I am an English major. 

By Greg Chandler

There's no getting away from the opportunity to consider biblical perspective on environmental theology and ethics while experiencing the natural world first-hand. (Photos above and at lower right courtesy of Dr. Steven Bouma-Prediger '79.)

Along the way, Dr. Bouma-Prediger had begun leading wilderness trips as a camp counselor to such places as the Boundary Waters region in northeastern Minnesota. After graduating from Hope, Bouma-Prediger taught mathematics and coached football for one year at DW/Dwight High School, near Lansing, Mich. "While I loved teaching, I didn't see myself growing old and gray teaching high school math and coaching football," he said.

So Dr. Bouma-Prediger enrolled at the Institute for Christian Studies, in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, in 1981 to begin work on a master's degree in philosophy. While most of his colleagues had an academic background in the humanities, he was one of the few whose background was in the sciences. He credits the well-rounded education he received at Hope with helping him make the transition.

"It would not have been easy to do had I not had a good broad liberal arts education at Hope," Dr. Bouma-Prediger said. "It would not be as easy as it would have been much more difficult." Dr. Bouma-Prediger later earned a master's in theology from Fuller Theological Seminary in California and a doctorate from the University of Chicago, the latter after writing a 440-page thesis that became the basis for his first book, The Generosity of Doctrine. That book examined the way three theologians—Rosemary Radford Ruether, Joseph Sittler and Jurgen Moltmann—view nature and its connection to faith.

After teaching for four years at North Park College in Chicago, Dr. Bouma-Prediger joined the Hope faculty in 1994. He says his teaching style is less based on lectures and more on class discussion, and that he likes to keep students guessing as to what's coming next.

"It could be putting students up randomly, it could be groups of three or four, it could be a large group discussion," he said.

Sometimes, Dr. Bouma-Prediger sets the tone for class with movies, poetry or music—the Canadian singer-songwriter Bruce Cockburn and the Irish rock group U2 are two of his favorite musical performers.

Ryan Atwell says that one of Dr. Bouma-Prediger's greatest strengths is his ability to bridge gaps between academic disciplines, and between academic study and the real world. "Steve was a professor who demanded a great deal of engagement with the course material and with other students," Atwell said. "I wanted to be prepared.

Dr. Bouma-Prediger's dynamic teaching style has made him a favorite among Hope students. In 1998, graduating seniors voted to have him present the commencement address. The following year, he was named the recipient of the H.O.P.E. (Hope Outstanding Professor Educator) award.

In 2003, Dr. Bouma-Prediger was voted the favorite teacher by Hope students. Two years later, he became the first holder of the John H. and Jeanne M. Jacobson Endowed Chair, named for the late Hope president and his wife.

Dr. Bouma-Prediger is quick to credit his colleagues at the Hope academic community for encouraging his teaching.

"I teach in an institution with a lot of good teachers," he said. "We shamelessly steal each other's good ideas. The passion my colleagues have for teaching rubs off.

Dr. Bouma-Prediger is about to release his fifth book, Beyond Homelessness: Christian Faith in an Age of Displacement, which he wrote with University of Toronto professor Brian Walsh. The book, to be published by Grand Rapids, Mich.-based Eerdmans Publishing, is scheduled for release early next year.

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