

EXCERPT

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## Stewards of Eden

*What Scripture Says About the Environment and Why It Matters*

Available February 25, 2020 | \$22, 168 pages, paperback | 978-0-8308-4926-0

Sandra L. Richter cares about the Bible *and* the environment. Using her expertise in ancient Israelite society as well as in biblical theology, she walks readers through biblical passages and shares case studies that connect the biblical mandate to current issues. She then calls Christians to apply that message to today's environmental concerns.

## God's Wild Creatures

In chapters 38 and 39 of the book that bears his name, Job, the long-suffering servant of the Most High, is hammered with a series of questions from on high. The intent of the interrogation? To remind Job that he is creature, not Creator.

Have you ever in your life commanded the morning, or caused the dawn to know its place? . . . Have you entered into the springs of the sea, or have you walked in the recesses of the deep? . . . Can you stalk prey for a lioness, and satisfy the young lions' appetites as they lie in their dens or crouch in the thicket? . . . Do you know when the mountain goats give birth? Have you watched the calving of the does? Have you counted the months they carry their young? Are you aware of the time of their delivery? . . . Is it by your understanding that the hawk soars, stretching his wings toward the south? Is it at your command that the eagle mounts up, and makes his nest on high? (Job 38:12, 16, 39-40; 39:1-2, 26-27)

When I hear these questions voiced, I echo Job's response: surely not I. I can hardly understand these marvelous things, let alone mimic or duplicate them. Only the master of the universe can call an eagle from its perch or command the dawn to take its place. So I, like Job, respond to creation with praise for the Creator. When I stand at the ocean's edge and feel the spray of its raging force on my face, when the wind silences me, when I am privileged to hold a wild creature in my hands, my heart cries out with the psalmist, "O Yahweh, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!" (Ps 8:9).

Why is my heart moved to worship by the splendor of an eagle on the wind, the staggering realities of life in all its complex forms? Why do I sit in front of my television watching *March of the Penguins* with my seven-year-old and find myself in awe of a God who could instill in the heart of a *penguin* a level of self-sacrificial obedience that puts this believer to shame? The answer is most simply because the cosmos, in all its beauty and complexity, is a reflection of the God who made it. And I am made in the image of that same God. So the part of me that remembers Eden is stunned into silence when I step into a meadow and unexpectedly lock eyes with those of a wild creature. The part of me that can still hear the echo of the Maker's song laughs with joy when I see dozens of common dolphins race across the channel so they can "bow ride" off the front of my whale-watching boat—diving in perfect synchronization, breathing as one, sleek and shimmering in the sun. There is no question that our God has graced this planet with creatures of such amazing beauty and skill that it nearly defies imagination. Wild and fierce and yet oh so vulnerable, these are the creatures that God has entrusted to *'ādām*.

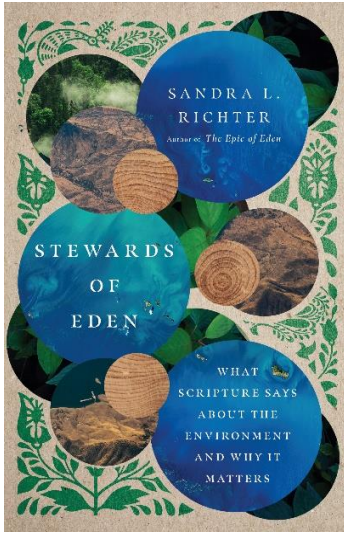
So what do the Scriptures have to say regarding the wild creatures that inhabit this planet with us? The Bible makes it very clear that even in a fallen world, God rejoices in the beauty and balance of his creation. It is Yahweh who "sent out the wild donkey free" and "gave to him the wilderness for a home" (Job 39:5-6). In the flood narrative, although God judges the world because of its corruption, he rescues animal-kind along with humankind, and his re-creational covenant is with "every living thing . . . the birds, the domestic animals, and every wild creature of the earth" (Gen 9:10-11). In the elevated language of Psalm 104 we read,



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He is the one who sends forth the springs into the wadis;  
between the mountains they flow;  
giving drink to each of his wild creatures. (Ps 104:10-11)

The Scriptures teach us that Yahweh has designed our ecosystem so *that* his wild creatures will have the food, water, and habitat they need to survive and flourish.

The trees of the Lord drink their fill—  
the cedars of Lebanon that he planted.  
Where the birds make their nests,  
and the stork builds its house in the cypresses.  
The high mountains are for the mountain goats;  
the crags are the refuge of the rock badgers. (Ps 104:16-18)

Clearly, God has intentionally provided this vast array of creatures the habitats necessary to their survival. But as any environmentalist would tell us, the single greatest cause of the extinction of an animal species is the destruction of its habitat. And in America we are presently devouring nearly two million acres a year in the noble quest for urban sprawl. As a result we are also experiencing a species extinction rate of as much as one thousand times the historical loss ratio. It would seem that “we in the industrialized world have [indeed] allowed our appetites to outrun both our resources and our humanity” and have reached a point where we need balance, “a balance we scarcely any longer recognize.” And the fact that the wild animals’ habitat was designed and given to them by our God should inspire us to reconsider our reckless behavior.

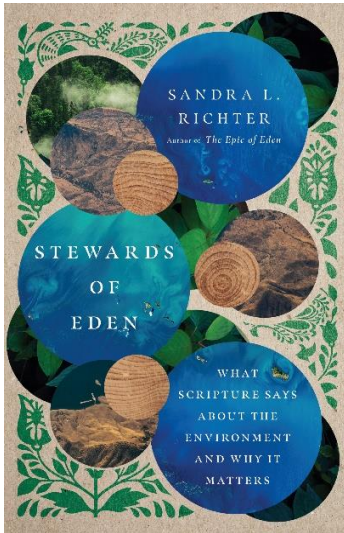
—Taken from Chapter 4, “The Wild Creatures Entrusted to ‘Ādām”



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## Connecting the Biblical Mandates to Current Issues

“No newcomer to serious biblical thinking about the environment, Sandra Richter is a learned and seasoned interpreter of the Scriptures. Her vision begins with Scripture, the overarching story of redemption, stressing the grand themes of the Christian faith. She brings into focus how care for our broken world occupies a vital place in robust biblical faith and discipleship. Bringing God’s living Word into contact with his hurting world, she issues a call that every follower of Christ will need to take seriously.”

—Lawson Stone, professor of Old Testament at Asbury Theological Seminary

“Creation is groaning like a woman in travail, and we are called to be midwives, delivering God’s creation to future generations in as good or better shape than we received it. Sandy Richter is a gifted biblical scholar and teacher, the right messenger with the right message at the right time.”

—Matthew Sleeth, author of *Reforesting Faith* and executive director of Blessed Earth

“The environment is one of the most pressing as well as polarizing issues today. As Sandra Richter points out, this issue is not simply a political question but a human question; it’s a matter of life and death. What are Christians to do? First and foremost we turn to the Bible to find out what God tells us about our role in the world. For that reason *Stewards of Eden* is critically important as it skillfully and clearly interprets the relevant biblical passages. All Christians should read this book.”

—Tremper Longman III, distinguished scholar and professor emeritus of biblical studies at Westmont College

“Sandra Richter marshals evidence from her decades of first-rate engagement with biblical theology, her extraordinary knowledge of pertinent ancient Near East sources, and her awareness of unconscionable contemporary environmental disasters in order to challenge the church. The earth is the Lord’s and we are privileged to be stewards thereof. That mandate transcends current political divides and puts the matter squarely in the realm of ‘kingdom politics.’ The task of the church is thus to nurture lives of restraint as we use resources and charity as we share them.”

—Elaine A. Phillips, Harold John Ockenga Distinguished Professor of Biblical and Theological Studies, Gordon College

“This deeply moving, impassioned, and informed argument for responsible Christian engagement with environmental concerns is the fruit of years of careful biblical study and wise application to contemporary issues. *Stewards of Eden* challenges, disturbs, and encourages us to recognize God’s consistent concern for the well-being of all creation and our responsibility as God’s stewards. Sandra Richter’s work is both very readable and richly insightful—I highly recommend it!”

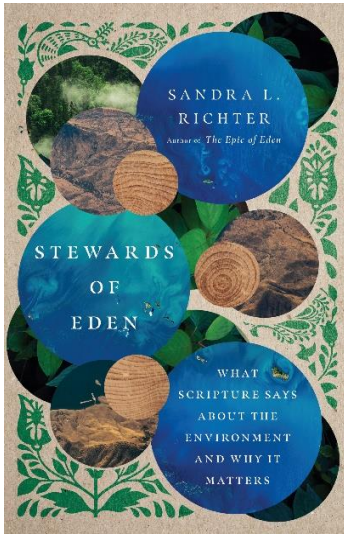
—Christine D. Pohl, professor emeritus, Christian ethics, at Asbury Theological Seminary



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"We can scarcely overstate the relevance of the subject of this volume for Christians who identify as evangelicals. For too long we have turned a blind eye to the ecological crises facing our planet—often based on our theological precommitments or our appeals to isolated texts in Scripture. The issues involved in turning around the rapid degradation of our earthly home and the home of all species of life (both plant and animal) are complex. Surely we must begin by reexamining the witness of the Scriptures to our roles as images of God and deputized stewards of his creation. Combining sound interpretation, engaging literary style, and awareness of the current urgency, Richter provides Christians with an invaluable resource for study, reflection, discussion, and action. This book should be required reading for all who seek to make a difference in this world."

—**Daniel I. Block, Gunther H. Knoedler Professor Emeritus of Old Testament, Wheaton College**

"My soul comes alive hiking mountain trails or kayaking across a saltwater bay. I remember and give thanks to the Creator. I encourage my congregation to sabbath and rest in creation. Yet, how is creation stewardship expressed in our day-to-day living as followers of Jesus? There I fall short. *Stewards of Eden* provides a compelling biblical analysis and a wake-up call to our responsibility as those who bear the imprint of the Creator. All creation groans because of the weight of the fall. Let's no longer be paralyzed by political agendas or blinded by an ignorant consumer mindset. Let's be the church! Dr. Richter's wisdom paired with practical suggestions awakens a movement toward justice for all of creation."

—**Melissa Maher, lead pastor of Mercy Street, a church within Chapelwood United Methodist, Houston, Texas**

"Richter's book moved me to tears. Finally, an evangelical voice has challenged the church's notion that the earth was given to humanity to exploit for our own benefit. Richter's knowledge of Scripture shines through as she lays out a biblical theology that instructs us to steward and care for God's beautiful creation, not destroy it for our own greed. Her love of creation, animals domestic and wild, and struggling humanity is evident throughout the book."

—**Elizabeth Harvey Roberts, The Nature Conservancy**

"A number of biblical scholars have demonstrated that 'creation care' is deeply rooted in the Scriptures. But Dr. Richter's book stands apart in its focus on examples from everyday life that illustrate and bring home to us the biblical principles she highlights. Her book therefore is a welcome addition to the burgeoning literature on the biblical basis for appropriate environmental activism."

—**Douglas Moo, Wessner Chair of Biblical Studies at Wheaton College and chair, Committee on Bible Translation**

"Sandra L. Richter presents a forceful and compelling prophetic assessment of the idolatries that influence many of our current economic and social practices and that deter us from properly imaging the Creator in caring for and protecting the creation. She reminds us that human flourishing is inextricably linked to the flourishing of creation as a whole."

—**Blaine B. Charette, professor of New Testament at Northwest University, Kirkland, Washington**

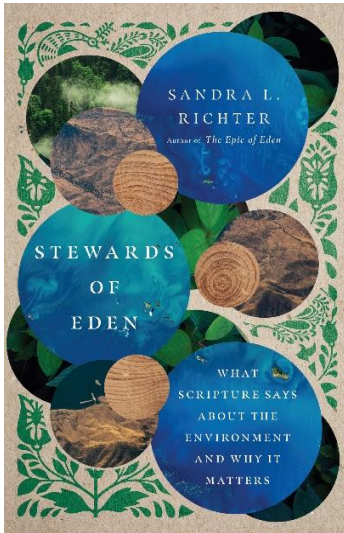


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“Richter combines an expert knowledge of the Old Testament and ancient Near Eastern culture and practice with an acute sensitivity to their resonances in contemporary environmental crises. She writes with an easy, conversational style, even as she engages the many difficult and troubling ways in which human actions are at odds with God’s intention for creation. Arguing that proper care—and even love—for ecosystems and the creatures (including humans) that inhabit them should surpass our superficial partisan divides, she provides a deep and compelling foundation for a Christian environmental and animal welfare ethic.”

—Amanda M. Sparkman, associate professor of biology at Westmont College

“Sandra Richter does a brilliant job of showing us in her contagious, passionate way how a theology of creation can intersect with practical guidelines for stewardship. This book provides a necessary and authentic understanding of biblical relationships regarding one’s engagement of faith and praxis in the care of God’s creation. Anyone who reads this book cannot avoid hearing the universal call to think rightly and justly about issues of sustainability for the future. Richter poignantly synthesizes history, case studies, and stories in ways that invite the reader to a radical change in praxis for the good of all creation, human and nonhuman. The discussion questions provided with each chapter prompt reflection and evoke a responsiveness for all readers.”

—Nadine C. Folino-Rorem, professor of biology at Wheaton College

“In *Stewards of Eden*, Sandra Richter has not only given us a biblical theology of creation care, she has profiled a biblical ethos that strikes a proper ethical balance between economic productivity and sustainability. Dr. Richter’s work is more than a biblical survey of environmental principles and practices, as she uses Scripture, theology, and current socioeconomic realities to ground the entire enterprise of creation care as an expression of our spiritual formation, that is our love for what God loves, our contentment in his provision, and our sensitivity to how all of this affects the vulnerable. I highly commend this work to pastors as a resource for doing biblical discipleship, equipping Christ followers to prioritize their calling as advocates for God’s creation in this time when many are prioritizing short-term convenience and temporary prosperity.”

—Darryl Williamson, lead pastor of Living Faith Bible Fellowship, Tampa

“This book is for much more than Jesus-loving environmentalists, it is for anyone who takes the Bible seriously. *Stewards of Eden* offers a long-overdue reminder that the story of the Bible and the work of Jesus are centrally about the restoration of the human vocation of glorifying God through the stewardship of the creation in his image.”

—Matt Ayars, president and dean of the School of Theology, Emmaus University

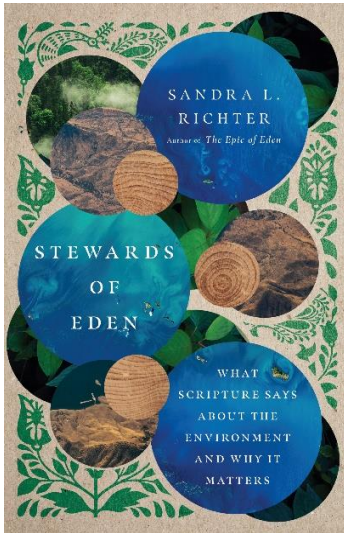
“Sandra Richter’s *Stewards of Eden* is a compelling and passionate call to action for a paralyzed church. Richter laments that young Christians hear the message that they should not advocate for creation and calls all Christians to a value system of holiness. The reader engages with the biblical foundation for creation care, poignant case studies, and practical suggestions for action. By the end of the book one feels equipped to live out a call to care for the amazing creation our



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Creator loves. We can celebrate that environmentalism is a response to the call to Christians to live transformed lives eagerly anticipating and working toward a reconciled creation.”

—**Kristen Page, Ruth Kraft Strohschein Distinguished Chair and Professor of Biology at Wheaton College**

“Rather than follow the lie that our planet is a marginalizing commodity for consumption and thus devoid of divine purpose, presence, and hope, this beautiful, bittersweet book guides us back to the ancient and current wonder of our human calling—to tend, and thus mend, this domain of broken beauty and divine glory. Richter helps relocate us in the *life of God’s* beloved world, setting us in our proper place as life promoters, glory sharers, and human stewards of creation, whose destiny is inextricably joined with our own—ultimately so in our still-incarnate Lord. Read and prayerfully live the truth of this book as you read and hear anew God’s truth. It’s that simple. And difficult. And non-optional.”

—**Cherith Fee Nordling, author of *Knowing God by Name***



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