Editor’s note: Two years ago, RBC alum Amanda Miller wrote an essay on why “Christians should live in sustainable ways” for a class at Cedarville University. In it, she discussed her newfound passion for creation care, saying she wanted to move beyond turning off lights and washing bags because it saved her money. “My environmentally friendly actions should be acts of praise to the Creator and not just self-focused thriftiness.”

She also said: “My relationship with Christ necessitates deep commitment to the earth and its welfare, from protecting endangered species to opposing resource depletion to fighting air pollution. If my chief end in life is to glorify God, then I must not be indifferent to the defacing of the creation that also sings God’s praises.”

Amanda ended her paper with some questions: “If I marry my boyfriend and live on his farm, what does this creation care look like in agricultural practices? Is my environmental concern best lived out quietly in my own lifestyle, or should I be vocal about ecology in my community?”

She did marry her boyfriend, Brian Miller! We asked her to write about what creation care looks like in their home in Hutchinson, Kansas. (All photos by Amanda Miller)

Coming from a Mennonite background that values simplicity taught me many of the finer arts of conservative living, and I never expected to be challenged in my perspective on environmental concern at Cedarville. Thankfully, God decided to surprise me.

My lifestyle has definitely changed because of the arguments presented to me and the further research I pursued after being awakened to this important aspect of discipleship. I am still just beginning my journey of praising the Creator through caring for his creation, but I am loving knowing that each step is worship as well.

I left Cedarville with a lot of excitement, motivation, and ideals—I had so many ideas about how to live

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more “greenly” I could barely contain myself. In the year since, my life has changed rather dramatically, and while my optimism about reaching my ideals may have calmed down, my enthusiasm for being environmentally friendly has matured.

Getting married and finding myself with my own shared household has definitely given me the chance to see how important this consideration of the earth is to me. It is one thing to think up lists of ways to be green and it is a whole other matter to actually implement them. The fact that it takes effort, however, is only appropriate—what is discipleship if it asks nothing of us?

I have shifted my thought process more from reasons why to ways how, and it truly has been fun for me to discover practical ways of implementation. While I have always operated under a frugal mindset (to a fault, I confess), selfishness has been a primary motivation. It has been refreshing to change my thoughts from, “Ooh, this saves me money and makes me feel like a super-Mennonite,” to, “Ooh, this is better for the environment and pleases my Father.”

**How cool to be able to praise God through seemingly insignificant and unspiritual daily actions!**

Trying to avoid overly packaged and processed products, using water wisely, recycling as much as possible, and unplugging appliances not in use are all little things, but they really are part of the bigger picture and a way of life. The fact that God cares about even our little steps only makes sense when I look around and see this fantastic world He has created; He has put His heart into designing the Earth and all its intricacies, so part of our sanctification as His children should include protecting and enjoying His creation.

Protecting creation is not a subcategory of discipleship separate from the rest of our life, but rather, harmonizes beautifully with other Christian values. For example, often earth-conscious living benefits physical health. Walking or biking saves gas; preparing natural foods at home avoids bolstering a market that depends on chemically processed products, wasteful packaging, and long-distance shipping. Just as the earth is God’s creation, so are our bodies; therefore, we must also remember our responsibility in that arena.

Another of my favorite discipleship values is community, a blessing that we as Mennonites tend to express well, and one that coincides with being earth-friendly. I know God has created me to live in community because there is something about it that makes my heart feel alive, especially when I experience it accompanied by other Christian values. Although I have just moved into a new community, I’ve already found this complementarity between community and environmentalism to be viable.

We practice both values as neighbors and we share what we have. Our recent trades of chickens for fresh-roasted coffee beans, apricot pie for the apricots that made it, and homemade butter for garden surplus not only make us part of each others’ lives, but help us help each other live locally and avoid distanced and disconnected supermarket shopping. When I buy produce at the farmer’s market instead of at cheaper grocery stores, I support earth-friendly agricultural practices and local gardeners. I also am motivated by those around me, learning about gardening, practicing selfless generosity (I haven’t had to buy produce in weeks due to my green-thumbed neighbors), and making products myself (laundry soap, tortillas, flavored vinegars, etc.).

I am in this new community because, by the grace of God, I did get to marry Brian. We have not yet moved to the dairy farm that...
brought up questions in my mind about agricultural and animal care practices, but I learned that their farm was actually a sort of pioneer in the area with environmentally friendly practices, such as the treatment of their cows and their method of recycling water.

I don’t know yet what I think about Round-up Ready corn and other confusing issues, but I do know it’s a blessing to have Brian bring a glass gallon jar of milk home when we need it. Since I make all our own butter, yogurt, sour cream, and occasionally cheese, we forgo the packaging, shipping, and factory-farm supporting that goes with purchasing these products. It has also been fun to have some of my green-ness be contagious, and for us to pursue better practices as a team; he lets me keep the air conditioning temperature higher than he’d prefer, planted us an orchard with the future benefits in mind, and systematized our electronics so they can all be turned off at once.

Joining together in our environmental efforts has also taught me a virtue that I know needed to be incorporated in my ecofriendly lifestyle—grace. I tend to be low-maintenance, with borderline ascetic tendencies at times, and once I get stuck on an idea like conservationism, I can push it further than I need to. I probably wouldn’t turn on the air conditioner even on silly 100-degree days if it were up to me. I take home compostable and recyclable materials from my packed lunch instead of throwing them away at work, I won’t drive to town unless it becomes imperative, and I don’t want to subscribe to magazines anymore because of the paper used.

It depends on the perspective of the person you ask whether these actions are over-zealous or under-dedicated, but either way, grace needs to permeate the way we do greenness. Grace that doesn’t judge others for not being informed or concerned, grace that lets my husband throw away occasional plastic bags, grace that reminds me that this is a balance and it’s not the end of the world if I forget my reusable shopping bags again.

While keeping environmental friendliness balanced, we must also, more importantly, keep it in perspective. Conservation is not the ultimate goal; it is an end to the means of praising God. If reducing our carbon footprint (only creating one bag of trash every month or two and not wasting a smidgen of water) becomes our focus, we actually fail. The chief end of man is to glorify

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God and enjoy Him forever, not to rigorously go through the motions of ecologically considerate living.

Anything that takes the place of our worship of our Creator is an idol, even if it is a “good” pursuit. Dedicating our conservationist lifestyle to God and living ecologically for Him is the reason it gets to be so much more fun than following a set of rules; we get to live holistically and incorporate God’s integral character of grace, feeling responsibility but not compulsion, joy and not drudgery.

I might sound naïve and trite as I chatter about the joys of environmentalism, but I can’t help but be excited and hopeful. As I began writing this article and reading more ecological books, I realized I’m doing it again—as my knowledge and experience grow, so does my passion and commitment. The more I learn, the more of a worshipful adventure it becomes. The closer I get to the earth and the more clearly I see its intricacies, the more I see God’s creativity and heart. There is so much to learn and to think about; I’m just starting to more deeply consider the issues surrounding genetically modified organisms, buying fresh produce only in season, pesticide/herbicide use versus organic growing, the implications of our environmental worldview on our morality—the list goes on. I hope God continues to give me excitement in pursuing this “new” aspect of glorifying Him, and I like to think He’s excited, too.

Amanda and her husband Brian are currently team leaders in Discipleship Training School with RMM in preparation to go with their four teammates to spend six months in the deserts of Kenya, and she is way beyond excited. When they return, she plans to keep pursuing God’s heart through ecological consideration, using homemade napkins, buying locally and in bulk, and canning up a storm, among other things.