

9. A Moral Roadmap for Ending the Global Plastics Crisis

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While other chapters in this book focus on medical and scientific arguments for eliminating plastics, and the theological chapters uplift the moral case for ending plastic waste, this chapter moves more toward the praxis—how do we first accept the knowledge and turn it into a moral argument that drives public opinion, leading to policy and individual behavior change for reduced plastic use and eventual elimination? To accomplish this goal, we must not make the mistake of some environmental movements. The “Big Green Groups” have accomplished much and led to significant changes in environmental laws and rising awareness among many demographic segments in the United States. However, they have failed to secure total victory on concerns such as climate change and newly identified threats such as plastic pollution.

Since I have been directly involved in defending God’s creation—for at least the last decade and a half plus—environmental organizations have attempted to create a “big tent” movement that incorporates everyone. Unfortunately, they tend to engage the public with progressive values and fail to realize that at least fifty percent of the United States is not progressive and generally reacts negatively to progressive values.

For example, several years ago, I was graciously invited to a retreat organized by significant “Green Groups.” As the retreat’s facilitator started his presentation and outlined his goals for the retreat, his first question was: “How do we get more progressives to vote for climate change action?” I immediately reacted, saying that this is the wrong question. How do we get more conservatives to support environmental policies? Conservatives, especially conservative people of faith, represent at least fifty percent of

Americans and vote at a higher percentage than their percentage of the general population.¹

While it will take years to analyze the 2024 American Presidential Election, I am confident that the results will show that conservative voters again voted at a higher percentage than the actual population as they were more highly motivated by the messaging of one candidate than the core supporters of the other candidate. With the American populace being more conservative than progressive, it is not surprising that any environmental concern, from plastics to climate change, continues to be a polarizing issue.

The failure to recognize that values are the driving force behind these differing political approaches is exacerbating the issue. Most attempts to mobilize Americans for a plastic-free future utilize language and value appeals that are inconsistent with conservatives' core values. In short, we need a multi-messaging effort to contact each demographic profile. Jonathan Haidt's *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* provides insights into how people formulate their moral foundations.²

Haidt's research on moral frames compares favorably to my experience using messages geared toward the evangelical community. These frames, tested in over three thousand presentations in churches, town halls, and Christian colleges around the nation, have been used to drive our education, resulting in over five million pro-life evangelical Christians acting on various environmental and public health concerns over the past five years. A few of the policy successes accomplished by our community, or where our community support had a significant influence, include the Endangered Species Act, the Mercury and Air Toxic Standard, the Great

¹ See Michael O. Emerson, "Christian Voters Will Play an Outsized Role in the US Election," Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy, September 17, 2024, doi.org/10.25613/TG0Y-VV96.

² Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* (Pantheon Books, 2012).

America Outdoors Act, the Inflation Reduction Act, and the New Source Methane Standard for the Oil and Gas Industry.

Attempting to prove scientific findings and pushing for government-based solutions as the primary goal remains problematic for the evangelical Christian community and American conservatives in general. Public messages using progressive-leaning language will not successfully build support for eliminating plastics. For achieving success, multiple messages from numerous trusted community members will be needed. The best analogy I can offer is that we do not need one “big tent” but a series of smaller tents raised with community-specific messaging that will join at the top and appear as one.

The Moral Roadmap

The moral roadmap that I propose lists six straightforward concepts that outline a model for building awareness, lifestyle changes, policy action, and successful outcomes in securing solutions to address plastic pollution and/or other environmental health concerns. These six steps include:

1. *Authentic Messenger.* The best messenger is always a community member. For example, an atheist trying to move a Southern Baptist church is not the best idea.
2. *The Concern.* It is necessary to identify the problem in language consistent with one’s community values. Children’s health, both born and unborn, remains the most important concern of evangelicals. One of the primary reasons we always discuss values in medical language and rarely use scientific terms is that medical professionals are more valued than scientists.
3. *Moral or Theological Value.* For the evangelical community, what has value is the Christian Bible.
4. *Individual Action.* Individual action is the prelude to total engagement. It is the “on ramp” to more sustained engagement. Examples include no longer using plastic food storage or containers for reheating foods (off-

- gassing), using reusable grocery shopping bags, or organizing a trash/plastic clean-up along highways, parks, or waterways.
5. *Advocacy*. The more people understand that through their actions alone they cannot solve environmental problems caused by pollution, the more they are willing to work systemically with policymakers on the local, state, federal, or international levels.
 6. *Hope*. If we always share dreaded consequences to our actions or inaction, it is easy for the most committed to walk away and say, “Why, bother?” What helps is to always dream about what good can happen, especially using the value systems of that community.

Because of their complexity, the remainder of this chapter will discuss points two and three of this moral roadmap. Both this model and the emphasis on value-based messaging come from my experience within the evangelical community. Hopefully, these examples will inspire readers to develop examples pertinent to their communities and raise their “tents” striving to address and hopefully solving the plastic pollution crisis.

These concepts and messages have proven successful among the most conservative demographic in the United States: evangelical Christians. The core values that help evangelicals understand and act by relying on their core values are derived from over seventeen years of experience in the evangelical community as the President/CEO and then President Emeritus of the Evangelical Environmental Network, and the successes that were achieved.

The Concern

Before exploring the best value-based approach, we must go back in time and understand why so many people outside the evangelical world never attempted to reach evangelicals and considered this portion of the population a “lost cause.” Even before the Cuyahoga River’s 1969 fire (the

river first caught fire in 1868),³ which became the poster child of the environmental crisis and led to the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in 1970, Lynn White, Jr., professor at the University of California Los Angeles, penned “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis.”⁴ White’s essay essentially blames Christianity and dominion theology as the root evil for not caring for the earth.

As we read in the biblical book of Genesis, “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’”⁵ While many Christians did, and some still misinterpret this passage as giving ultimate authority to do anything to the Earth, White’s paper reinforced the evangelical perception that environmentalists are anti-Bible, anti-God, tree-worshiping atheists, and thus in direct opposition to core evangelical Christian beliefs. In response to White, Dr. Francis Schaeffer gave a series of lectures at Wheaton College in 1969 that became the book *Pollution and the Death of Man*.⁶ Unfortunately, Schaeffer’s efforts never got much acceptance outside the evangelical higher education, even though years later, Schaeffer became the leading theologian who underpinned and co-founded the Moral Majority Movement.⁷

Change has happened and is still happening, but there remains the perception that caring for the environment (creation care) is a liberal agenda and, therefore, ungodly. Below is an example shared a few years ago by an Evangelical Environment Network supporter. While this discussion

³ See Lorraine Boissoneault, “The Cuyahoga River Caught Fire at Least a Dozen Times, but No One Cared Until 1969,” *Smithsonian Magazine* (2019), www.smithsonianmag.com/history/cuyahoga-river-caught-fire-least-dozen-times-no-one-cared-until-1969-180972444/.

⁴ See Lynn White, Jr., “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,” *Science* 155, no. 3767 (1967): 1203–1207.

⁵ Genesis 1:26 (KJV).

⁶ See Francis A. Schaeffer, *Pollution and the Death of Man* (Tyndale House, 1970).

⁷ See William Edgar, “Francis Schaeffer and His Global Influence,” *Westminster Magazine* 3, no. 2 (2023): wm.wts.edu/magazine-articles/francis-schaeffer-and-his-global-influence.

revolved around climate change, the principles also apply to ending the plastic crisis.

Yesterday, I had an experience that was simultaneously strange and emblematic of encountering fellow Evangelical Christians on the issue of climate change. The context of the situation was our town's monthly "First Friday" event, staged from April through October in Warrenton, VA, to stage a block party between 5:00 and 9:00 p.m. Local craft and food vendors and civic organizations set up booths along the street to advertise and sell their products or to publicize their organizations and causes. For the past several years, we have participated in "First Friday." While operating the booth, I engaged a local pastor in conversation over climate change. The man leads a well-established local congregation, and as we entered a conversation, he resorted to many of the highly predictable tropes of climate change denial, e.g., "the science isn't settled," "there's no consensus," "it's a liberal political plot," "God granted us dominion over Creation," and "the oceans aren't warming." On each point, I summoned substantial and substantive reference to either publicly verifiable empirical data or actual reference to Scripture to counter his propositions. At that point, he would immediately move on to the next denial trope without any rebuttal to the response I'd given him. But when we got to the matter of the warming oceans, why they are warming, the role that warming plays in modifying global climate patterns, and the mountain of empirical data that directly and unequivocally links this warming to the rise in atmospheric greenhouse gases resulting from increasing consumption of hydrocarbon fuels, things started down a path into certifiable weirdness. At first, he flatly denied the cause of the atypical rise in ocean temperature as a thoroughly-documented, unnatural phenomenon with more than nearly seventy years of direct observations correlating it to a commensurate rise in atmospheric CO₂ that is further correlated to increased hydrocarbon fuel consumption, i.e., a verifiable "given 'A,' then 'B,' then 'C'" chain of observation leading to causation. He then demonstrated no understanding of the relationship between climate and weather, citing that it was "hot" when he visited Africa and "it's always been hot in Africa," so there was no truth to what I just told him

regarding what we're seeing in the oceans and the linkage to what we're seeing play out in climate. Then, as I had to busy myself with other tasks at the booth, he delivered his final assessment that, contrary to what he just asserted, the oceans are warming. Still, the cause is that Hell is expanding, heating the oceans, and he could factually substantiate that from Scripture.

Some have asserted that simply being more winsome and compelling in communicating scientific information is the key to overcoming environmental threats in the United States. However, as exemplified in the story from our grassroots champion, this assumes that science is well-understood by the general population and that scientific evidence has an equally weighted value in our decision-making processes. However, that supposition is not correct for many in the evangelical community.

Instead, reframing plastic pollution within an existing moral framework and adding individual action helps to engage a much wider audience.⁸ When solutions are presented as involving multiple sectors and actions and are framed according to existing values and priorities, many previously disengaged individuals willingly engage and act. Change depends on engaging existing faith and moral frameworks. These frameworks must include children's health (both unborn and born), the potential harm to future generations, business opportunities, efficient limited government action, and hope. Solutions must also include practical and meaningful individual engagement.⁹ Sanctity (the sacredness of life) and purity (morally untainted) are the top moral values for the conservative evangelical community (Figure 1). Therefore, meaningful communication and education in our community must focus on these

⁸ See Christopher Wolsko, Hector Ariceaga, and Jesse Seiden, "Red, White, and Blue Enough to Be Green: Effects of Moral Framing on Climate Change Attitudes and Conservation Behaviors," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 65 (2016): 7–19.

⁹ See Matthew Feinberg and Robb Willer, "The Moral Roots of Environmental Attitudes," *Psychological Science* 24, no. 1 (2012): 56–62.

two primary concerns—the best and most common messages for our community.

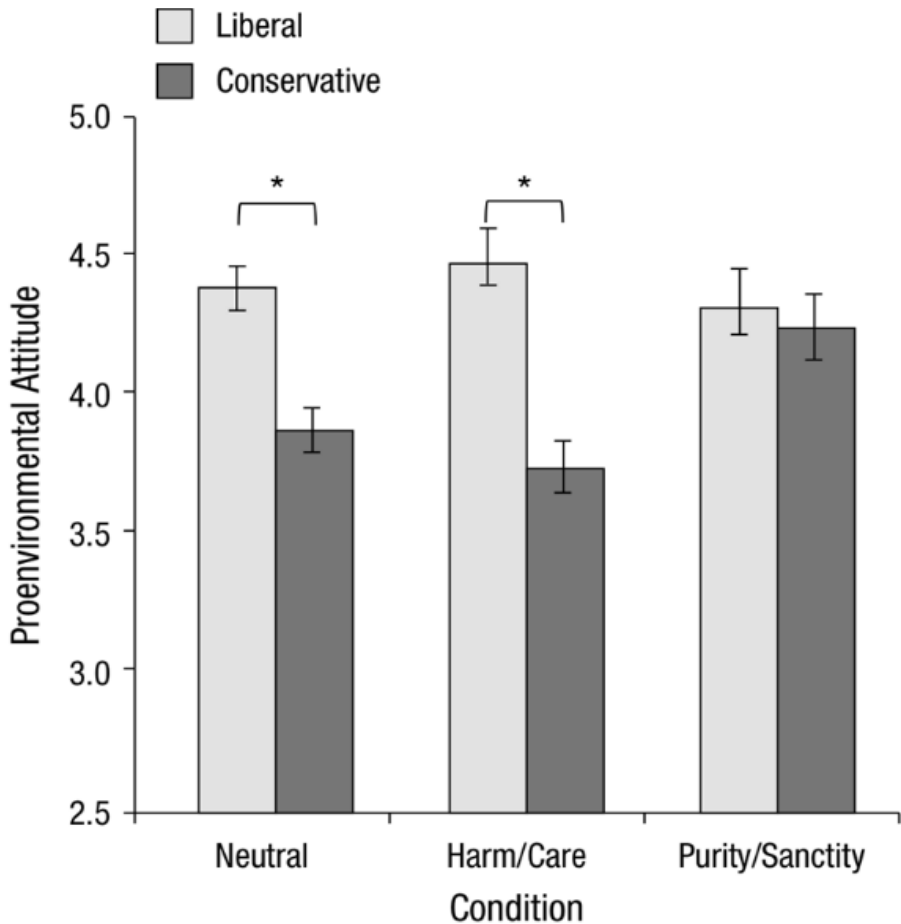


Figure 1. “Results from Study 3: mean pro-environmental attitude as a function of moral-messaging condition and political ideology (liberal = 1 SD below the mean; conservative = 1 SD above the mean). Asterisks indicate significant differences between groups ($p < .001$). Error bars represent ± 1 SEM.” Matthew Feinberg and Robb Willer, “The Moral Roots of Environmental Attitudes,” *Psychological Science* 24, no. 1 (2012): 60.

For Schaeffer, “Modern man [*sic*] has been upsetting the balance of nature, and the problem is drastic and urgent. It is not just a matter of

aesthetics, nor is the problem only future; the quality of life has already diminished for many modern men.”¹⁰

Most people find a balance in life by trying to maintain stability in work, family, values, and faith, whether healthy or not. Individuals change only when their everyday life balance and values are impacted in such a way as to force a tipping point; changes are only initiated and actions taken as issues touch the center of our being and whom we care about the most.¹¹ When problems like plastic pollution arise, it is very easy to dismiss or deny them because they add another stressor to our hectic everyday lives.

Using the concepts first developed by Dr. Murray Bowen (1913–1990) in his Family Systems Theory, instead of being dismissive we can create a plan to recognize the key values that can potentially move individuals to act. In particular,

Bowen family systems theory is a theory of human behavior that views the family as an emotional unit and uses systems thinking to describe the unit’s complex interactions. It is the nature of a family that its members are intensely connected emotionally. Often people feel distant or disconnected from their families, but this is more feeling than fact. Families so profoundly affect their members’ thoughts, feelings, and actions that it often seems as if people are living under the same “emotional skin.” People solicit each other’s attention, approval, and support, and they react to each other’s needs, expectations, and upsets. This connectedness and reactivity make the functioning of family members interdependent. A change in one person’s functioning is predictably followed by reciprocal changes in the functioning of others. Families differ somewhat in their degree of interdependence, but it is always present to some degree.¹²

¹⁰ Schaeffer, *Pollution and the Death of Man*, 21.

¹¹ See the Bowen Center, www.thebowncenter.org.

¹² The Bowen Center for the Study of the Family, “Introduction to the Eight Concepts,” www.thebowncenter.org/introduction-eight-concepts.

Taking Family Systems Theory to the next step, in 1985 Rabbi Edwin Friedman (1932–1996) wrote *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue*.¹³ In this seminal work, Friedman shows how churches, other faith organizations, and communities may act as systems and behave like families. For Friedman, this approach explains how a herd mentality functions within faith communities and helps us understand how we can identify the correct moral message to engage and see minds and attitudes change to create a healthy future.¹⁴

While many people experience and recognize environmental concerns, the evangelical community best relates to these concerns by understanding the increased harm to our children’s health, both born and unborn. When threats are brought into our living rooms and our lives, we accept reality. That is why the work of Philip Landrigan and colleagues, in publishing “The Minderoo-Monaco Commission on Plastics and Human Health,”¹⁵ provides the medical research that allows us to take the impacts and threats of plastic pollution into living rooms, schools, and physicians’ offices. We encourage studying this report and learning about all the potential threats.

On Human Life

Evangelical Christians believe that all human life is sacred, that each person conceived is of equal and innate value and dignity, and that all human life is worthy of protection. Unfortunately, many in our community have viewed pro-life as only protecting the unborn child from termination. However, times are changing, and many in the evangelical community—

¹³ See Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue* (Guilford Press, 1985).

¹⁴ Family Systems Theory contains much more than the few isolated concepts presented. I was trained in Family Systems Theory during my seminary training and used Bowen and Friedman’s work during my eighteen years as a local church pastor.

¹⁵ See Philip J. Landrigan, Hervé Raps, Maureen Cropper, Caroline Bald, Manuel Brunner, Elvia Maya Canonizado, et al., “The Minderoo-Monaco Commission on Plastics and Human Health,” *Annals of Global Health* 89, no. 1 (2023): 1–215.

including the National Association of Evangelicals, Focus on the Family, the Evangelical Environmental Network, and others—now understand pro-life as including life from conception to natural death, a theology much more in-tune with sound biblical teaching than only preventing a procedure from ending a pregnancy. Each child has the *right to fulfill their God-given potential*, what Jesus called the “abundant life.”¹⁶ Jesus referred to a spiritual connection and a holistic understanding of well-being, body and spirit together. He was especially concerned about vulnerable populations being denied abundant life. “Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.’”¹⁷ My commitment to Jesus compels efforts to educate Christians to do all to defend children from life-altering and life-threatening plastic pollution. This is a pro-life concern, plain and simple.

While understanding pro-life as an all-of-life concern, the most substantial value-based messaging to address plastic pollution remains focused on the unborn and newly born child. The medical conditions that so far resonate best in our community are premature birth, cognitive disorders, preterm birth, and childhood cancers associated with living within a five-mile radius of a shell-gas fracking site. Moreover, driving interest and support on recent scientific research depend on concerns about the lowest male fertility rates in the Western world, male reproductive congenital disabilities, developmental disorders, and preterm birth associated with micro- and nano-plastics.

Sola Scriptura

Evangelicals take the Bible seriously and believe in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. The term “evangelical” comes from the Greek word *euangelion*, meaning “the good news” or the “gospel.” Thus, the evangelical faith focuses on the “good news” of salvation brought to sinners by Jesus

¹⁶ John 10:10 (NRSUE).

¹⁷ Matthew 19:14 (NIV).

Christ.¹⁸ British historian David Bebbington provides a helpful summary of distinctive evangelical beliefs by identifying four primary characteristics of evangelicalism: primary authority of the Bible, cross-centered (a stress on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross as making possible the redemption of humanity), conversion (the belief that lives need to be transformed through a “born-again” experience and a lifelong process of following Jesus), and activism (getting busy in advancing the cause of Christ). This approach frames corporate and individual evangelism as well as moral and social reform.¹⁹

Considering the above definitions, one can see why life values and children’s health are the value-based keys to opening the door to addressing creation care (Christian Environmentalism) in general and plastic pollution in particular. However, the Bible remains the foundational text. Throughout the history of Protestantism, and especially in its evangelical wing, the Bible has always been our primary rule of faith. *Sola Scriptura* (Latin for ‘by scripture alone’) remains our central theological statement. Since Martin Luther (1483–1546), all Christians have had open access to the Bible. While doctrine, tradition, experience, and scholarship play essential roles depending on individual denominations or congregations, sharing Scripture’s concern for creation care is paramount. At the same time, admitting that biblical interpretations can cause chaos, the Bible remains the basis for life in Christ. However, biblical knowledge among US evangelicals remains woefully lacking, and this biblical illiteracy and many misinterpretations have made the efforts of groups like the Evangelical Environmental Network and others often painstakingly slow.

Some time ago, I led a community men’s morning Bible study in a conservative area of the United States. The teaching was based on a passage from the letter to the Colossians:

¹⁸ See National Association of Evangelicals, www.nae.org/what-is-an-evangelical/.

¹⁹ See “Bebbington’s Four Points of Evangelicalism,” www.ligonier.org/posts/bebbingtons-four-points-evangelicalism.

For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.²⁰

Because “for in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him,” Christians are not the owners of the Earth. The Earth, God’s creation, was formed by and for God, by and for Jesus. Unfortunately, too many Christians, especially evangelicals, do not understand the imperative to “work it and take care of it [the Earth].”²¹

As a case in point, immediately after sharing my thoughts and during a time set aside for reflection and discussion, one gentleman said, “I’ve read the Bible all my life, and I never saw this Scripture in the light of caring for the earth.”

Humanity has been given a precious gift, a planet that can provide for all our needs if we only follow God and use it wisely. The same applies to the whole creation just as we are called to love our neighbor, not subjugate them. Never does the Bible support the Earth being trashed or misused. Genesis states just the opposite. The earth supplies the necessities for biological life; God designed creation for this purpose. God created and was the first gardener. For life to prosper, humans are to empower the garden to flourish. As made in God’s image, we have been responsible for reflecting God’s presence by caring for creation.

²⁰ Colossians 1:16–20 (NIV).

²¹ Genesis 2:15 (NIV).

The sad reality is that our stewardship reflects our relationship with God. Upon a close reading of Genesis chapter 3, we understand that original sin was the temptation to be God-like, to be in control. Looking back at human history, our principal failing always seems to be the desire to be in charge, combined with the inability to live within God-given limits. The Genesis account describes a universal order with God as the loving and very good creator, humans cast in God's image as partners in maintaining creation, and all creation living sustainably.

However, our desire to be in control breaks the order, attempts to bypass the limits, and injures our relationship with God, leading to a broken and unsustainable world. Each time we use more than we need or consume more than our share, we perpetuate our brokenness, support our vanity, and continue disregarding God's limits. This behavior distorts the creation and impacts all.

Throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, God defines and provides deliberate instructions for tending the Earth. Although many Christians have not yet made the connection, the Bible offers definitive mandates to live in a reciprocal relationship with the non-human creation. The biblical books of Deuteronomy, Numbers, and Leviticus, God explicitly instruct to observe a Sabbath rest for the land, to implement crop rotation and animal husbandry. There are strict ordinances regarding farming, livestock management, and land use. These conditions define the parameters for living in a relationship with God, people, and the Earth in an integrated approach to abundant life. One of the most illustrative passages stresses that "the land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants. Throughout the land that you hold, you shall provide for the redemption of the land."²²

However, ownership is not the primary biblical concern; it is people, especially those marginalized or on the fringes of society. I mention just a couple of passages to illustrate these commands. First, "Defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed. Rescue

²² Leviticus 25:23–24 (NRSVUE).

the weak and the needy.”²³ Second, “He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’”²⁴

The Bible calls us to defend life and empower life to the fullest by following Jesus’s commands. Yet, we have failed to understand that plastic pollution significantly impacts humanity. Overcoming our failure requires a renewed study of Scripture to grasp the critical importance of creation care as discipleship. As John Stott (1921–2011), one of the great evangelical leaders of the twentieth and early twenty-first century, wrote in his last book, *The Radical Disciple: Some Neglected Aspects of Our Calling*, creation care is one of the “neglected aspects of our calling.”²⁵

The Moral Roadmap Works

The best way to convey environmental threats is by stressing threats to *our children*, at least within the evangelical community and with other social conservatives in the United States. Unfortunately, discussing global threats or environmental health issues results in a cognitive disconnect. People might give a few dollars to feed a child in Africa, Asia, or South America. However, for most in the United States, their behavior will neither change nor result in advocating for environmental policies or corporate changes—all things are truly local.

Below is an example of a presentation in a Southern Baptist Church in Alabama during the first administration of President Donald J. Trump (2017–2021). This is a true story that has been repeated hundreds of times in our ministry while the evening’s discussion centered on climate change; it could be any environmental health concern that threatens children.

During the first Trump Administration, I was invited to speak at a weeknight gathering at Southern Baptist Church. Attendance was

²³ Psalm 82:3–4 (NIV).

²⁴ Matthew 25:45 (NIV).

²⁵ John R. W. Stott, *The Radical Disciple: Some Neglected Aspects of Our Calling* (InterVarsity Press, 2010).

between 100 and 125; the attendees were local church members, students from a local Christian College, and their professors. However, one attendee stood out. She was a mature woman with elaborately coiffed hair, numerous gold chains around her neck, and wearing a red skirt-suit with the jacket adorned front and back with at least 100 pins showing her support for President Trump. My mind was spinning. Was this going to be an evening dominated by debunked theories? Would this woman attempt to take over the meeting? I took a deep breath, prayed, and dived into my talk. To my surprise, the woman seemed to listen intently to my presentation, track and follow the discussion during our open dialogue, and take it all in. Being extremely curious, I walked over to her as the evening ended. "I'm surprised to see you here this evening; you are a great supporter of President Trump, and he denied the reality of climate change." She just looked up at me in an assured, steady voice and said, "I'm sure no one has ever talked to President Trump the way you talked, and if you could talk to him, you would change his mind."

In another similar account, several Evangelical Environmental Network staff were invited to present at a conference on Gulf Coast restoration near Mobile. The night before the conference, the leadership asked the presenters to share a meal with key attendees. A good Southern Baptist attendee scrimmaged with us over our changing climate during the dinner. He was adamant that climate change was a liberal deception and that the science was far from settled. Needless to say, the dinner discussion was, at best, tenuous, if not outright hostile. To our surprise, the gentleman still attended the next day's seminar and carefully listened as we shared our hearts on how fossil fuel pollution harms our children's lungs, hearts, minds, and lives. Immediately after my talk, he walked up to me and asked if climate change was responsible for all these children's health threats. "No," I replied, "but the same fossil fuels that are harming our children cause climate change." "Okay, he said. I want to defend our kids!"

The above examples show what the moral roadmap that I proposed can accomplish with conservative evangelical Christians. These same evangelicals, once committed and passionate, can make a difference in

public policy. While the Evangelical Environmental Network could share hundreds of examples, one of my favorite narratives centers on the late Senator John S. McCain, III (1936–2018). Although I met with the Senator several times, I cannot say I knew him beyond his gruff demeanor and no-nonsense attitude. However, one day, I got a brief smile when I asked him to sign my copy of his 1999 book, *Faith of My Fathers*.²⁶ However, what sealed my admiration for the Senator was his decision to vote against the 2017 Congressional Review Act (CRA), which kept the Bureau of Land Management Methane Standard in place to limit fugitive pollutants on natural wells on public lands.²⁷ There were multiple reasons for his vote, but according to the Senator’s staff, one very important factor was over fourteen thousand Arizona evangelicals (organized by the Evangelical Environmental Network) asking him to stop the CRA to benefit children’s health.

Concluding Thoughts

Often, I am asked what the most significant environmental health concern is today. My usual reply starts with a statement from the *Lancet* Commission on Climate Change and Human Health, “Climate change is the most significant global health threat facing the world in the 21st century, but it is also the most incredible opportunity to redefine the social and environmental determinants of health.”²⁸ Plastic pollution is a close second, for me, after climate change, because plastic pollution may result in life-altering changes in our genetic makeup, including our ability to reproduce. Hence, the first good news is that if we end our addiction to fossil fuels, we can reduce both threats to human health.

The second good news is that we can solve these crises but not without the support of conservatives and conservative people of faith. The major

²⁶ John McCain with Marc Salter, *Faith of My Fathers* (Random House, 1999).

²⁷ See www.gao.gov/legal/congressional-review-act.

²⁸ “The *Lancet* Countdown on Health and Climate,” www.thelancet.com/countdown-health-climate.

environmental organizations have significantly reduced pollution and made tremendous gains in environmental health. However, in the past two decades, the polarization of the American people has diminished the attention given to these issues among conservative citizens and conservative policymakers. Only by utilizing value-based messaging and tools like the moral roadmap will the final goals be reached in defending human health and restoring a healthy planet.

The simple beauty of the moral roadmap is that it can be adapted for use with any demographic segment only by knowing a group's values and the authoritative basis for their values. It is time to adopt solutions for plastic pollution and other environmental threats. This chapter offers new ways to address environmental concerns and attempts new approaches to generate support across demographics. Past efforts simply have finalized on the work to be done, and we all know that doing the same thing over and over again will not result in a different answer.

To conclude, in the letter to the Romans we read, "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."²⁹



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²⁹ Romans 15:13 (NIV).

MSNBC, BBC, and numerous radio programs, both Christian and secular. Rev. Hescox and EEN have been widely recognized for their advocacy for the Mercury and Air Toxics Standard (MATS), Land Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), Growing Climate Solutions Act, Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, the Inflation Reduction Act, and Methane Leakage Reduction Standards, among others. He is a member of the National Association of Evangelicals, a past member of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) Board of Directors, a past member of Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Clean Air Act Advisory Committee, the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection's Citizen Advisory Council, and a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences' Commission on Accelerating Climate Action. Before joining EEN, he pastored a local church for 18 years, and before the call to ordained ministry served the coal and utility industry as Director, Fuel Systems for Allis Mineral Systems (York, PA).