

A GREEN READ: How to Walk Gently

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Another Indiana January finds my nightstand groaning with books. Reading is one of the blessings of winter—no yard work calls my name, and the early evening darkness encourages me to ignore the dishes, curl up on the sofa, and open a book. My latest read is *Walking Gently on the Earth: Making Faithful Choices about Food, Energy, Shelter and More*, co-authored by Lisa Graham McMinn and her daughter Megan Anna Neff (InterVarsity Press, 2010). These women ask many of the questions I ask as I try to define a green discipleship:

- What does stewardship of the earth mean in practical terms?
- How do creation care and social justice go together?
- What do I do when I feel overwhelmed by the reality of global climate change?
- Where do I find trustworthy information about environmental topics?

McMinn and Neff aren't experts, but, like me, they are people who want a green Christian ethic along with their CFL light bulbs. They also recognize that being environmentally conscious goes hand-in-hand with seeking justice for all God's people, especially the powerless.

In *Walking Gently*, each chapter begins with a prelude written by Neff, who spent time in Malawi and Ghana. In each prelude she introduces a symbol from the Akan culture of Ghana, weaving the meaning of that symbol

into meditations. Neff's insight into Ghanaian and Malawian culture helps me as a Western Christian see my own cultural blind spots. "Listening to the voices of African Christianity," she writes, "I grow in my appreciation for life and awareness of all of life. I begin to see how creation is connected. The birds and wind that spread seed; the soil that gives the seed a fertile place to germinate; the sun, air and rain that help the seed turn into something that bears fruit for animals and people.... We are all interconnected and belong to the whole that is God's creation."

McMinn writes the majority of the book. She covers some ground that has been traversed more extensively elsewhere, discussing such issues as processed and industrial food, farming practices, and energy use. However, her personal reflections demonstrate how to put theory into practice—the most difficult part of living a green life.

McMinn also tackles some topics more deeply than I have seen in other Christian books about sustainability. For instance, in the chapter titled "Dining at Tables of Compassion," she challenges us to think about how we use the animals, our co-creatures, for our own ends. McMinn doesn't advocate making animals our equals. Yet she questions causing or ignoring animal suffering, contending that allowing animals to live as they are designed to live protects human health and the environment too. Her book isn't gratuitous, but her descriptions of factory-farmed chickens reminded

me why I seek out local farm-raised meats.

A sociology professor at George Fox University in Oregon, McMinn also tackles the controversial subject of human population. The United States' population recently reached 300 million, and the world population continues to explode, straining resources globally and contributing to a host of environmental problems. In light of these issues, McMinn asks, should we limit our family size? What part should contraception play? She makes a case for keeping families small as a way of living sustainably in the future.

McMinn is honest, confessing that she hasn't "arrived" yet. She advocates making gradual changes, reminding us that small changes made by many of us add up to great changes. To assist readers, each chapter contains a helpful list of resources to aid in those small changes. What I find refreshing about this book is that McMinn and Neff both express their awe. Often people of faith are so afraid of putting the earth on a pedestal that they are reticent about appreciating its richness or celebrating its mystery and majesty. These authors share the meaning and solace they find in nature, something we humans can all experience.

I hope this book finds its way to your nightstand this winter. It's definitely food for thought. ■

Marianne Peters is a freelance writer living in Plymouth, Indiana.