

Creation Care: Our Stewardship of Creation

Part One: The Soul of Creation Care

Creation care is not another cause, but a way of loving God. *The Soul of Creation Care is a mystical awareness of creation that leads to an understanding that we're a part (not the whole), and that God cares for it all.*

How did I come to care about Creation Care? Pastors have defenses against groups trying to access the church for their cause. Pastors are invited to luncheons for pitches, are often sent books and DVDs about various causes. In 1999, a steady stream of the well intentioned lobbied me to mobilize our church for coming Y2K disaster, when computer systems of earth would collapse, throwing us back into stone age. Could we store bulgur wheat, encourage people to fill bathtubs with water, etc.? I gave it a miss.

Someone sent me Saving God's Green Earth, by Tri Robinson (pastor at the Vineyard Church in Boise, ID). Tri's book implements biblical principles of environmental stewardship. I thought, "Good for Tri, but I've got other fish to fry. I don't need convincing, and don't have bandwidth for something new."

Then I was asked to represent the Vineyard Association at a retreat of top environmental scientists and evangelical leaders. At the retreat, I was having dinner with people whose books I've read--like E.O. Wilson, the best-known biologist alive (and way above my station). I was thinking, "What am I doing here?"

On plane, I read Saving God's Green Earth, and it made perfect sense. At the retreat, I talked with these notebook-toting scientists, perusing their data. The scientists were not wild-eyed ideologues, but measured and cautious people. They were careful not to cry wolf--*Just the facts ma'am*.

During the meeting, Gus Speth, first scientist to advise a U.S. President on climate concerns, said : "I used to think we could solve environmental crisis--conditions so bad in Africa much of land won't grow crops; clean water not available to millions; rain forest shrinking fast; all this landing heavily on poor in developing nations or inner cities where asthma rates are skyrocketing, lead poisoning harming kids--by throwing enough good science at the problem. I was wrong. **The primary threat isn't pollution, climate change, biodiversity loss, or habitat destruction. It's selfishness, greed, and apathy. We need a spiritual & cultural transformation to deal with that.**" The hair on my arms stood on end, and a shiver went up my spine like it does when God is talking. Something in me changed in that moment.

"We scientists are too nervous about calling the environment, *creation*. That's got to stop." This is from Dean of School of Forestry & Environment at Yale! I was witnessing a "moment" in history.

In that moment, concern for the environment *went from head to heart*. Creation care is not another politically correct concern. It's faithfulness to God, knowing we will give an account of our stewardship when our tour of duty is up.

However, duty or obligation (or whatever it is that makes us the kind of people who floss daily) *isn't* what fuels this thing. What fuels this thing goes way deeper than that found in Psalm 104.

1-14 O my soul, bless God! God, my God, how great you are!

beautifully, gloriously robed,
Dressed up in sunshine,
and all heaven stretched out for your tent.
You built your palace on the ocean deeps,
made a chariot out of clouds and took off on wind-wings.
You commandeered winds as messengers,
appointed fire and flame as ambassadors.
You set earth on a firm foundation
so that nothing can shake it, ever.
You blanketed earth with ocean,
covered the mountains with deep waters;
Then you roared and the water ran away—
your thunder crash put it to flight.
Mountains pushed up, valleys spread out
in the places you assigned them.
You set boundaries between earth and sea;
never again will earth be flooded.
You started the springs and rivers,
sent them flowing among the hills.
All the wild animals now drink their fill,
wild donkeys quench their thirst.
Along the riverbanks the birds build nests,
ravens make their voices heard.
You water the mountains from your heavenly cisterns;
earth is supplied with plenty of water.
You make grass grow for the livestock,
hay for the animals that plow the ground.

14-23 Oh yes, God brings grain from the land,
wine to make people happy,
Their faces glowing with health,
a people well-fed and hearty.
God's trees are well-watered—
the Lebanon cedars he planted.
Birds build their nests in those trees;
look—the stork at home in the treetop.
Mountain goats climb about the cliffs;
badgers burrow among the rocks.
The moon keeps track of the seasons,
the sun is in charge of each day.
When it's dark and night takes over,
all the forest creatures come out.
The young lions roar for their prey,
clamoring to God for their supper.
When the sun comes up, they vanish,
lazily stretched out in their dens.
Meanwhile, men and women go out to work,
busy at their jobs until evening.

24-30 What a wildly wonderful world, God!

You made it all, with Wisdom at your side,
 made earth overflow with your wonderful creations.
 Oh, look—the deep, wide sea,
 brimming with fish past counting,
 sardines and sharks and salmon.
 Ships plow those waters,
 and Leviathan, your pet dragon, romps in them.
 All the creatures look expectantly to you
 to give them their meals on time.
 You come, and they gather around;
 you open your hand and they eat from it.
 If you turned your back,
 they'd die in a minute—
 Take back your Spirit and they die,
 revert to original mud;
 Send out your Spirit and they spring to life—
 the whole countryside in bloom and blossom.
31-32 The glory of God—let it last forever!
 Let God enjoy his creation!
 He takes one look at earth and triggers an earthquake,
 points a finger at the mountains, and volcanoes erupt.
33-35 Oh, let me sing to God all my life long,
 sing hymns to my God as long as I live!
 Oh, let my song please him;
 I'm so pleased to be singing to God.
 But clear the ground of sinners—
 no more godless men and women! O my soul, bless God!

The King James Version gives "Praise to the Sovereign LORD for His creation and providence". The word *providence* indicates "care". In other words, it gives "Praise God for his Creation and his care of creation!"

The soul of Creation Care is a *mystical awareness* of creation... Creation is one mystical place!

"Ever since creation of the world, his invisible attributes of eternal power & divinity have been able to be understood & perceived by what he has made." (Ro.1:20)

"He wraps himself in light as with a garment. He makes the clouds his chariot and rides on the wings of the wind. He makes winds his messengers, flames of fire his servants." (104:2-4, NIV)

In Hebrew spirituality, this concept is rampant. God appears to Moses in a burning bush. Elijah goes to Mt. Horeb and is exposed to the gentle wind that bears "the still, small voice." Not by accident, Jesus ascends in a *cloud*; ten days later, the Spirit descends as *wind* and tongues of *fire*!

We don't worship creation. But we do listen for God's voice, we do feel the brush of his garment across our face in the wind and the dancing flame!

You may think, "Mystical shmystical! What are you talking about?" I'm talking about Jesus at his baptism hearing God's voice, "*This is my son, in whom I am well pleased,*" while only some standing by thought it had thundered! It is a *mystical awareness*: God speaking through his creation.

I'm talking about humans, wired to stand in awe before creation with mouths agape, pupils dilated, and faces flushed—knowing that something beyond this world is peeking in at us through this one. This is a *mystical awareness* of creation.

I'm talking about Carl Safina, an ocean scientist, writing in [Song for the Blue Ocean](#) about his experience being in the gulf of Maine in search of whales and finding them:

"Charlie [his guide] remarks, 'Boy, there are some whales in here!' [Safina:] *Man, this place is alive! In every direction now, creatures far larger than dinosaurs cavort and carry on, blowing voluminous clouds of breath and breaking the sea's surface in rings of foam. The scene is ages old. Pleistocene park. Everything here is giant; the mammals are giant; the fishes, giant; the scale of creatures enlarged to match the oceanic scale itself. The vast sea seems boundless and expansive. From our commanding view the ocean stretches off like a tight azure drum around the rim of the world, and here against the center of this drum pounds the rhythm of the living. I feel utterly captivated, connected and rhapsodic; I feel that somehow a sweepingly enlightening, profound realization awaits just beyond consciousness--like a forgotten dream sensed upon waking--if I can take this scene in for a few more moments, just long enough to let myself open fully and encompass it.* 'All right, let's get out of here,' Charlie says. 'We'll see more giant tuna as we go north, I'm sure.'"

One member of the church remarks:

"I often marvel at what I see. All it takes is eyes to see and ears to hear. My dad taught me to see things on the farm. A couple of months ago I was heading back out of the woods near us and came to the edge of the gravel pit, same as always. All of a sudden there was a big flurry overhead, and a big bird flew out of a tree. A bald eagle, for heaven's sake! On that same walk I had seen a stately buck watching me from a wooded hillside, spotted a vigilant doe in a shaft of sunlight in a deep dark spruce ravine, found rock piles off trail from long ago inhabitants, and heard the velvety hooting of a great horned owl."

Psalm 104 is God teaching us how to "see things on the farm."

Creation is God's provision for us, body and *soul*. Psychologists would call it "fascination" or "biophilia": When we are exposed to nature, our blood pressure lowers, our stress hormones retreat, and our endorphins surge to make the heart glad. Psalm 104 is the psalmist in a mode of fascination, in a mystical awareness of the creation. At the end of Psalm 104, it says so: "*May my meditation be pleasing to Him, as I rejoice in the Lord.*" (v. 34) Similarly, the Hebrews prayed with the eyes open much of time. In Genesis 24:63, Isaac "*went out to the field to meditate one evening, and as he looked up he saw...*"

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Many think David's son Solomon wrote Psalm 104 because he was a singing, psalming, botanist- zoologist. Solomon is described in 1 Kings 4: 32-34:

"He spoke 3000 proverbs and his songs numbered a thousand and five. He described plant life from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of walls. He also taught about animals and birds, reptiles and fish. People of all nations came to listen to Solomon's wisdom, sent by all the kings of the world who had heard of his wisdom."

Ask a botanist or zoologist to describe their specialty plant or animal. Whoever wrote this psalm is *in love* with the plant and animal life and the planet that sustains them, believing their love comes from God who cares about it all!

Jesus himself talked this way: *"Consider the lilies they neither toil nor spin, yet God cares for them!"* He speaks lessons from nature pointing to the nature of God: *the kingdom is like a mustard seed, a field of wheat, a fish in the net...*

The following are biblical passages that point to God's care for the whole:

Ps. 104: 10-18. We're included in his care, but we're not the only ones he cares for. *"The stork has its home in the pine trees."* The Hebrew for 'home' is *temple*. The pine trees are a sacred temple for the storks. See also, *"the mountains belong to the wild goats; the crags are a refuge for the coney [rock badgers]."*

"He makes grass grow for the cattle, and plants for man to cultivate." Cultivate is an important word here. In **Genesis 2:15**, *"The Lord God took the human and put him in the Garden of Eden to cultivate it and take care of it."* In Hebrew, work and worship are synonymous. Creation care is our priestly service. We are to cultivate & take care of creation, not hog the whole thing to ourselves!

Psalm 104: 21-23: In this passage we see that the lions own the night, return to their dens at daybreak, and that we come out until sundown. We take turns!

It's worth noting that at the time these psalms were written, the global population was less than 150 million. We're heading for 8 billion by the year 2020. Our footprint is heavier now; how much more do we need to be reminded not to be the bull in the china shop, and engage in considerate use, not abuse!

The Pacific Northwest is home to the salmon. Salmon are born in rivers, and swim to ocean where they migrate for thousands of miles; when it's time to come back, make merry, and have little baby salmon, they come mysteriously over thousands of miles to same river in which they were hatched! Guided by what? Who knows! Fine tuning to magnetic field...

*What a wildly wonderful world, God! You made it all, with Wisdom at your side, made earth overflow with your wonderful creations.
Oh, look—the deep, wide sea, brimming with fish past counting,
sardines and sharks and salmon. Ships plow those waters,
and Leviathan, your pet dragon, romps in them. All the creatures look expectantly to you
to give them their meals on time. You come, and they gather around; you open your
hand and they eat from it.*

Guided by Wisdom, the salmon make their way to their very spot in river, sometimes a thousand miles inland, in which they were hatched. They come *home* [Hebrew = temple]; they come back to their temple, a sacred place.

Ecologists would call this sacred place, *habitat*. *"Even the sparrow has a home where she may raise her young near your altar!"* (Psalm 84:3) Jesus also spoke of this place: *"Foxes have holes, birds of the air have their nests..."* Home is where the returning salmon lay their eggs and raise their young, who then swim to sea--and the cycle repeats.

Unless their home has been ruined while they were away.

It turns out their home depends on the trees that line river and provide shade from sun; the logs in river provide a birthing center, nurseries, and the NICU. When trees are clear-cut (rather than leaving a band of trees along the banks) as they have been--because we have regarded trees as nothing more than ours for the taking--their habitat is ruined. The salmon population is now in such serious decline that the fishing industry in the Pacific Northwest is out of luck, and nearly out of salmon.

Who cares? Some don't care. Some make fun of those who do care. You cannot, however, read Psalm 104 and not understand that the God of Creation Cares! If the God of Creation cares, and if we care what he cares about, then we ought to care, too. We are his Creation stewards, partners with him in His Creation Care.

Though it is a duty, the soul of Creation Care is not merely having a "social conscience" drilled into you. It's about worship and wonder; it's reverence and awe; it's a mystical awareness of the creation because the creation is a creation, and because the Creator is hiding in its shadows and riding on its beams of light.

It's about the child of awe: humility. Humility is finding our place in the creation, not hogging it all to ourselves as if it's simply ours for the taking. Considerate use, not abuse, is what Creation Stewards aim for.

Today, there is an invitation from the Spirit who renews the face of the earth to open our hearts and eyes to world around us, and see it not as consumers, but as worshippers of the Creator whose world it is.

As we do, just as the King of Creation promised, *"Out of your hearts will flow rivers of living water."* We'll be changed on the inside and empowered to care. That river on the inside will make for a river the salmon can come home to.

Here is a prayer to offer, for those with a heart that wants to be open:

Lord, open my heart to see you shining through the creation, and to care for your creation as you desire.

As you respond, begin by seeing what the Father is already doing and blessing it. Your love for animals is from the heart of God. Your love for nature (being outdoors on golf course, fishing, deer stand, walking through the woods) is from the heart of God. Ask for more of what He is already doing:

1. *Like Isaac, "go into the open country to meditate."* Take a walk, lift up your eyes to the heavens, bring a flower to work. Give God's world a chance to touch your heart: "Open the

eyes of my heart, Lord: I want to see you!"

2. Let the psalms open your heart: Psalm 8, 19, 104....

3. Let the love of Jesus for His creation open your heart. Underline in gospels each time Jesus holds up something of creation as a revelation of God.