

Biblical Principles of Stewardship

Below are the creation care principles used as a basis for the Tangier Island watermen and Pennsylvania farmer stewardship initiatives. These principles are directly taken from the book *EarthWise* by Calvin B. DeWitt. [Other principles incorporated in the two initiatives are listed in #1 of the FAQ on the website.](#)

1. The Earthkeeping Principle – *As the Lord keeps and sustains us, so we must keep and sustain our Lord’s creation.*

Our relationship to creation must be a loving, caring, keeping relationship. When we fulfill God’s mandate to *tend* (Hebrew word “*abad*” meaning “to serve”, “to till”, “to work”) *keep* (Hebrew word “*shamar*” meaning “to safeguard” or “take care of”) the creation, we make sure that the creatures and other living things under our care are maintained so that they can flourish. They must remain connected with members of the same species, with the many other species with which they interact, and with the soil, air, and water they depend on. (Genesis 2:15 & Numbers 6:24)

2. The Fruitfulness Principle – *We should enjoy but not destroy creation’s fruitfulness.*

In Genesis 1, God declares a blessing of fruitfulness for the whole creation, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth” (1:22) and let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds, creature that move along the ground, and wild animals each according to their kind (1:24). As God’s fruitful work brings fruit to creation, so should ours. As God provides for all his creatures, so should we who are created to reflect God’s image. As Noah cared for God’s creatures when they were threatened with extinction, so should we. The prophet Isaiah warns, “Woe to you who add house to house and join field to field till no space is left and you live alone in the land” (Is. 5:8). The prophet Ezekiel also provides admonition, “Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture? Must you also trample the rest of your pasture with your feet? Is it not enough for you to drink clear water? Must you also muddy the rest with your feet? (34:18)

3. The Sabbath Principle – *We must provide for creation’s Sabbath rests.*

In Exodus 23:12, God commands, “Six days do your work, but on the seventh day, do not work, so that your ox and your donkey may rest and so that the slave born in your household and the foreigner living among you may be refreshed.” Nothing in creation must be relentlessly pressed. “For six years you are to sow your fields and harvest the crops, but during the seventh year let the land lie unplowed and unused. Then the poor among your people may get food from it and the wild animals may eat what they leave...(23:10-11). The Sabbath is not merely a legalistic requirement; it’s a profound principle. The Sabbath year is given to protect the land from relentless exploitation, to help it rejuvenate, to give it a time of rest and restoration.

4. The Discipleship Principle – *We must be disciples of Jesus Christ—the Creator, Sustainer, and Reconciler of all things.*

Christians are to walk in the footsteps of the one—Jesus Christ—who reconciles all things. (Col 1:19-20). The Christ we follow is the one *in whom* and *for whom* all things were created (Col. 1:16). He is the one *through whom* God made the universe and *through whom* God redeems his people (John 1:3; Col. 1:16,20; Heb.1:3). We walk the path of the one who takes the form of a reconciling servant. As disciples of the last Adam, we work to reconcile all things to God in Christ.

5. The Kingdom Principle - *We must seek first the kingdom of God.*

Believers who seek the kingdom of God as their first priority will inherit the kingdom. Its inheritance is not for people who arrogantly exploit their neighbors, the land, and earth's creatures for all they are worth. Nor is the inheritance for those who carelessly and knowingly destroy the earth. Seeking God's kingdom first is our calling, our vocation. We affirm this calling whenever we pray as Jesus taught us: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done *on earth...*" (Matt.6:9-10).

6. The Contentment Principle – *We must seek true contentment.*

In 1 Timothy 6:6 we learn that "godliness with contentment is great gain." Contentment means aiming to have the things that will sustain us while not pressing beyond that. An Amish saying based on this passage goes like this: "To desire to be rich is to desire to have more than what we need to be content." Being content helps us personally, and it helps preserve creation's integrity. All the things we use, all the things we make, everything we manipulate, everything we accumulate derives from creation itself. If we learn to seek godly contentment as our great gain, we will take and shape less of God's earth. We will demand less from the land. We will leave room for God's creatures. We will be responsible stewards, caretakers, keepers of creation. We will regularly allow creation to heal itself and perpetuate its fruitfulness, to the glory and praise of its Maker.

7. The Praxis Principle – *We must practice what we believe.*

The Scriptures admonish us to act on what we know is right. We must practice God's requirements, or they do no good.

8. The Con-Servancy Principle – *We must return creation's service to us with service of our own.*

Our love of our Creator God, God's love of creation, and our imaging this love of God—all join together to commission us as *con-servers* (a reciprocal service or service with) of creation. As *con-servers*, we follow the example of the second Adam—Jesus Christ (see 1 Cor. 15:22,45).