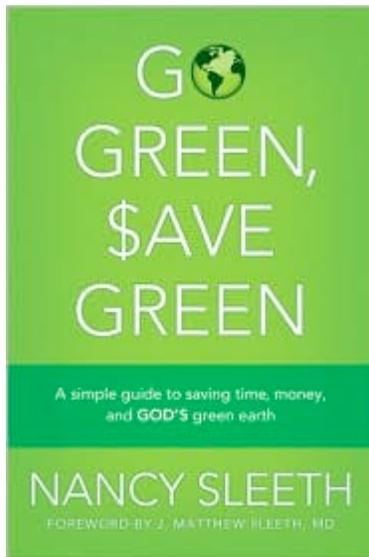


The Power of Green Christian Women

by [Nancy Sleeth](#)

C. S. Lewis says that when you aim at heaven you will get Earth thrown in. When these women ascended a mountain, they gained a whole community.



Never underestimate the power of a few intelligent, passionate Christian women.

I met Pat, a writer, when she offered to put my husband and I up overnight in the cottage behind her house. We were giving a talk on creation care at some churches in Knoxville and needed a place to sleep. We've been back several times for several other speaking tours Pat has organized. Together with Dawn, an adoption attorney, and Thea, Pat's compassionate earth-mother neighbor, Pat supports a small non-profit called LEAF, inspired by a friend and church member who died of cancer in 2005.

They had no idea what God had planned for their "little" nonprofit.

The initial idea was to equip area churches with tools to engage in creation care. They do this by offering free books and DVDs to interested churches through their Web site, <http://www.tnleaf.org> and inviting speakers like us to give sermons and public talks.

Recently they went on a tour of mountains that were being blown up in Appalachia to mine small veins of coal. Here's how Dawn remembers the experience:

"A small group of Christian clergy and lay leaders had gathered on a ridge overlooking a flattened mountain that had once been higher than where they now stood. The ravage and rubble beneath them looked more like the surface of the moon than the lush Appalachian mountain it had been just weeks before. The group had just heard grim statistics and shocking stories of families whose faucets ran with poison water, whose children suffered from breathing disorders, and whose homes no one would buy. This desolate view brought tears and feelings of despair, as if at the funeral of a beautiful child. And like a funeral, these Christians leaned on their faith. Beholding this destruction, this forsaken piece of God's creation, they sang *Amazing Grace*."

As they looked over the destruction, one pastor said, "This is sin."

My friends asked, "How can we stop this?"

Mountain top removal (MTR) coal mining is a method of mining that blasts off the tops of mountains, lowering them sometimes as much as 1,000 feet in order to get to the coal seams that lie within like thin layers of icing between thick slabs of a cake. It has been called strip mining on steroids. The practice permanently trades water quality, property values, tourism potential, and mountain communities for short-term gains for a few coal companies. MTR is cheaper than underground mining, which means that while coal companies make quick profits, few miners are employed.

As an adoption attorney who advocates for child welfare laws, Dawn assumed that environmental welfare advocates would already have anti-MTR legislation in the pipeline, and she wanted to direct LEAF's energy to the ongoing effort. When she searched the Web and made phone calls to traditional environmental groups, however, she found nothing. For too many years, environmentalists had their hands full working defense: maintaining and enforcing current law. No one had been working on offense against MTR: no one had been proposing new law.

Dawn was frustrated but didn't know what to do. LEAF was new and inexperienced—just a few moms who cared about the future of their children and their planet. Legislation was not their primary mission. Other good people had made mining issues their life's work. These women were still new to the lingo. Just two years earlier, they hadn't known a stream buffer zone from ozone.

All good reasons for inaction, but God spoke, as he sometimes will, in an unlikely voice. In the fall of 2007, at a child welfare meeting, Dawn met up with a Nashville lawyer and long-time colleague on child welfare issues. She told him about their mountaintop removal concerns. He said, "Legislatively, what is it that you want?" Before her brain engaged, Dawn spoke: "A ban on mountain top removal coal mining." She was a little embarrassed, afraid that she sounded naively optimistic, but instead he said, "We can do that!" It reminded her of God telling David, "Go choose five smooth stones."

These moms now had a powerful ally but still no legislation. None of them had the technical and scientific background to write effective legislation. But the blessings were just beginning. Later that same day, Dawn ran into the regional director of the National Parks and Conservation Association, an effective yet moderate environmental voice, widely recognized as a reliable source of technical information. Within two weeks, the first draft of the bill to ban mountain top removal coal mining in Tennessee was completed.

The miracles just kept coming. As they reached out for support, the question was not, "What are you Christians doing here?" But, "Where have you been?" Every time they needed something, they prayed, "Either that or something better, God." They keep getting a lot of something better.

As Christians, we all have to work on God's timetable. Usually that requires patience, but in the case of creation care, God's time appears to be right now. Their legislation did not pass on the first round, but I have little doubt that it will. And soon.

All of these women are busy working mothers. Pat was finishing her first novel when LEAF was born. She acknowledged that a leadership role in the nonprofit set back her book considerably, but said, “There’s not a book in this world, except Scripture, that’s more important than a mountain.”

When I first met Dawn, Pat, and Thea, I envied their close friendship. They raise their kids together. They pray together. They live in community.

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Nancy Sleeth is the author of [*Go Green, Save Green: A Simple guide to saving time, money, and God’s green earth.*](#) The book is the first-ever practical guide for going green from a faith perspective. In addition to being an expert on integrating more environmentally friendly practices and perspectives into everyday life, Sleeth is the Program Director of [Blessed Earth](#), a faith-based environmental nonprofit.

After a spiritual and environmental conversion experience, Sleeth and her family radically altered their footprint, reducing their electricity use to one-tenth and their fossil fuel use to one-third the national averages. Along with her husband, Matthew, Nancy now travels throughout the U.S. speaking and writing about faith and the environment.

Prior to heeding this environmental calling, Sleeth served as communications director for a *Fortune 500* company and as a high school and college educator and administrator, most recently at [Asbury College](#) in Wilmore, Kentucky. Sleeth is a graduate of [Georgetown University](#) and holds a masters degree in journalism. She and Matthew are the parents of Clark, who is preparing for a calling in missionary medicine, and Emma Sleeth, a student at Asbury College and author of [*It’s Easy Being Green*](#) (Zondervan, Spring 2008).

