



## Sharing My Green Convictions

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**A**re you kidding?" I said, dumbfounded.

"No! I take home all my recycling from Mom and Dad's," my friend Angie told me. I could almost see the green flames snapping behind her pupils. "They won't recycle it, so I just pack it up in my car." She crossed her arms, looking determined.

After our conversation, I wondered how Angie's parents felt about her conviction. Did they laugh it off? Feel offended and hurt? Get angry? Did she offer them a reasonable explanation for her passion about recycling, or did she assume her actions spoke for themselves?

As the holiday season approaches, so does the opportunity to spend time with relatives and friends we don't see often. Perhaps your family members, like mine, don't all share the same level of commitment to going green. For years I have tried to be a faithful witness, sharing my faith with my family and hoping they see God's work in my life. Now I'm also hoping that they see my faith giving birth to a concern for creation care. I'd love for my family and friends to join me in sustainable living. It's better for the future of both planet and people. How do I share this message effectively with people close to me? As Jesus said, a "prophet" isn't always welcome in her own country!

For additional perspective on this topic, I spoke to Paul Corner, pastor

of Salem Covenant Church in Washington Depot, Connecticut. He and his family are committed to earth stewardship. He suggested four ways to encourage our families and friends to be greener, especially those who may not appreciate our convictions.

*Keep it simple.* Don't start with a lecture on the science of climate change. Rather than expecting our folks to jump on our bandwagon, Corner says, we should start from where they are. Last Christmas I bought my mother some attractive reusable shopping bags. To my surprise, she has used them faithfully. If I had chastised her for using plastic bags, I doubt she would have been receptive to changing her habits. Now maybe she'll be open to other changes.

*Lead by example.* Corner suggests that if your family usually uses Styrofoam plates at family dinners, you could suggest they use regular plates to cut down on waste and volunteer to wash dishes afterward. You could set up a container for recycling next to the trash can and volunteer to take it to the curb or the closest collection site. Get involved by *servicing*, something Christians should be known for, especially in our families. Show people that it's not that hard or complicated to switch gears.

*Share stories.* "Talk about the impact going green has had on your life," says Corner. "Talk about the benefits." As my husband and I have

shared the story of our downsizing adventure, moving to a house half the size of our previous one, our family has responded positively. We share about doing it for cost-saving reasons, but we also talk about reducing our carbon footprint, too, and how beneficial it is to the planet if we consume fewer resources. People may not agree, but it gives them something to think about.

*Be humble.* "Be humble, but persistent," says Corner. "Don't bash people over the head." People should be educated about the effects of fossil fuels on our planet's climate and be grieved over habitat and species loss. I think it's my responsibility to keep talking about these issues when I have the chance, because I believe we all have to work together to care for God's world. But the times I've done it out of pride or scorn, I've hurt my own witness by failing to demonstrate the Christian virtue of humility and probably closed the door on future conversations.

I certainly don't equate the three R's (reduce, reuse, and recycle) with the four Gospels, but sometimes sharing my commitment to being green has allowed me to talk about my faith. That's only natural, because for me, living sustainably is also about being sustained by God's Spirit. ■

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