

# The Concurrently Companion



## Episode 26: Exploring environmental stewardship (with Dr. Nathan Howell)

### Topic Introduction

Dr. Nathan Howell is a professor of Environmental Engineering at West Texas A&M. In today's episode, we collaborate with him to explore where our Christian worldview intersects with care for the environment, or stewardship of creation.

### Discussion

*Key terms: creation, environment, environmental engineering, environmentalism, human flourishing, pollution, cognitive dissonance, the "now and not yet"*

Key authors mentioned: Francis Schaeffer, Wendell Berry, *Scientific American*

### Questions raised by the discussion

- » What is the way to pursue a profession Christianly? What do we need to be able to operate in "secular" vocational contexts as believers? Think broadly. (What do we need to know? What do we need to believe? What practices do we need in our lives?) There are multiple dimensions to consider.
- » What is the difference between an *environmentalist* and an *environmental engineer*: their vocations/functioning, their work expression? How might we compare or contrast the methodologies and philosophies between those two roles?
- » Dr. Howell explained environmentalism as an advocacy (of any kind) towards care of the environment. Do you agree with his definition? Why or why not?
- » What role does "dissonance" have in learning and education? What example of dissonance was in the episode?
- » What is the role of question-asking for the scientist (i.e. within the scientific method)? How does that method help us employ better thinking, feeling, and ultimately action in the area of the environment? How do we see it applied in the example Dr. Howell gave regarding BPA in plastics?
- » What have you observed and experienced from preaching and teaching within the church regarding environmental issues?
- » What lies at the heart of blame-shifting regarding environmental problems? What are the unfortunate results? How does a Christian worldview challenge those tendencies?
- » How does suffering play into the picture? What is an appropriate Christian response to Creator, creation, creature, and image-bearer regarding things of the environment?
- » Where and how does science affirm the things of our faith? How does our faith/scripture supply foundational truth, reason, and confidence to explore the world through scientific means and methods?
- » How should we, as Christians, balance degradation to the environment, degradation to

environmental resources, with the need to promote human flourishing? Where is the sin fracture and the repentance for the ways our actions have failed in environmental stewardship?

### Important takeaways and ideas for further study

- » Water is extremely difficult/expensive to clean up. (What is the scientific/chemical reason for this?)
- » Litigation often complicates efforts at environmental stewardship. (What is at the crux of most lawsuits regarding the environment?)
- » “Environmental engineering is very much about the science, but it connects a lot with people and their lives in really intimate ways, like the air they breathe, the food they eat, the water they have. And trusting a supply chain of food all the way through, like ensuring that food is really safe—all those are environmental engineering kind of questions. And it’s good to care about the details.”
- » “More often than not, environmental topics in the media are covered in terms of policy...[a] discussion of policy costs and trying to find blame...I would contrast that with what I would like to see more of, which is just trying to understand [] environmental concerns...so it moves between science and solution, or science and advocacy, maybe not in a way that’s intended to obfuscate, but that needs to be sometimes broken apart so that you can think about it clearly.”
- » “Environmental things are an aggregate of many choices that many people make. So it’s not like being just honest as a business person, or being faithful as a parent. Many people’s actions together is what actually addresses some problems that we have.”
- » “There should be an alignment between creation care and flourishing, or preserving resources and human flourishing...trust[ing] in God that if we take care of something, like an endangered species, there may be a cost at that moment...But we’re somehow trusting God that, if He’s really over the entire world in the universe, He’s going to find a way to use it for our good ...because of the humility saying, ‘We don’t really understand how it all works together.’—there’s more going on there than probably we’ll ever perceive.”
- » “Know that you know *why* you are so strenuously advocating for something. Because if it’s just to please other people, then you’re not really pleasing God. You’re really using the environment to increase your reputation in some way.”
- » “In some ways, the questions are more important than the answers, just getting to where I honestly care about asking these questions.”

### Scriptural Anchors/Provision

Genesis 1:28

Romans 5

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