

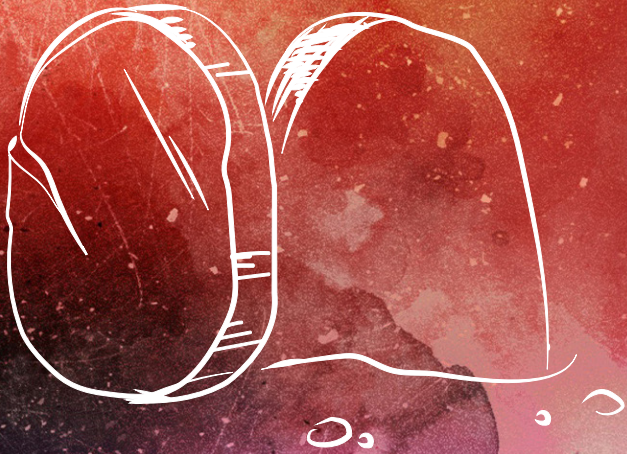
GLENKIRK CHURCH



WEEKLY DEVOTIONS

The DEVO

APRIL 5 - 9, 2021



MONDAY

Psalm 19:1-6; Job 9:5-10; Romans 1:20

My wife loves walks and hikes in the hills; so do my children and grandkids. I'll join them periodically, sometimes begrudgingly. Given my wiring, however, I don't always marvel in nature's splendor and variety the way some do. I can overlook the beauty of God's work in creation—missing associated moments of joy and wonder—which is my loss.

Understanding the intricate designs within nature and their related functionality interests me more. For example, the oceans are, among other things, giant “filters” and “scrubbers” for the byproducts of earthly life; stars are “factories” producing energy and light as well as the elements (many finding their way to earth) essential for the earth's biosphere; many plants are beautiful and food sources, but also produce oxygen and refine our air, etc. The awe-inspiring “fingerprints” of a brilliant, artful, Almighty Creator are all over such things.

“The knowledge of God has been written for us in two volumes ... There is the revelation in nature, and there is the revelation given in the [Bible]. Both are essential to the knowledge and understanding of God. ... No [one lives] anywhere who [has] not been exposed to [the] witness of God in nature. ... Just as the sun is needed to give light and strength to all living things on earth, so God is needed to give moral light and spiritual strength to [people]. ...

“[Many, however] have missed the message and instead of worshiping the God who made the sun, they worship the sun (and nature itself). ... [In] Romans the Apostle Paul says that ... [all] are exposed to the

truth about God, which is evident in creation, and [yet many] deliberately reject it. And, because they do, God lets certain things take place. ... [For example,] their thinking becomes distorted. ... Nature is designed to tell us not only how things happened but who is behind them.” (Ray Stedman)

This week’s theme is knowing God through nature. I’ve got some growing to do here, at least in seeing and appreciating Him more via creation’s beauty. If you know nature lovers who are unbelievers, this week’s devotions might help in sharing the Creator with them.

QUESTIONS

Why is it important to appreciate the beauty in creation? What are some of the functional purposes of some of creation’s elements (stars, oceans and plants)? What are the “two volumes” relevant to attaining the knowledge of God?

PRAYERS FOR CHILD ABUSE MONTH

Pray for those children who are trapped inside homes where abuse is happening and they feel they have nowhere to turn. Ask the Lord, who is the Good Shepherd, to show His compassionate hand of mercy to be with His precious sheep who are in these situations. Ask the Lord to lead them beside quiet waters and protect them physically, spiritually and emotionally.

TUESDAY

Job 38:4-38; Psalm 8:3-4; Matthew 6:26-30

Evolutionary theory contends that the universe reached its current state via continuing random events and natural processes fashioning the cosmos, nature's laws and all life forms and physical things. Nature, per macro-evolution, is both self-creating and self-designing despite its being impersonal, unintelligent and godless. Debunking the flaws with macro-evolution explaining both creation and the universe surpasses the scope of a 350-word devo. However, let's consider several factors evolutionists cannot reconcile effectively with their beliefs.

"[Ours is a] 'Goldilocks World'—a planet ... 'just right' for the sustaining of life. ... If our world were tilted at a slightly different angle, if our atmosphere were but a little different ... if Earth had less water ... life would not be possible. Our very position in the galaxy itself, on a quiet arm of the spiral-shaped Milky Way, away from danger, speaks of intelligent design." (Wesley Baines)

"Continents and islands ... comprise 29 percent of the Earth's surface ... [ideal] for sustaining a large, globally distributed, high-tech human population. ... The Moon's large mass relative to Earth ... proximity to Earth, and ... [singleness stabilizes] the tilt of Earth's rotation axis (yielding life-enabling climate and tidal patterns). ... Jupiter and Saturn [are] gravitational shields for Earth ... [located and sized perfectly to protect Earth] from catastrophic hits by asteroids and comets. ... A universe of 50 billion trillion stars, plus a hundred times more matter, all fine-tuned to mind-boggling precision ... [were evidently] engineered for the specific benefit of the human species." (Ross)

“The fact that something came from nothing—a scientific impossibility—points toward a divine Creator.” (Baines) “Someone from beyond the physics and dimensions of the universe ... placed life and humanity in the only location in the universe at the only time in cosmic history where and when such creatures could survive and thrive.” (Hugh Ross)

An “impersonal force” could not meticulously design our unbelievably fine-tuned planet and universe optimized for human life. Intelligent design requires an Intelligent Designer. However, as we’ll address Friday, creation as now configured is not the end game. “The universe ... was not intended to last forever ... but [is] the perfect creation to carry us to our ultimate destination. ... God made this universe to serve as a classroom (‘bootcamp’) for humans.” (Ross)

QUESTIONS

What does creation’s and Earth’s meticulous fine-tuning say to evolutionists—how do they address these things? How can “something (everything) come from nothing”?

PRAYERS FOR CHILD ABUSE MONTH

Pray for healthy foster placement of children escaping abusive situations. May these foster homes provide the love and security that have been missing from these children’s lives. Ask the Lord to heal the areas of abandonment and remind each child of His eternal presence. Pray that God’s loving peace would permeate these homes.

WEDNESDAY

Genesis 1:26-31; Genesis 2:15; Jeremiah 2:7

I've heard evangelical believers flippantly dismiss environmental concerns with comments like, "Don't worry—it's all going to burn up in the 'end times' anyway." One of the many problems with books like *The Late, Great Planet Earth* and the *Left Behind* series is an attitude of "Christian escapism" some derive from them. However, the Bible clearly indicates that God has established humankind as creation's stewards.

"Since God is Creator, Owner and Ruler, we [must] care for creation in the way that God calls for ... [as] the logical outworking of our love for God. ... God's twin purposes for creation are to reveal God's character and nature, and to provide for what God has made. ... Humanity has been given both dominion and stewardship over creation. ... Humans are not independent actors [regarding] creation, because creation is God's. We will be judged ... if we mar, degrade or destroy creation." (Jared Hyneman, Christopher Shore)

"The most important thing we can do is to love God. Caring for creation is a way we show love to our Creator and [His handiwork]. ... [As well, we are to] love our neighbors. ... Taking care of [the Earth] is very directly caring for people [accordingly]." (Brian Webb)
"[Unfortunately] we too often place profits above people ... [acting] as if the world is there for our use alone. ... [The] global economy is based upon the most efficient ways to strip resources from the land and to pay the lowest wages. ... [Mismanaging Earth's resources has]

greatest impact on the most vulnerable people—third world countries, the poor, people of color, the sick, and the elderly ... [those] with the least resources to respond.” (David Rhoads)

As God’s redeemed image-bearers, we have opportunity to help others see Him via creation’s wonders and managing Earth’s resources to bless all humankind, particularly the marginalized. Our faithful stewardship may help us engage unbelieving nature lovers and secular humanitarians who might otherwise see Christians as aloof.

“We have been granted the greatest of all eternal opportunities: a choice to share in Christ’s own ministry of reconciliation of all peoples and all creation. ... [Therefore] creation’s resources must be shared, used and developed ... with justice and charity.” (Hyneman, Shore)

QUESTIONS

What is “Christian escapism” and its problematic byproducts? What does it mean that we are called by God to steward our environment and greater creation? How does this show love and honor for God?

PRAYERS FOR CHILD ABUSE MONTH

The Lord is a merciful Father to the fatherless; He is a God who cares for the orphans. Pray for the many Christian orphanages that provide a home to the fatherless. Remember in your prayers the orphanages that we support through our Glenkirk Mission giving—*For His Children* in Ecuador and *Three Angels* in Haiti. Pray that God would be their Protector, covering them with His shield and rampart.

THURSDAY

Nehemiah 9:6; Ezekiel 8:16-17; Romans 1:21-23

My son's friend, Jason, is an extremely smart, technical guy, self-describing as a "naturalist." I once asked him, "Wouldn't you agree that there must have been an 'uncaused cause' at the very beginning, something or Someone that pre-existed and at least commenced creating everything else?" He agreed. My follow-up, "So, as a naturalist, you see nature as eternal and self-creating. Nature essentially is your 'god,' right?" Amazed, I heard Jason reply, "Yes."

Yesterday we discussed how some believers misguidedly ignore environmental concerns, dismissing God's call to steward creation. Such stewardship, however, is a far cry from those who revere nature and its ways to the extreme, making these their "gods." Such views are embraced among many faith systems, including pantheism, Wicca (witchcraft), paganism, Shinto and tribal religions. Jason doesn't identify with these groups, but they share this problem: worshipping creation rather than the Creator.

Nature is not an intelligent force; nature-deifying faiths generally see nature mindlessly working of its own accord continually. Evolutionary theory, enabling nature worship, *tries* to explain how the "hardware" (physical aspects) of living things progressed, but it has no hypotheses for the "software" (the soul and DNA) much less the "power" (Creator) needed to design, initiate and sustain life. Naturalistic beliefs generally default to life as random and accidental, lacking greater purpose or meaning.

Beyond the formal religions referenced above, nature worship shows up in: extreme environmentalism, venerating “Mother Earth” and/or elevating animal rights to equal-to or greater-than status with human rights; naturalism, embracing evolution as explaining both life and the universe; and popular expressions like, “The universe is telling me that ...” Atheism (“there is no god”) harmonizes with pantheism (“god is in everything and everything is in god”) in one important sense—if “everything (all creation) is god,” then nothing truly is god and He doesn’t exist—the ultimate blasphemy.

As with most things, biblical truth avoids either extreme. We’re to care for creation, but not idolize it. Righteous worship is directed at the Creator alone, the One who fashioned all created things, is the Source of love and goodness, and died for our redemption. Share Him with a “Jason” you know today!

QUESTIONS

How would you respond to someone who maintains that nature is eternal and “self-creating”? How does overemphasis on nature and its wonder show up for some people? What are some of the problems with worshiping nature?

PRAYERS FOR CHILD ABUSE MONTH

Cry out to God on behalf of those precious children in every corner of the world who are facing injustice, oppression, fear, neglect, abandonment, loneliness, or any kind of abuse. Pray that the LORD would put a shield of protection around each child who is suffering. Pray for God’s church to stand, to speak, and to be His hands to reach out to all the children of the world.

FRIDAY

Isaiah 65:17; Romans 8:18-23; Revelation 21

There is yet another reason why we are to care for creation: God is not through with it yet—He will use it to fashion our eternal home. Jesus' saving sacrifice—the means to our salvation—“*is finished*” (John 19:30) and sufficient. However, God will meld Earth and the heavens in a future, glorious act of re-creation. Some believe this concludes the “seventh day” of creation (Genesis 2:1-3), commencing the “eternal age” wherein believers will dwell with God thereafter.

“The Bible says unequivocally that God’s purpose is to restore all creation. The whole notion of incarnation—God becoming flesh (John 1:1)—is that the divine movement is not an escape from Earth but a movement toward embodiment in creation. Jesus became flesh to bring ‘new creation’ (Galatians 6:15).” (Rhoades) “The New Jerusalem ... is literally heaven on earth. ... In Revelation 21 God does a complete make-over of heaven and earth. ...

“The New Jerusalem ... is the city that Abraham looked for in faith (Hebrews 11:10). It is the place where God will dwell with His people forever (Revelation 21:3). Inhabitants of this celestial city will have all tears wiped away (Revelation 21:4). ... The New Jerusalem will be a place of unimagined blessing. The curse of the old earth will be gone (Revelation 22:3). In the city are the tree of life ‘*for the healing of the nations*’ and the river of life.” (GotQuestions?org)

“God will come to a renewed heaven and Earth and will dwell here among people (21:1-27).” (Rhoades) “The New Jerusalem is the ultimate fulfillment of all God’s promises. The New Jerusalem is God’s goodness made fully manifest.” (GotQuestions.org)

In exploring “knowing God through nature” this week, we are reminded that God is not a distant, uncaring Creator. Not only has Jesus provided the Way to salvation and walks with us amidst our challenges (Psalm 23:1-4), but He created and blesses us with a habitat optimized for human life. The “*Alpha and Omega*” will return (Revelation 22:13), taking Earth’s beauty and perfecting it to fully glorify God while providing for our eternity. This heightens the importance, and privilege, of our faithfully stewarding God’s creation until then.

QUESTIONS

What does “God is not through with creation yet” mean? What is the “New Jerusalem”? What’s the significance of the New Jerusalem and God’s call to humankind to be faithful stewards over creation until Christ’s return?

PRAYERS FOR CHILD ABUSE MONTH

We know each child is fearfully and wonderfully made. Pray for God to reveal His plan, His purpose and His love to each child. May these children know God’s presence in a powerful way so that they would understand that they are not alone and they have a purpose in this world. Also, ask God to make each of our hearts tender towards the oppressed and voiceless that we might work on behalf of all children everywhere.

Sources:

- Ray Stedman's quotes are from <https://www.raystedman.org/old-testament/psalms/opening-the-books>
- Wesley Baines' quotes can be found at <https://www.beliefnet.com/faiths/finding-god-in-nature.aspx>
- Hugh Ross' quotes are from his book, *Why the Universe Is the Way It Is* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008).
- Jared Hyneman's and Christopher Shore's quotes are from https://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/World%20Vision's%20Biblical%20Understanding%20of%20How%20we%20Relate%20to%20Creation_Full.pdf
- Brian Webb's quotes can be found at <https://www.wesleyan.org/good-stewards-gods-creation>
- David Rhoads' quotes are from <https://lutheransrestoringcreation.org/the-stewardship-of-creation-a-theological-reflection/>
- GotQuestions.org quotes can be found at <https://www.gotquestions.org/new-jerusalem.html>

