

The Creation Care Bible Challenge

A 50 Day Bible Challenge

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Edited by Marek P. Zabriskie

FORWARD MOVEMENT

Cincinnati, Ohio

Preface

Peak religious moments are not confined to churches. Many of us have had such moments in nature. This doesn't detract from the important role that churches play but rather reminds us that in the beauty of creation, we encounter God's cathedral in its widest sense.

Sir Francis Bacon, the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century philosopher, scientist, and advocate for the scientific method, noted, "God has, in fact, written two books, not just one. Of course, we are all familiar with the first book he wrote, namely scripture. But he has written a second book called creation." In his book, *The Incarnation of the Son of God*, Charles Gore, one of the most important theologians in the Anglican tradition, wrote,

To believe in God is to move about the world... [recognizing that] God is in all things. There is no creature so small, but represents something of his goodness. [God] is disclosed in all graces and kinds of life: under the diverse modes of beauty, and truth, and goodness."

Indeed, God is powerfully revealed to us through creation. On July 15, 1978, two days after I turned 18, I stayed at a bed-and-breakfast in Oban, Scotland, run by a Mrs. Lewis. I headed overseas after high school with plans to train with a semi-professional soccer team in Aberdeen. My mother insisted, since I was postponing college and hoping to play soccer abroad, that I at least travel a bit as well. After locating the bed-and-breakfast, I walked down a stone staircase known to the locals as Jacob's Ladder to purchase some cheese, a loaf of bread and a carton of milk.

Sitting on the stone windowsill of my room, I listened to classical music on my transistor radio and watched as the sun slowly descended in the direction of the Islands of Mull and Iona, where Christianity came to Scotland in 563 CE. My parents were going through a difficult divorce. As I watched the brilliant sunset, it was as if a veil had been lifted. I could literally see that something good would come forth from everything painful in my parents' marriage, in our family's life, in problems facing friends, and in even world events. I sensed that "all should be well," as Julian of Norwich famously wrote in her book, *Revelations of Divine Love*. That evening was a spiritual awakening, setting me on a course to become a committed Christian and eventually a priest. A few days later, I had a similar experience while watching the sheep graze by the waterside as the sun set in the Scottish Highlands.

Our encounters with God in creation remind us of the great connectedness of all living things and the harmonious design that God intends for us. Psalm 24 begins, "The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it." This understanding of the earth is echoed in Psalms 50:12, 89:11, and 98:8 and throughout scripture.

Millions of people know the power of discovering God not only in ancient churches, monasteries, and holy sites, but also in the surrounding landscapes. The high crosses of Ireland consecrate the surrounding hills and fields and remind visitors that they are standing on holy ground. All life is holy. The outdoors is indeed the handiwork of God. Who can venture through a forest of redwood trees or stand on a mountain overlooking the valleys below and not have a religious experience?

Climate change and global warming, however, are now affecting all of creation. They are the most pressing issues of our day. Other concerns

are vital, but they will not matter if the planet becomes unsustainable for human life. Nature is resilient but delicate.

Today, humans are paying the price as we experience extreme weather and natural disasters: massive flooding, fires ravaging huge swaths of territory, rising sea levels, cyclones, tornadoes, and hurricanes devastating many regions, and massive water shortages. Water has become more precious than oil in many parts of the world, leading to massive displacements of people. Young people wonder what the future holds for them. We have obsessed with human freedom at the expense of the common good. Leaders in corporations, government, and those investing funds must take action to avoid reaching a point of no return.

In 1962, Rachel Carson published *Silent Spring*, which many claim set the foundation for the modern environmental movement. Carson's book analyzed the effects of many pesticides on the environment, DDT in particular. It also implicated the chemical industry and modern industrial society for the developing environmental crisis.

Four years later, historian Lynn White Jr. delivered an address to the American Association for the Advancement of Science in which he bluntly stated that Christianity “bears a huge burden of guilt for the devastation of nature in which the West has been engaged for centuries.” His address generated a huge amount of debate.

White's premise was that the Judeo-Christian tradition “made it possible to exploit all nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects.” He cited the biblical command “to fill the earth and subdue it” (Genesis 1:28) as the ultimate proof that the Judeo-Christian tradition puts humans above the rest of creation and regards all other forms of life as subordinate. He maintained that this faulty

understanding of scripture gave a green light for humans to dominate the earth.

White was a devout Christian. He did not intend his essay to be a general attack on the Judeo-Christian tradition but rather as a criticism to a particular strain of Christianity that he saw as supporting environmental degradation. Whereas animistic paganism viewed humans as part of nature, Christianity, said White, viewed humans as dominant over nature. This created a dualism that had not previously existed, desacralizing nature and paving the way for its destruction. Christianity, said White, made it possible to exploit nature with indifference to creation. He proposed Saint Francis as a model for how God intended humans to relate to nature. “I propose Francis as a patron saint of ecologists,” he wrote.

In his article “Creation and Environment,” Anglican theologian John Macquarrie challenged the blanket criticisms of the Judeo-Christian tradition as regards the environment. Macquarrie pointed to Genesis 9, where God makes a covenant with Noah after the flood. God speaks to Noah and says, “As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark” (Genesis 9:9-10).

He argued that this was a covenant to protect both humans and animals, not one to be viewed in terms of “domination” or “superiority” of humans over animals. Macquarrie maintained that Genesis 9 overrode the declarations found in Genesis 1 and 2. He also cited the celebration of nature found throughout the psalms and evidenced in other parts of the Bible that God’s glory was manifested in all of creation.

French-American microbiologist, pathologist, and environmentalist René Dubos maintained Christians should look to Saint Benedict of Nursia, founder of the Benedictine monastic order, as a role model for interacting with creation. Dubos argued that Benedictines promoted manual labor and self-sufficient monasteries with a focus on the stewardship of all created things, including land and animals. He noted that when establishing monasteries, Benedictines drained swamps, created good farmland, and did not exploit the environment. Their work, said Dubos, was an act of “stewardship” and “a prayer which helps in recreating paradise out of chaotic wilderness.” Benedict, said Dubos, represented the wise use of the land while Francis represented a utopian dream doomed to fail.

Since White’s controversial article in 1966, environmental issues have become increasingly important with each passing year. Today, hardly a day passes where we do not read or hear about climate change and global warming. A recent United Nations report claims that the global average temperature will rise 2.7 degrees Celsius by century’s end and notes that even if all countries meet their promised emissions cuts, this rise is likely to worsen extreme wildfires, droughts, and floods.

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic slowing the economy, shutting down businesses and drastically reducing air travel and other transportation, 2020 was the hottest year ever reported on the planet. The temperature in Death Valley reached 130 degrees. The most recorded wildfires in history burned over five million acres—a land mass equal to the entire area of Connecticut, Delaware, and Rhode Island combined.

David Pogue, who frequently hosts PBS’s *Nova* science specials, discusses climate change and the greenhouse effect by showing a

photograph of two dogs in a car. “If we want to reach people, we should call it the dog-in-the-car-effect. You come back to your car in the summer and it’s boiling inside. Same exact thing: trapped infrared energy reflected from the sun. In the climate analogy, we are the dog,” says Pogue. He shows a graph that starkly depicts the dramatic rise in levels of carbon dioxide.

Pogue sometimes exchanges the words “global warming” with “global weirding.” “It’s heat waves, freak snowstorms, flooding, water shortages, historic rains, droughts. We had the most hurricanes last season,” he notes. “Nature is a network of interconnected systems. You can’t turn one knob without affecting a bunch of other things.”

In her article, “Christian Discipleship in the Environmental Crisis,” Margot Hodson, one of our featured authors in this book, notes that there has been a 60% drop in vertebrate species since 1970. She writes, “Clearly something has gone badly wrong in our relationship with the Earth, and we have damaged and degraded the precious gift of creation that has been entrusted to us.”

Indeed, “all of the world feels at risk, and most of it is,” notes *The Economist*, adding that “even if everyone manages to honor today’s firm pledges, large parts of the tropics risk becoming too hot for outdoor work. Coral reefs and livelihoods that depend on them will vanish, and the Amazon rainforest will become a ghost of itself. Severe harvest failures will be commonplace. Ice sheets in Antarctica and Greenland will shrink past the point of no return, promising sea rises measured not in millimeters, as today’s are, but in meters.” *The Economist* notes that progress toward reaching the goals of the Paris Agreement remain woefully inadequate.

In September of 2021, Pope Francis, Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby, and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew issued a

joint statement for the first time, warning of the importance of environmental sustainability, its impact on poverty, and urgency for global cooperation. The statement read, “We call on everyone, whatever their belief or worldview, to endeavor to listen to the cry of the earth and of people who are poor, examining their behavior and pledging meaningful sacrifices for the sake of the earth which God has given to us.” It concludes, “This is a critical moment. Our children’s future and the future of our common home depend on it.” They urge leaders to avoid focusing on short-term profits at the expense of long-term sustainability, adding, “God mandates: ‘Choose life, so that you and your children might live’” (Deuteronomy 30:19)

Historian Lynn White was partially right to lay some of the blame for the environmental crisis at the feet of Christians, but we also can play a critical role in helping to reshape our self-understanding and attachment to the earth—while there is still time. Christianity demands that we critically rethink our lifestyles, our use of resources, our attachment to creation, and our theology and mission.

Margot Hodson notes, “The Protestant Reformation put emphasis on the first part of Romans 8; now we need a new ‘Environmental Reformation’ to place emphasis on the later part of Romans 8. Creation is groaning, and it has been stripped of its fullness by humanity. As Christians, we are called in Christ to act to enable fullness once more. To do this is to give glory to God.” Like many things, we are finding that it has been in our scriptures all along. Only now are we discovering what God’s Word has been saying to us all along.

The Rev. Marek P. Zabriskie
Founder of The Bible Challenge
Director of the Center for Biblical Studies
thecenterforbiblicalstudies.org

How to Read the Bible Prayerfully

Welcome to the Creation Care Bible Challenge. We are delighted that you are interested in reading God's life-transforming word. It will change and enrich your life. This book is an ideal resource for individuals, small groups, churches, and dioceses. Here are some suggestions to consider as you get started:

- You can begin the Creation Care Bible Challenge at any time of year. With 50 meditations, it's a perfect companion for each day of the season of Easter, but creation care itself is a year-long, day-in, day-out endeavor, and the book can be read at any period.
- Each day has a manageable amount of reading, a meditation, a few questions, and a prayer, written by one of many wonderful authors.
- We challenge you to read the Bible each day! This is a great spiritual discipline to establish.
- If you need more than fifty days to read through the Creation Care Bible Challenge, we support you in moving at the pace that works best for you. And if you want to keep going when you're done, a list of additional scripture citations is included in the back of the book. Keep reading!
- Many Bible Challenge participants read the Bible using their iPad, iPhone, Kindle, or Nook, or listen to the Bible on a mobile device using faithcomesthroughhearing.org, Audio.com, or Pandora radio. Find what works for you.
- Other resources for learning more about the Bible and engaging scripture can be found on our website,

ForwardMovement.org. In addition, you can find a list of resources at thecenterforbiblicalresources.org. The center also offers a Read the Bible in a Year program and reading plans for the New Testament, Psalms, and Proverbs.

- Because the Bible is not a newspaper, it is best to read it with a reverent spirit. We advocate a devotional approach to reading the Bible, rather than reading it as a purely intellectual or academic exercise.
- Before reading the Bible, take a moment of silence to put yourself in the presence of God. We then invite you to read this prayer written by Archbishop Thomas Cranmer:

Blessed Lord, who has caused all holy scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

- Consider using the ancient monastic practice of *lectio divina*. In this form of Bible reading, you read the text and then meditate on a portion of it—be it a verse or two or even a single word. Mull over the words and their meaning. Then offer a prayer to God based on what you have read, how it has made you feel, or what it has caused you to ponder. Listen in silence for God to respond to your prayer.
- We encourage you to read in the morning, if possible, so that your prayerful reading may spiritually enliven the rest of your day. If you cannot read in the morning, read when you can later in the day. Try to carve out a regular time for your daily reading.

- One way to hold yourself accountable to reading God’s Word is to form a group within your church or community—particularly any outreach and ministry groups. By participating in the Creation Care Bible Challenge together, you can support one another in your reading, discuss the Bible passages, ask questions, and share how God’s word is transforming your life.
- Ask to have a notice printed in your church newsletter that you are starting a group to participate in the Creation Care Bible Challenge. Invite others to join you and gather regularly to discuss the readings, ask questions, and share how they transform your life. Visit the Center for Biblical Resources website to see more suggestions about how churches can participate in The Bible Challenge.
- Have fun and find spiritual peace and the joy that God desires for you in your daily reading. The Center for Biblical Studies aims to help you discover God’s wisdom and to create a lifelong spiritual practice of daily Bible reading so that God may guide you through each day of your life.
- Once you’ve finished one complete reading of the Bible, start over and do it again. God may speak differently to you in each reading. Follow the example of U.S. President John Adams, who read through the Bible each year during his adult life. We highly advocate this practice.
- After participating in the Creation Care Bible Challenge, you will be more equipped to support and mentor others in reading the Bible—and to connect your ministry of advocacy and assistance with Holy Scripture.

We are thrilled that you are participating in The Bible Challenge. May God richly bless you as you prayerfully engage the scriptures each day. To learn more about The Bible Challenge, visit us at: thecenterforblicalstudies.org to see all of our resources.

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DAY 1

Genesis 1:1-5

¹In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, ²the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.

³Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. ⁴And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

Reflection

We are poignantly aware that God's narrative does not include us as the central cast of God's actions. We are a part of a greater work. We are created as part of God's cosmos, which begins before our arrival in the garden.

The central active word in this passage is "separated" or "divided." The better translation is "set apart for God's service." God's purpose of creation and creatures is to be *set apart to serve* as a reflection of God's self, beauty, and glory. The first to hear this text understood their contiguous role in the narrative and within the wider body of creation.

Today, we live within a different worldview. We see the spaces we occupy and the environment surrounding us as observable objects. We objectify others and God, so too we objectify the wider creation and its creatures. We naturally upend God's narrative. We interject humanity at the center of it, with God and creation existing for our benefit.

We hide from our sin—the polluting of God's intent. We pollute waterways and oceans, drive creatures to extinction, and make ourselves unwell. We create a 1.6 million square kilometer trash island in the Pacific (twice the size of Texas); we clutter Earth's orbit with 27,000 pieces of space debris and continue to launch future trash in the form of exploration tools onto other planets of God's making—with no plans for recapturing and recycling. Creation care is a cosmic issue and a reminder that science alone will not fix the problem before us.

God's beginning narrative reminds us that this planet and the cosmos are not ours and do not exist for our benefit but for God's. We are at once invited to realize our place within God's cosmic creation, and only then may we take part and tend and serve the Garden of God's making.

The Rt. Rev. C. Andrew "Andy" Doyle
Bishop of the Diocese of Texas
Houston, Texas

Questions

When you think of Genesis, what are the first pieces of the narrative that come to mind? How has that shaped your worldview of the whole text?

How might you do a fearless personal moral inventory that would open your eyes to our sin of pollution (personal and corporate)?

The Book of Common Prayer speaks of reconciliation as amending actions by means that bring comfort and counsel. What does repentance look like?

How might you participate within your family, your wider community, and the wider country to mend God's creation?

Prayer

God, who multiplied the blessing of creation through cosmic self-revelation, aid us in understanding our place within the body of creation. Give us courage to name our sin of pollution and strengthen us to set upon an individual and corporate pilgrimage to tend the cosmos as a blessing that reveals your beauty and glory to future generations. *Amen.*

DAY 2

Genesis 1:6-8

⁶And God said, “Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” ⁷So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from

the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. ⁸God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

Reflection

I have always loved being in and with water—swimming, washing dishes, and taking long, hot showers. Maybe you have, too. Every human being comes from the watery world of the womb. Our bodies are mostly water. Water is as essential to our lives as the air we breathe. On day two in the book of Genesis, we read that out of a watery abyss, God places a dome in the midst of waters to separate the waters above from the waters below.

In the Godly Play method of presenting scripture stories, author Jerome Berryman clarifies just what water we are talking about in Genesis when he writes (and the storyteller says) in the creation story: “Now I don’t mean just the water in a water glass or the water in a bathtub or shower. I don’t even mean just the water in a river or a lake. I don’t even mean just the water in the ocean or the water that comes down from the sky in rain. I mean all of the water that is water. This is the water that all the rest of the water comes from.”

Then the storyteller shows the card with the firmament, dividing the waters. This powerful storytelling reminds me that water has never been added to the world since creation. It is the same water, now in vastly different places and arrangements than at creation.

During the pandemics of COVID-19, climate change, and racial injustice, I have been reminded that water justice is also essential to the flourishing of all creation. We have depended on water to wash our hands during the pandemic. Extreme flooding and hurricanes have increased this past year, as have extreme heat and fires, as climate change causes water shortage and damage. Communities of color are disproportionately affected by both climate change and unclean and unsafe drinking water.

The prophet Amos preached, “Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream.” How can I be more mindful of the gift of water on my island home? It is not a renewable resource. The amount has not changed since creation.

The Rev. Dr. Anita Louise Schell
Provisional Priest-in-Charge of St. Ann’s Church
Old Lyme, Connecticut

Questions

Some have proposed adding a sixth response to the Baptismal Covenant in the Book of Common Prayer to address climate change and our duty to protect the beauty and integrity of all creation. Would such an addition to the baptismal liturgy change your understanding of baptism? If so, how?

In what watershed do you live? What significance does this watershed have for you and your neighborhood? What does justice rolling down like water and righteousness like an everflowing stream look like to you and your faith community?

Prayer

Almighty and ever generous God, you have given us the gift of water. We confess that we have not cared for this vital resource as a gift. Out of greed, we have polluted, squandered, consumed, and hoarded your precious gift. We pray that we may be restored to a right relationship with the waters above and the waters below. All this we pray in the name of the one who was called by you from the waters of his baptism, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Redeemer. *Amen.*

Genesis 1:24-28

²⁴And God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind.” And it was so. ²⁵God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.

²⁶Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds

of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”

²⁷So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. ²⁸God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”

Reflection

It is often missed (and we may wonder why) that the sixth day of creation begins with God making all the animals—wild animals and domestic animals, but this day doesn't end there. God declares that these animals are good, but the sixth day of creation doesn't close until after God makes humans. We share the sixth day with the wild animals and cattle!

Granted, God lavishes more directions on us, and those directions, as many have interpreted them, have brought sharp criticisms from environmentalists. The words that are most problematic are “subdue” and “dominion.” A famous essay, “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis,” written by Lynn White in 1966, laid the blame for the rampant destruction of the environment squarely on the shoulders of Christians who have interpreted this passage as license to be Earth conquistadores.

In the years since 1966, many interpreters have provided a truer meaning of the charge given to us. Let me point out that when we combine the sharing of a day of creation with animals, with the fact that “dominion” and “domicile” come from the same ancient root, a word meaning house, we come up with a home that is made of time and space. And when we look back further in Genesis 1, we see that God created the heavens as a dome, a great house.

Our task, then, is to be a householder, with all the animals as part of the household with us. Think of dorm parents. We need to provide for and care for and indeed get along with our housemates. If we fail, our contract may not be renewed.

The Rt. Rev. Marc Andrus
Bishop of the Diocese of California
San Francisco, California

Questions

What, in the way humans are created, suits us to be heads of the household we share with other animals?

How does thinking of the animals of the earth, including domestic animals, as members of the same household with us change your views of life?

Can you think of one way you can change your thinking and doing after looking at this passage from Genesis?

Prayer

Dear God, we pray that your love will become the energy molding our treatment of the other creatures with whom we share Earth, our island home. Help us to be humane, patient, and kind to all. When we fail, lead us to amendment of life. Bless all life in the name of Jesus Christ our Savior. *Amen.*