feeding growing populations and future generations. There is a great deal at stake here. How farmers care for their land, or how they do not care for their land, holds tremendous repercussions for future food supplies. Their job, and how they do their job, is of critical importance, and as Christians we need to restore to farming the dignity and respect that it deserves.

If we agree that farming is a respectable and noble way of life, if we agree that it is a critical endeavor essential to the future well-being of communities, landscapes, and nations, how can the Church, and missionaries, promote a biblically-based message that affirms and encourages farmers to become excellent stewards of their land? Once again we must turn to the Scriptures and place God back into the center of this picture.

“Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed.” (Genesis 2:8)

“The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.” (Genesis 2:15)

We must learn to make the most of these two passages because they contain priceless truths that can usher in one of the most necessary shifts in worldview. Ideas have consequences. God’s truth changes both perspectives and people. The “poverty” of heart and mind that plagues many farming communities in the 3rd world can be healed and transformed. In these Scriptures we see that God was not just a bystander when the Garden of Eden came into being. He himself was the One who planted that garden. And what a garden it must have been! A true masterpiece that was diverse and glorious beyond our imagination.

In the context of agriculture, when we reflect on this story in Genesis, God emerges as being the First Farmer. He planted the very first garden! This brings us face to face with some profound questions. What is God’s view of farming? Does He view it as a demeaning and useless way of life? Or does He take the soil of the earth into His hands and look upon farming as a noble vocation to be pursued with excellence? The conclusion is not only clear, it is liberating and transforming. Since God is the Model Farmer, the One who sets all the standards, we can now begin unfolding a brand new picture on this topic that holds far-reaching implications.

The First Farmer principle is powerful because it connects us with God, and it begins to fill the enormous void that often confronts farmers. Instead of conforming to the social pattern that looks at this picture as an empty cup, the Bible helps us to see the vocation of farming in a new light, as something that overflows with a significant sense of legitimate meaning and dignity. God’s garden was a work of art that emanated His excellence, and it serves as the premier example to be followed by farmers who are made in His image.

So God was the First Farmer, and according to the second passage (Genesis 2:15), tending and caring for that fabulous garden was mankind’s very first job description. This was God’s original intention for mankind from the beginning, and this is GOOD NEWS for the farmers of Africa. They can take courage in knowing that their job is a noble one, that their task is one of significance, and that God has given them a special responsibility. For those of us who are missionaries or church leaders, we need to recognize the critical need to build this type of worldview into our farming communities.

Missions Integrated with Creation Stewardship Works

The Evidence of Transformation

Up to this point this paper has sought to highlight three main ideas:

- A) Our world is in desperate need of Christ-centered leadership on creation stewardship.
- B) A truly wonderful opportunity exists to provide that leadership by embracing creation stewardship as one of the important components of evangelical mission efforts.
- C) We have a sound basis for pursuing such a cause because of multiple truths found in Scripture, including the central reality that Christ our Savior is Christ the Creator of all things. When properly applied to this situation Scripture is a most promising ally through which a complete transformation of perspective and behavior can take place.

The appropriate question that must now be considered is this. Do we have evidence that such an approach actually works in the context of missions? Can a biblical worldview on creation change both people and their behavior? It is here that we will provide a brief summary of outcomes we have seen in our work at Care of Creation Kenya (CCK).

Before looking at the results themselves it is important to mention that most of our efforts have revolved around work with professing Christians from a broad range of different denominations. In this sense our ministry is one of discipleship as opposed to evangelism. Results of numerous conferences and workshops conducted by CCK over the past several years have shown that church and community leaders, school teaches, farmers and others can be successfully awakened to take practical steps in caring for creation. The key to this “awakening” is a discipleship and vision-casting process which helps leaders, farmers, and community members explore the environmental crisis through the lens of a biblical worldview.

Positive Results from the 2nd International Conference on God and Creation

As part of our effort to spread a biblical vision for creation stewardship East Africa, CCK has organized and hosted two international conferences on God and Creation. These events took place in January 2004 and again in March of 2006. In each case a total of 250 church and community leaders attended from several countries across the region. While a post-conference evaluation was not conducted for the first event, a CCK intern named Sarah Zomer was able to conduct such an evaluation for the event held in 2006.

The brief summary of evaluation results given below in Tables 3 and 4 suggest that conferences and workshops of this nature hold tremendous potential for transforming worldviews. Christians that have often ignored environmental concerns can be awakened to recognize their God-given responsibility, and such a transformation can lead to verifiable action.

Table 3: Transformation of Worldview (Results of Post Conference Evaluation)

Evidence of Changed Perspectives
Representative Sample of Comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• "I have attended many conferences and seminars on the environment, but none of them impacted me like the God and Creation conference." <i>Joseph Gituri</i>

- “For the first time I have seen myself as a real steward of the creation. I now realize how I have neglected my responsibility and violated the original purpose that God had for a healthy and beautiful environment. As Christians it is a high time we stop concentrating only on spiritual matters. I will take it upon myself to make sure my sermons include creation stewardship.” *Margaret Makandi, Meru area*
- “I was deeply challenged because I realized that I had the lowest level of knowledge about environmental concerns. I have been the best tree cutter and have never replanted anything. My sermons only focused on spiritual needs and never touched on the physical things which God has created.” *Festus Kamunde*
- I was challenged to hear that God is coming to reconcile the whole creation to Himself and I feel the need to repent before God as I have neglected His creation. I have never thought about environmental stewardship but now I have a whole new perspective.” *John Mwangi Kerugoya*
- “This is a refreshing aspect of the gospel that can truly transform our future both spiritually and physically. It should be taught everywhere.” *Ibrahim Chemunay, Nairobi Great Commission School*

***Note:** 85% of respondents who completed a post conference evaluation made comments similar to the ones given above.

Table 4: Transformation of Behavior (Results of Post Conference Evaluation)

Evidence of Action Taken	Percent or number
A) % of respondents who reported action taken by building awareness through speaking , preaching or by organizing a local workshop or seminar	29%
B) % of respondents who reported action through tree planting initiatives	24%
• Total # of trees planted	16,000
C) % of respondents who reported efforts to encourage their community leaders to take action	9%
D) % of respondents who reported action through establishment of a new tree nursery	8%
• Total # of tree nurseries started	15
E) % of respondents who reported specific lifestyle and behavior changes	4%
F) % of respondents who started practicing conservation agriculture	4%
G) % of respondents who reported efforts to develop curriculum for their church or bible school	3%
H) % of respondents who organized a creation stewardship day in their community or church	2%
I) % of respondents who reported changes made at their organization towards better stewardship	2%

***Note:** A total of 105 out of 250 attendees participated in the post-conference evaluation.

Positive Results from CCK’s Farming God’s Way (FGW) Program

Apart from conferences and workshops, another focus of CCK’s work is to promote a biblical vision for reforestation and for agricultural stewardship. For the purposes of this paper we will focus specifically on agriculture and our work amongst farmers. One conviction we hold as a budding mission agency is that God does not want His people to simply tolerate the reality that millions of people in certain countries face serious food shortages on a semi-regular and often

chronic basis. We believe He wants us to pursue a larger vision of equipping farmers in those countries to restore and revitalize their land, and to free their people from the crippling force of dependency upon outsiders. This ultimately is the goal of our Farming God’s Way program.

Originally developed by Brian Oldreive in Zimbabwe, Farming God’s Way is a deliberate attempt to put God, as the First Farmer, back into the center of our farming systems. It is an effort to disciple and train farmers into a biblical worldview of agriculture. The basic premise of this approach is the truth that we can glorify God by pursuing excellence in agricultural stewardship. How we do agriculture should reflect the goodness and greatness of God.

This biblical training is combined with the practice of conservation agriculture to reverse the effects of land degradation. The technique applied on the ground is simple and effective, and it protects and improves the productivity of the land at the same time. But it also represents a significant change from traditional methods, so it must be introduced to farmers in the right way.

For three years now CCK has been conducting its own trials, learning how to appropriately introduce this method to local farmers. Combining the actual technique with biblical discipleship is proving to be an effective approach, and we are beginning to see some remarkable results. Tremendous potential exists for not only alleviating the “physical” poverty that farmers face, but for also restoring their dignity, and for eliminating the “spiritual” and emotional poverty that afflicts so many.

The comments and testimonials below highlight the transformation that is taking place in the hearts and fields of farmers in Ndeiya, a community on the edge of the Rift Valley.

Table 5: Transformation of Worldview on Agriculture

Evidence of Changed Perspectives
Representative Sample of Comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “I have now learned that we have completely left God out of our farms. Your teaching has opened my heart to realize that we have strayed from God’s will and I know God is calling us back to the garden. We claim to have faith but have not been practicing it.” <i>Henry Njoroge Munjuga</i>• “Since I started attending the discipleship classes I have changed my perspective of farming. I used to hate farming but now I love it and I dream about it every day.” <i>Hannah Wanjiku</i>• “You and your organization have been sent as angels by God to rid us of our miserable lives as farmers. The truth as you spoke from the Bible is so evident that I wonder how far we’d be if you had come here years ago!” <i>Mzee Godfrey Ndung’u Njenga from Karanya</i>• “This message is most important to the church. Let’s have all the pastors present today go ahead right now and tell us when they’ll gather their congregations for this message!” <i>Farmer from Kijabe</i>• “This is one of the best messages I have ever heard. I feel I am a totally transformed person.” <i>Christopher Mwaura from Chogoria Hills</i>• “This is wonderful, encouraging and enriching. Please teach these Scriptures to all the Christian leaders everywhere!” <i>Grace Wanja Njoroge</i>• “These teachings are a big revelation and the best thing to have happened in our lives as farmers particularly because we have realized that farming is ordained by the First Farmer - God, himself!” <i>Farmers Group from Ndeiya</i>

Table 6: Transformation of Landscapes

Evidence of Improved Productivity
Representative Sample of Comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I have never seen such good crops growing on this land. Please come and teach me how to do farming God’s way.” <i>Daniel Mbugwa</i> • “I am very happy to have met the people from CCK. I took them to a portion of my land that has never produced anything for so many years and we decided to try Farming God’s Way on it and the beans on that plot are beautiful.” <i>Elizabeth Njoki</i> • “I have been following the teaching since 2007 and as a result my heart and mind have been completely changed. My crop yields have been very different and have been the talk of many as they admire my farm.” <i>Elizabeth Ng’ang’a</i> • "It is not God who has refused us food in abundance, but we Christians who have refused to listen to God and do things His way. Look at this maize!! Isn't seeing believing." <i>Mr. James Ng’ang’a</i> in the presence of fellow teachers at Kiawanda Primary School, who concurred in unison as they compared the green maize in the FGW plot to the drying maize in the control plot.

In addition to the verbal confirmation received from farmers about the effectiveness of Farming God’s Way, CCK has measured, when possible, the actual yield outputs to substantiate the claims. We have also consistently measured yields on our own demonstration plot located onsite near our office. Tables 7 and 8 below summarize a portion of numerical data collected to date.

Table 7: Transformed Landscapes: FGW Yield Results at CCK Demo Site 2007-2009

CCK Demo site	FGW Crop	Yield in bags/acre	Comments
March 2007	Maize Beans	34 9.3	Preliminary FGW trial at Brackenhurst
March 2008	Maize Beans	39 11.9	All inputs being equal, note a 15% increase in Maize yield over 2007 and a 28% increase in Bean yield over 2007. This suggests FGW is beginning to restore the strength and health of the land
March 2009 <i>Drought year</i>	Maize Beans	12.2 8.8	2009 came with a terrible drought. Maize and bean yields at CCK were 31% and 73% of the levels seen in 2008. Other maize plots planted locally at the same time experienced total failure, highlighting how FGW can produce a crop even during a bad drought.

***Note:** In rural Kenya large gunny sacks are commonly used to measure yield. One “bag” of maize, weighs 90 kilograms. 30 bags/acre for example, translates to 2.7 metric tons/acre.

Table 8: Transformed Landscapes: FGW vs. Control Plots in Ndeiya 2008-2009

Location and date	FGW vs. control plot	Yield in bags/acre	Comments
Kiawanda October 2008			This was the preliminary FGW trial conducted with a control plot comparison (Kiawanda Primary School grounds)
	FGW Maize	13.2	On the very 1 st season, all inputs being equal, FGW maize produced twice as much yield as compared to the control plot
	Control plot	6.1	
	FGW beans	7.3	In similar but less dramatic fashion, the FGW plot produced a 33% greater yield as compared to the control plot
Control plot	5.5		
Kiawanda October 2009 Drought year	FGW Maize	17.7	On the 2 nd season, all inputs being equal, FGW maize produced 3 times as much yield as the control plot, showing how the practice is continuing to restore the vitality of the land
	Control plot	5.9	
Paul Thuo July 2009 Drought year	FGW Beans	6.3	During the 2009 drought, and farmer Paul’s 1 st attempt with FGW, his field yielded 65% more beans compared to his control plot
	Control plot	3.8	
Elizabeth M. July 2009 Drought year	FGW Beans	2.3	In the same year and situation, Farmer Elizabeth’s bean field yielded 36% more beans compared to an adjacent control plot
	Control plot	1.7	

It is important to note that the drought of 2009 complicated the collection of raw data from a number of farms in Ndeiya. The FGW plots were doing so well during a time of almost complete crop failure that grain from those plots was actually stolen before some harvest figures could be collected. In spite of the setback, this limited data speaks for itself, and photos of the actual fields provided visual proof that FGW trials were outperforming all other crops in the area. Other setbacks in verifying improved yield figures have included foraging by wild animals, which targeted the FGW plots because of their more luxuriant appearance and growth.

What the combined results on these tables demonstrate is that a promising and positive change has begun in Ndeiya. Although the overall numbers of farmers participating in this program is small, the good news is spreading quickly, and we hope this trend will continue to grow and sweep across the area to others. This ministry endeavor is helping farmers to recognize and embrace their biblically based responsibility to be good stewards of their land. Many of them are expressing legitimate joy in discovering that their Christian faith can be relevantly applied to their way of life, and they are beginning to see the physical fruit that comes from better stewardship. Another encouraging development which has begun in this community relates to reforestation. Some of these farmers are now thinking beyond their field crops and are beginning to discuss the next steps that should be taken in healing their land. The question they are asking now is this: “What trees should we be planting?”

While more work is certainly needed, the hope for eternity which these farmers have is now being complemented by corresponding hope for today, and their lives are demonstrating how the gospel can change both people and their land. A very similar set of conclusions can be drawn from the statements and actions taken by those who have attended the God and Creation

conferences and workshops. When we put God back into the center of environmental and agricultural matters, where our Creator deserves to be, He equips and enables us to begin making the critical changes that are needed.

Conclusion

What I hope this paper has demonstrated is that we as Christians have a glorious and exciting opportunity before us in terms of integrating missions with legitimate efforts to care for creation. Of all people on earth, we have absolutely the best reasons to become actively involved, and to develop a robust response that demonstrates the fullness of Christ's love through a holistic expression in our quest to fulfill the Great Commission. By exploring this new frontier, and by developing new strategies to integrate creation care into the cause of evangelical missions, we will bring Good News to a world that normally leaves God out of the picture, and that strives to wrestle with this problem in its own strength. From an environmental point of view we must recognize the reality that we live in a world where vast numbers of people face major and often increasing challenges in meeting their basic needs of food, water, and shelter. Caring for creation can be a wonderful way to meet the needs of others, and we should be living to meet the needs of others because God is living to meet our needs.

Appendix 1



Transforming people and the land that sustains them

Care of Creation Kenya (CCK) is an evangelical mission organization dedicated to awakening the Church to its responsibility in environmental and agricultural stewardship. We are a registered NGO and our office is located in Kenya at the well-known Brackenhurst International Conference Center near Limuru.

Our Mission statement

Our mission is to pursue a God-centered response to the environmental crisis in Africa which brings glory to the Creator, advances the cause of Christ, and leads to a transformation of the people and the land that sustains them.

Additional Resources

To learn more about biblical principles of environmental and agricultural stewardship the following books are available from the author of this paper:

- “Christ and Creation: Our Biblical Calling to Environmental Stewardship” by Craig Sorley
- “Farming that Brings Glory to God and Hope to the Hungry: A Set of Biblical Principles to Transform the Practice of Agriculture” by Craig Sorley

These books have been published in Kenya and are not yet available in the US but copies can be obtained by contacting the author via email.

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