

BEYOND STEWARDSHIP

New Approaches to
Creation Care

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*To our parents,
Jane and John Warners
and
Alice and Loren Heun,
who
always supported us,
always encouraged us,
and
always believed in us.*

This call for respect is a call of justice. The Old Testament prophets proclaimed that a call of justice was coming from the vulnerable humans in society—the widow, the orphan, the alien, the poor. Although they had independent moral standing, these persons existed on society's margins, oppressed and exploited. Their vulnerability and harm called out for justice, because they mattered. Justice showed up as a claim, an imperative arising because they also had independent moral standing. Justice summoned the people to ensure that the marginalized persons were not harmed and to look after their welfare. That claim was based in experiencing the claimant's moral standing as a being of worth, an end worthy of respect. The goodness of the creation shows up in this same way. We experience the goodness of the creation as a felt claim, as an imperative that the nonhuman creation matters. The imperative becomes, then, a summons to protect the vulnerable earth from harm. Earth matters. The experience of creation's disruption, the harm of the earth itself, is a call of justice.

We are touched by the earth in this call of justice. We are touched by the earth's gracious and contingent support. Our response to earth's call of justice should be a deep, expansive environmental responsibility. We are touched by grace, grace given corporeally, by the gift of grace experienced as the earth. This independent moral standing of earth should spur a response. It should awaken our fundamental responsibility to the creation as something to respect and care for intrinsically. This reorientation is a call for restraint and a call to care for creation for its own sake.

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SYMBIOTIC STEWARDSHIP



Aminah Al-Attas Bradford

Over four hundred applicants and not one of them mentioned the creation. These were Calvin College student leaders applying to be faith facilitators in their residence halls. At the end of their interviews, I asked for a one-hundred-word explanation of the gospel. Without fail the students mentioned God, God's Son Jesus, humans, and sin. Some mentioned the devil, hell, and heaven. A few mentioned incarnation and resurrection. But no one mentioned the creation. To be fair, when you are given only a hundred words to summarize the gospel, why mention muskrats or glaciers or microbes? After all, in the end, what does the creation really have to do with salvation?

I also asked students about their service experiences, and some were advocates for environmental causes. Their reasons for serving far surpassed anything I could have offered when I was a college student. Some mentioned that Christ is Lord of all things (Colossians 1:15–20), others that every square inch of creation is the Lord's.¹ Some students celebrated

¹ Abraham Kuyper, *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 461.

that creation is the theater of God's glory,² others that humans are to be stewards of creation (Genesis 1:26–28). But in these students' minds, and I imagine in the minds of many ecologically sensitive Christians, when giving a bare-bones gospel account, the creation doesn't merit mention. Creation is a matter of ethics, or obedience, but not salvation.

I press on this phenomenon of separating the creation from salvation because this book is framed by a shared lament aptly put by my colleague James R. Skillen. Given all the theological and biblical justifications mentioned above, he asked in a discussion, "Why isn't ecological stewardship the bread and butter of the church?" Scholars are beginning to think that part of the problem is the logic of stewardship itself. Stewardship is a problematic concept.

A key critique of stewardship is that it depends on the twin prides of thinking too highly and centrally of humanity (anthropocentrism) and thinking too lowly of everything else (objectification). Stewardship emphasizes humanity's exceptional capacity and responsibility while minimizing the creation's inherent value. After all, how can we steward if we are not separate from and somewhat superior to the rest of the creation? This distorted way of thinking about the human and the nonhuman creation may not seem problematic because modern theology itself functions with this segregated and marginalizing view of the nonhuman creation, what I call matter or flesh. Modern Christianity often operates with this same puffed-up picture of humans. We are taught that the gospel revolves around us. As God's image bearers, we imagine humans are set apart, the only characters in a drama about divine rescue. [We think of ourselves as distinct from and more important than the rest of creation—more rational than animal and more "spiritual" than creaturely. This view of humanity corresponds to an anemic picture of the rest of the creation. We think of the creation as special scenery, a backdrop to our lives. Acknowledging these twin prides offers a critique of stewardship and raises questions about *who* we are and *where* we are.]

This critique is bolstered by new biological insights. Learning that trillions of microbes living in and on our bodies (known as the human

2 John Calvin, *Calvin: Institutes of Christian Religion*, 4th ed., vol. 1, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967), 61, 179, 341.

microbiome) contribute to our digestion, cognition, sleep, immunity, and more erodes the biological notion that we are an independent, superior species. These discoveries of humanity's intimate entanglement with microbial life also complicate the theological idea that we are separate from and superior to the rest of creation. How superior to animals can we be if we depend on them to be ourselves?

These critiques alone, that stewardship operates with an exaggerated, prideful, and now biologically untenable idea of the human being, are reason enough to reconsider the language of stewardship. But anthropocentrism and objectification are not the cause of stewardship's failure to make ecological concerns the bread and butter of the church. In fact, they are symptoms of a deeper problem. Anthropocentrism and objectification are endemic to a Christian culture that cannot account for why the non-human creation matters. Christians may be waking to *ecological* reasons why all people should care for the creation, but few Christians seem to have a *theological* imagination for why the creation matters to the central drama of salvation. The student interviewees who championed ecological stewardship didn't know how to connect the creation to the gospel. They didn't know why the creation matters.

Stewardship is a problematic term, but not in the way we usually think. The real problem is that Christians do not know why matter matters for redemption. When we understand why the creation matters for redemption, stewardship becomes symbiotic and its tendencies toward anthropocentrism and objectification fall away.

At one level, creation matters because, without it, humans would cease to exist. Coming to grips with humanity's biologically symbiotic relationship with the creation is a good start. That is why I focus on our dependence on microbial life. Biological dependence wakes people from their false sense of independence, superiority, and centrality. But our dependence on the creation goes beyond biology. The creation matters for salvation. Cultivating a new imagination for biological *and* spiritual dependency primes us to finally acknowledge that stewardship is a mutual task between humans and the nonhuman creation. Stewardship becomes symbiotic when our dependence on creatures moves beyond matters of biology to matters of redemption.

We should not be naïve. Accepting humanity's entanglement or kinship with other creatures (especially spiritual dependence) is a hard pill to swallow for many Christians. That is why, before we can turn toward symbiotic stewardship, we must first explore the roots of our resistance to dependence on nonhuman matter. I suspect that whether we call it stewardship, earthkeeping, creation care, or kinship, until Christians understand why they place themselves above the nonhuman creation and until they have an imagination for how the nonhuman creation is related to salvation, environmental stewardship will never be the bread and butter of the church. Stewardship won't matter until matter matters.

Our Microbial Symbionts

I am a theologian, not a microbiologist. But I like microbes because they expose unexamined assumptions about what it means to be human. Sometimes we don't realize the deep beliefs we hold about ourselves and the world until something, like the microbiome, challenges them. Looking at microbes is an opportunity to turn the microscope back on ourselves. As we do this, it is important to pay attention to and learn from the questions that arise. (See Halteman and Zwart, chapter 9.) Microbes will reveal and Scripture will reform our understanding of ourselves and our relationships to creatures. Microbes are like tiny prophets. They prepare the way for a deepened imagination for how matter might matter for salvation.

Humans depend on nonhuman matter, the flesh of the world, for food and shelter. This is not news. The discovery that humans themselves are food and shelter for trillions of microscopic creatures is news, and it is making headlines: "We Are Our Bacteria,"³ "Microbes Maketh Man,"⁴ "The Human Microbiome: Me, Myself, Us."⁵ When we count up the cells

3 Jane E. Brody, "We Are Our Bacteria," *New York Times*, July 14, 2014, <https://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/07/14/we-are-our-bacteria/>.

4 "Microbes Maketh Man," *Economist*, August 18, 2012, <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2012/08/18/microbes-maketh-man>.

5 "The Human Microbiome: Me, Myself, Us," *Economist*, August 18, 2012, <https://www.economist.com/science-and-technology/2012/08/18/me-myself-us>.

that comprise a human body, we find there are at least as many nonhuman cells as there are human cells. Microbes inhabit our skin and line our digestive pathway. Collectively, they are sometimes referred to as a person's microbial organ. Even inside our human cells there are mitochondria, the organelles that power each cell. The microbial DNA contained in mitochondria indicates that mitochondria were formerly free-living microbes themselves. The multiple layers of human-microbe intimacy make it difficult to conceive of human life as we know it without these invisible partners.

For example, what you eat becomes a meal for your gut microbes, who feast as they aid your own digestion. Their waste supplies neurochemicals that contribute to feelings of being full, happy, sleepy and help you crave your next meal. But your intimate entanglement with microbes goes even deeper. You were inoculated with your first microbial inhabitants as you passed through your mother's birth canal. The composition of your mother's breast milk was tailored to suit your new microbiome. Her breast milk contained nutrients that could not nourish you directly but fed your microbes, who then aided you in early stages of digestion, immune system development, and even brain function.

In light of such discoveries, scientists are reconsidering the very nature of humanity. They no longer treat the idea of a biological individual as tenable. They can't easily determine where you end and your microbes begin.⁶ Biologically, humans are an amalgam of us and them, us plus our symbionts. Scholars are straining for new language to describe this reality. Instead of calling ourselves human, they suggest ecosystem, waystation, or my personal favorite, holobiont—from the Greek meaning "a whole set of lives." If symbiosis was previously studied as plants and pollinators, today humans, or shall we say holobionts, are the new textbook example of mutual dependence.

6 "These findings lead us into directions that transcend the self/non-self, subject/object dichotomies that have characterized Western thought. . . . Animals cannot be considered individuals by anatomical or physiological criteria because a diversity of symbionts are both present and functional." Scott F. Gilbert, Jan Sapp, and Alfred I. Tauber, "A Symbiotic View of Life: We Have Never Been Individuals," *Quarterly Review of Biology* 87, no. 4 (December 2012): 325–26.

Self-Analysis

How does the idea of the microbiome settle in your mind? What questions rise to the surface? Where do you get stuck? News of humanity's thoroughgoing microbial dependencies can be unnerving for Christians raised on the values of independence and personal responsibility. You might be asking, "If I am not in charge of my own behaviors, thoughts, and feelings, who am I? What about Genesis and being made in God's image? And how does individual salvation work if I am more of an amalgam of creatures than an independent agent? Don't my reason and free will distinguish me as human? Aren't all these distinctions the tools I need to get beyond my animal instincts and lean into Christlike behaviors . . . like stewardship, for example?"

News that humans are holobionts may seem so incompatible with Protestant ideas of individual salvation and discipleship that some might be tempted to ignore or deny the science of the microbiome altogether. Another danger is that young Christians, especially young Christian biologists, might feel their only choice is to abandon not the science but their Christian faith, finding it too inflexible to accommodate new biological discoveries. But the questions and hesitations that arise are important. They reveal that the impulse to distinguish and elevate ourselves above the rest of creation isn't accidental. It is theological. The questions and hesitations are driven by how we are taught to think about ourselves and the world in which we live, the way we interpret the Bible, and especially the way we read the account of the Fall in Genesis.

In the following rereading of Adam and Eve's Fall, we will discover that the temptation to draw a dividing line between humans and the rest of creation, elevating the human race above other creatures, is a temptation as old as the human race itself. This ancient, primal temptation explains why environmentalist critiques of stewardship's anthropocentrism and objectification don't motivate the typical modern western Christian. In fact, if these assumptions are understood to be central to Christian theology, criticisms of these assumptions may fuel churchgoers' suspicions of environmentalists. When Christianity itself is built on the divide between the human and the nonhuman creation, critiquing anthropocentrism and objectification will

not motivate Christians toward environmental care. Indeed, the critiques become an attack on Christianity itself, and thus the critiques are ignored. Christians are set up to reject environmentalism. If biological dependence and kinship with the creation are to become motivations for creation care, we must first understand why Christians cling so tightly to the distinction between humans and the nonhuman creation in the first place.

The Fall as Creaturely Denial

How would you describe the root cause of Adam and Eve's Fall? One classic interpretation is that they failed to resist temptation. They did not use their God-given gifts of reason, freedom, and willpower to rise above their lower animal instincts and natural cravings. They succumbed to lust and appetite. In so doing, Adam and Eve debased themselves, behaving more like the other creatures than like humans meant to rise above their animality. They moved down toward creatures instead of up toward God. Some suggest that when humans fell, they lost or tarnished the image of God in them, the very dignity meant to distinguish humans from animals.

By this account, the more animal a human is, the more lowly and sinful they are. To heal from the Fall is to get beyond creaturely temptations and to move toward the distinctly human or even divine qualities of our nature. The less animal we are, the more holy we are. (Gender and race also map onto this hierarchy: the darker and more feminine a person is, the more animal and less holy they are imagined to be.) No wonder some Christians resist ecologists' well-meaning attempts to humble humanity by emphasizing our dependence on animals!

But what if there is a different way to read the Fall? Theologians like to emphasize that all of reality is divided by one solid line. That line does not fall between the human and the nonhuman creation but between God the Creator and everything else. While the Creator is independent and needs nothing, everything on the other side of the line is dependent and creaturely, because creatures get their being and life from God. By definition, to be creaturely is to be dependent.

When the snake tempted Eve to eat from the tree of knowledge, he suggested a way to sidestep her dependence on God. In essence, he suggested

that humans don't need God for knowledge and wisdom. Rather, they can be independent from God and thus become like God. Adam and Eve weren't dragged down by their creatureliness; they were dragged down because they tried to rise above it. Adam and Eve's sin was not their failure to rise above or transcend their creatureliness. Their sin was rejecting their creatureliness and denying their dependence on God. They did not want to be creatures like other animals. In their attempt to gain independence from God and get beyond their creatureliness, they fell.⁷ The Fall was a case of creaturely denial.

In this rereading, we learn that turning a blind eye to our creaturely dependencies and elevating ourselves above the rest of the creation are fallen instincts. Believing that humans exist in their own category of being, that they do not share the same dependencies and fate as the rest of the creation, is a condition of the Fall. In fact, in this understanding of the Fall, both anthropocentrism and objectification are two sides of the same coin—two examples of rejecting our creatureliness. Anthropocentrism and objectification are conditions of the Fall.

Thus, when ecological folk lament stewardship's anthropocentric and objectifying tendencies, they are like prophets crying out against the delusion that we are higher than the rest of the creation. Microbes are prophets too, although tiny ones. They bring us face-to-face with our biological dependency. They are like a flag God waves to get our attention. Humanity's symbiotic existence with microbes is not an affront to human sanctification; it is a reminder of our creatureliness and of God's providence. The microbiome tells us the truth that by God's grace we are embedded, enmeshed in the creation that mutually and symbiotically supports our being.

Hopefully, microbial witness of our enmeshed dependence makes the old attitudes of human exceptionality and centrality seem strange. Hopefully, this interpretation of the Fall gives Christians permission to reconsider such attitudes. But when the language of stewardship separates and elevates humanity over and against the rest of the creation, the

7 Sebastian Moore, *Jesus the Liberator of Desire* (New York: Crossroad, 1989). I am indebted to Gene Rogers for showing me this interpretation.

stewardship paradigm reinforces the very attitudes that rereading the Fall might help us shed. However, if we can separate stewardship from anthropocentrism and exceptionalism by embracing our mutual dependence with the nonhuman creation, stewardship becomes symbiotic. When the ailing planet ceases to be an object out there and becomes a world embedded in our very being, the objectionable aspects of stewardship shift. As we learn to pay attention to and care for the microbial life that supports our own, it becomes a matter of repentance that we acknowledge biological stewardship goes both ways. In light of our intimate symbioticism, any attempts to care for and restore the creation that cares for and restores us can only be conceived as symbiotic stewardship.

Beyond Biological Symbioticism

Coming to grips with the biological mutuality of stewardship begins to rehabilitate the language of stewardship. The image of microbes dining on the breast milk my daughter suckled but couldn't digest until her symbionts broke it down becomes iconoclastic. It exposes the idolatry of one-sided biological stewardship and anthropocentrism. It destroys our objectification of the nonhuman creation. But it is not enough for matter to matter biologically. Acknowledgment that our symbioticism is a biological gift of God's providence is the beginning, but it is not the end. It is the yeast (another microbe) that expands our imaginations as we explore the deeper ways that nonhuman flesh matters in humanity's redemption and recovery from the Fall.

How do we grow wonder for nonhuman matter's contribution to humanity's restoration to God? We look at Jesus. We look at the biblical story of incarnation and baptism. My hope is that our new sense of biological dependencies and a reformed reading of the Fall give us eyes to see the contributions of the flesh that have been present in the Scriptures all along. (See Meyaard-Schaap, chapter 3.)

The Word Became Flesh and Was Made Holobiont

When many Western Christians think about the incarnation, they think about God becoming human—that is to say, Christians tend to emphasize

God becoming a *Homo sapiens* rather than the more general miracle of God becoming matter, flesh, the tissue of the world. But incarnation literally means “in the flesh,” “in the body”—as in God became matter. One way to tune our attention toward nonhuman contributions to human redemption is to prioritize Jesus becoming flesh before emphasizing the particularities of his becoming human, male, Middle Eastern flesh.⁸ This is not to say that Jesus came as all flesh. Jesus was not a river or a monarch butterfly, and it does matter that Jesus became human. Rather, it is to say that we must not rush past the significance that God united God’s self to flesh, to biological matter. In the incarnation, God becomes related, becomes kin, to the flesh of the world as a fleshed human, or holobiont.

Because Jesus is a real human and because he was born of Mary, Jesus is just as much a holobiont as you and I. Jesus was inoculated with his mother’s microbial symbionts. The DNA he carries is mostly bacterial. If we squirm at these implications of Jesus taking on real flesh, it is because we harbor vestiges of the fallen desire for saviors to be more than creaturely. We are not alone. The desire to protect Christ from tainted, lowly realities of embodiment has fueled gnostic heresies, which pit matter against spirit, from the earliest days of the church. But Jesus was a human, not a ghost or an angel. Which means he is hydrogen, oxygen, carbon, nitrogen. His bones are made of energy from the sun that was stored in the grains of wheat that became the bread that Jesus digested, but not without the help of his symbionts. Matter matters biologically for Jesus as much as it does for us. When Christ crosses the Creator-creature divide, he doesn’t just dip his toe into the world of flesh; he submerges himself in it.

Most importantly, Jesus’ connection with flesh does not begin with the incarnation. The incarnation makes *visible* the connection that the Second Person of the Trinity has always had with the creation. From Irenaeus and Athanasius to Calvin, the church affirms that the Word has from all time

8 Duncan Reid, “Enfleshing the Human: An Earth-Revealing, Earth-Healing Christology,” in *Earth Revealing; Earth Healing: Ecology and Christian Theology*, ed. Denis Edwards (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001), 69–83. Using the two phrases from the Nicene creed, “became flesh” and “was made human,” Reid proposes that ecological Christologies must prioritize Jesus’ flesh as foundational and Jesus’ humanity as an amplification rather than a negation of Jesus’ enfleshment.

been present and active with creation as the one through whom all things were made. From this we know that matter matters to Christ, not only because Christ is matter but because Christ has always been the Lord of matter, the one in whom all things hold together (Colossians 1:16–17). Christ’s Lordship reflects an intimate, creative relationship with matter. And Christ’s relationship to flesh is not just because it’s the scenery or the sideshow to our human drama. In fact, Christ’s central relationship with matter becomes increasingly clear as we reread the story of Jesus’ baptism, where, if anything, *we* become the sideshow, the awe-filled observers of an encounter between Jesus and a river. In Jesus’ baptism, we can explore further how matter might matter for redemption. Such exploration further erodes those patterns of anthropocentrism and objectification that falsely suggest that stewardship is a one-way street.

Jesus and the Jordan

Why did Jesus get baptized? Jesus was the only pure and holy human to walk the earth. He was the last human in need of baptism. Early Christian theologians puzzled over this and offered a surprising explanation. Jesus got into the Jordan River not to purify himself but to purify the water.

Theologians spanning a millennium explain: “Christ was baptized in order that by the experience he might *purify* the water.”⁹ Jesus “is cleansed for the purification for the waters, for he indeed did not need purification, who takes away the sin of the world.”¹⁰ Thomas Aquinas quotes Ambrose: “I answer that, ‘Our Lord was baptized because He wished, not to be cleansed, but to cleanse the waters.’”¹¹

By these ancient accounts, Jesus’ entry into the Jordan was less about a holy God getting wet and more about water getting holy. Here water, nonhuman matter, or flesh, is center stage and not because humans need

9 Ignatius of Antioch, “Letter to the Ephesians 18.2,” in *The Holy Spirit in the Syrian Baptismal Tradition*, by Sebastian Brock (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2008), 92 (emphasis added).

10 Gregory of Nazianzus, “Oration 38.16,” in *Festal Orations: St. Gregory of Nazianzus*, trans. Nonna Verna Harrison (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2008), 74.

11 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: Volume 53, The Life of Christ (3a. 38–45)*, trans. Samuel Parsons and Albert Pinheiro (Westminster: Blackfriars, 1971), 23.

water to survive. This scene is not about us. As Lord of all things, Christ has always had a relationship with nonhuman creation, and he gives his own purity and righteousness to the water. And the water and all creation are grateful! As an ancient liturgy says, "Christ sanctified it when he went down and was baptized in it. At the moment he went up from the water, heaven and earth accorded him honour, the sun inclined its rays, the stars worshipped him who had sanctified all rivers and springs."¹² Not just the Jordan River but all rivers and streams were sanctified. This logic, that when one creature undergoes transformation all of its relatives get changed too, may seem surprising, but it is central to how theologians make sense of the gospel. For example, when Adam falls, all humans fall. When the Word becomes flesh, all flesh becomes Christ's kin. When Jesus purifies the Jordan, all water gets healed.

When we train our imagination to view the creation as more than scenery in the Scriptures, what we see at Jesus's baptism is his direct interaction with the tissue of the world. With our imagination materially retuned, the creation is no longer a backdrop. Matter becomes a main character, and humans are the bystanders. Here the geography is a main character, and humans are the scenery.

Creation Stewards Humanity

This is not to say that humans are excluded from the larger story of baptism. On the contrary, Christ purified the rivers for their own sake so that they could become part of the mystery of human baptism. Rivers, water, flesh, *and* humans all participate in baptism. When we get into the water that Christ baptized, our own purification is sealed and signaled. Although humans participate, water leads the way. Water gets baptized and then shares its baptism with us. By the power of the Spirit, water stewards the grace of baptism. Just as microbes (flesh) facilitate our biological life, water (creation) facilitates our sacramental life. (See Meyaard-Schaap, chapter 3.) Christ refuses to let us sidestep the creation. And thank goodness, for our baptism becomes yet another opportunity to repent of the

¹² Severus of Antioch, "Fenquitho III," in *The Holy Spirit in the Syrian Baptismal Tradition*, 95.

lie of independence from the nonhuman creation. Matter contributes to our reorientation to God as we recover from denying our creaturely dependence.

And we have not even mentioned the bread and wine, our spiritual food. Grain and grapes do not grow without microbes, which prepare the soil. Grain and grapes are converted and preserved as bread and wine by microbial yeast. And we would struggle to digest this holy meal without our own microbial symbionts. Our Lord doesn't want us to think about phantasmic, immaterial things. He wants us to touch and taste, to embrace our entanglement and dependence on flesh. As it tends generations of humans, flesh becomes a steward of humanity. Nonhuman flesh assists in human repentance and restoration. As we heal from the sin of denying our creatureliness, Christ employs the water of baptism and the bread and wine to steward our material journey of redemption. Flesh becomes the bread and butter of the church.

When we can imagine how matter contributes to our biology *and* to our redemption, the falsehoods fade away. And as anthropocentrism and objectification fade away, so do the problems of stewardship. When we understand that matter matters for redemption, caring for the creation becomes a mutual stewardship wherein we acknowledge that the flesh that supports our biological and spiritual renewal needs us to return the favor. We move beyond mere stewardship to symbiotic stewardship as we embrace our creaturely dependence.

I do not mean to minimize the problems of the Christian Environmental Stewardship paradigm. Rather, I suggest that the problems run deeper than stewardship itself. The root of stewardship's problem is us, specifically a version of Christianity that overemphasizes humanity and underemphasizes everything else. Until we address the root of stewardship's failure, no amount of tinkering with names and paradigms will move the needle in a moment of great ecological urgency.

My hope is that rereading Scripture in these creaturely, materially attentive ways clears theological weeds for those chapters that rightfully suggest that our relationship to creatures is one of embedded kinship. I hope it stretches Christian imaginations so that we read the Scriptures

for a gospel account that shows our need to repent of creaturely denial and celebrates Christ's and our own entanglement with flesh. This clearing makes way for symbiotic stewardship. My hope is that we all learn to narrate the gospel to show that the nonhuman creation matters for salvation—even if we are given only one hundred words. *For God so loved the world, that while we were yet denying our creaturely kinship with all flesh, Christ chose to depend on such flesh for our rescue.*

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FROM STEWARDSHIP TO EARTHKEEPING:

Why We Should Move beyond Stewardship



Steven Bouma-Prediger

Mitch and May Term

In the spring of 2018, after finishing his third year at Hope College, Mitch had the opportunity to take a May term course in upstate New York. He and ten other students enrolled in "Ecological Theology and Ethics," an upper-level religion course that I teach each year. The course includes a nine-day wilderness expedition in the Adirondack Mountains. Using Camp Fowler, a Christian camp in the south-central part of the park as our base of operations, we go whitewater rafting, spend four days canoeing (and portaging), have a solo day, and backpack for four days on a forty-three-mile stretch of the famous Northville–Lake Placid Trail. Students learn wilderness skills, enhance their leadership ability, and put into practice ideas about ecology, ethics, and theology discussed in the traditional classroom setting. In short, the course combines, as Mitch put it,