

**THE
EARTH
IS THE
LORD'S!**

**A Ten-Day
Devotional On
Caring For Creation**

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Caring For Creation

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2021

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INTRODUCTION:

The Earth Is The Lord's!

'The Earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world and all who live in it!'—Psalm 24:1



God's creation is a great gift to humans everywhere. Whether we live in the suburbs of Australia, the cities of Bangladesh or the coastal villages of Papua New Guinea, all humans interact with the space around them. All humans are made in God's image and share the privilege of caring for his Earth. We were made to steward it as the gift it is . . . to all of us.

So, what does the Bible say about caring for God's creation? How can his word help deepen our love for him and for our fellow image bearers throughout his world, especially those living in poverty where the land is often either stripped, polluted or underutilised?

And if, as followers of Jesus, we know *'the Earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world and all who live in it'*, as Psalm 24:1 says, how can we live in a way that makes a difference to the environment and as stewards, reflects our love for God?

In other words, caring for God's Earth is as essential to Christians as prayer, services, justice, and worship. It's why many Baptist churches across Australia include this in their belief statements on their websites:

'The one triune God created the heavens and the earth and all that exists in them. He continues to care for and govern his creation, working out his sovereign purposes for all that he has made.'

Baptist World Aid Australia has a long history of supporting international programs that ensure environmental stewardship in vulnerable communities. We believe caring for God's creation is paramount to who we are.

No wonder the Communication Team at Baptist World Aid jumped at the opportunity to write this devotional. They initiated it and crafted these personal reflections out of their own experiences, prayer

and biblical study. Some came out of situations they were living through at the time they wrote them, while others came after years of thinking about certain passages and strolling through the bush or by the ocean.

From start to finish, they turned their love for God's creation and for scripture—as well as their concern for vulnerable communities—into a series of heartfelt reflections that they hope will inspire you in equally personal and insightful ways. They've even included original prayers and specific questions to help you dig deeper in your own reflection. Our prayer at Baptist World Aid

is that this devotional will deepen your love for the Triune God and his good creation. We hope it invites Christians everywhere to join him in caring well for the Earth, as a way to reflect our love for Jesus and for all our neighbours around the world.

Because wherever we live, whatever our calling, we proclaim together, *'The Lord loves righteousness and justice; the Earth is full of his unfailing love,'—Psalm 33:5.*

**'THE LORD LOVES
RIGHTEOUSNESS
AND JUSTICE;
THE EARTH IS
FULL OF HIS
UNFAILING LOVE,'**

—PSALM 33:5.

DAY ONE:

God And His Technicolour Creativity

By Jo Kadlecek



In the beginning, God created . . .! —Genesis 1:1

(Read slowly through the first two chapters of Genesis to watch how the Creator of the Universe formed the world we live in.)

In a 21st century world full of gadgets, endless entertainment and instant information, it's hard for us to imagine there was once a void. A formless and empty nothingness where the Earth now sits. It was a vacuum of lifelessness. No heavens, no Earth.

Until God began to create.

Equally challenging to consider is how absolute darkness once covered the entire surface of the Earth even while the Spirit of God hovered over waters.

But when God said, 'Let there be light,' it is *not* hard to imagine how that magnificent light, reflecting his glory and majesty and beauty, affected . . . everything.

The light of the Good News of Jesus, who was there at the beginning, still changes everything.

Genesis tells us that the Triune God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—also created land with loads of vegetation and fruit-bearing seeds, waters and rivers and astonishing creatures to fill them. He put boundaries in place and set stars, sun and moon to separate day from night. And after all that mastery, across the creation of the entire world we know as *the*

Lord's, he stepped back and saw that it was good.

God then went on to make human beings as his ultimate creation. From the dust of the Earth and the breath of his Spirit he gave all humans—women and men—the dignity of being made in his image, to be his, *Imago dei*, which is Latin for *made in God's image*.

He then charged his *image bearers* to take good care of his creation. To be fruitful and increase in number; to fill the Earth and subdue it. To rule over the creatures of the seas and the land and the sky. In his grace he provided food for everything that has the 'breath of life'.

In all of that beautiful order, God saw that it was good. He still does. Even as sin entered the world and both the Earth and human beings were stained with its brokenness, God continued to reflect his goodness to us in one another and in the mountains, oceans, cities and bush that surround us.

Throughout the story of his people, from Genesis to Revelation, God provides a way through the brokenness, reminding us of his vision for goodness and wholeness. Jesus embodied that vision. Every day he gives us an opportunity to care for that good Earth he's given so that our brothers and sisters around the globe might know his fullness of life.

Dig Deeper:

- 1 What new insights did you gain about God's creativity when reading through Genesis 1 and 2?
- 2 How can you care for another 'image bearer' today?
- 3 What specific aspect of creation really astounds you at how creative God is?



Prayer:

Lord God of the Universe, thank you for the gift of this amazing planet, in all its intricacies, designs and provision. Thank you for loving us so much that you held nothing back in creating the Earth for our needs and delight, and gave us your Son to bring us to you. In his name, Amen.

DAY TWO:

Connecting With God In Creation

By Matthew Smeal



'Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day,' —Genesis 3:8

'But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed,' —Luke 5:16

The idea of God strolling in the Garden of Eden is a beautiful thought. That the God of all creation would come down to Earth to spend time amongst his creation is captivating. But perhaps the idea shouldn't be too startling.

We know from Genesis 1:31 that once God had finished creating the earth, he 'saw all that he had made, and it was very good'. We also know that God created humankind in his own likeness and in that of the heavenly beings (Genesis 1:26). It should be no surprise then that the God of heaven and Earth would enjoy doing what we do: 'walking in the garden in the cool of the day'.

Going hand-in-hand with nature is solitude. Christians often use the term *quiet time*: it is a time to sit quietly, to read the Bible, to meditate, to reflect, to pray. The quiet time is a time to be still and quiet before God, a time to be alone—with him.

One of the best places to do that is in God's creation, in nature, surrounded by his majesty, and not by distractions.

Time alone in nature, communing with God, is an example that Jesus himself set. Just looking through Luke's Gospel, we see several examples:

- Luke 4:42 – 'At daybreak, Jesus went out to a solitary place.'
- Luke 5:16 – 'But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.'
- Luke 9:18 – 'Once when Jesus was praying in private . . .'
- Luke 21:37 – 'Each day Jesus was teaching at the temple, and each evening he went out to spend the night on the hill called the Mount of Olives . . .'

- Luke 22:41 – (having gone again to the Mount of Olives) 'He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them.'

Between those passages are times of great activity in Jesus' life. These include being tempted in the wilderness and being rejected in Nazareth, calling the first disciples and sending them out, calming a storm, healing the sick, teaching the crowds – and entering Jerusalem. He even went to a mountain with two disciples and joined two of God's prophets there. We know it as the Mount of Transfiguration.

In other words, we see a pattern in Jesus' life where he would engage, then withdraw; engage, then withdraw. Jesus' time in solitude, in nature, was his time to be with his Heavenly Father, to prepare, and to recharge.

The same is true for us.

Writer and theologian Henri Nouwen wrote, 'When we enter into solitude to be with God alone, we quickly discover how dependent we are.' Being dependent on God is a good thing. We all know that when we try to go it alone, we make a mess of things. Instead, Proverbs 3:5 tells us to 'Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding'.

Seeking God in the quiet places, in his creation and taking in the beauty of a sunset or the ocean colours, is a crucial part of our relationship with him. Surely that's what the psalmist meant when he wrote in Psalm 46:10 to, 'Be still and know that I am God'.

Dig Deeper:

- 1** Where do you like to spend time alone in creation?
- 2** How do you most sense God's presence?
- 3** When could you plan to spend time alone with God in his creation on a regular basis, whether walking in the bush, listening to the birds in a local park, or visiting some other favourite spot, where you could pray and reflect on the Maker of the Earth?



Prayer:

Dear Lord, thank you for the beautiful creation that you have given us. Thank you for your majesty that surrounds us. Lord, help us to care for your world, your gift to us, and help us to spend time within it, time where we can be with you. Amen.

DAY THREE:

When The Earth Feeds You

By Bethany Cliff



'For she had heard in the fields of Moab that the Lord had visited his people and given them food!—Ruth 1:6b

(Read through the book of Ruth for insight into God's plans of agricultural provision for the poor.)

As a young wife and mother, Naomi moved to Moab with her husband and their two sons. A harsh famine was spreading in their homeland, Judah. The heat and lack of rain turned the earth to dust. Food was scarce.

Later in Moab, Naomi's husband passed away, and then ten years on so did her two sons. The only family she had left were her two daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah, both Moabite women.

Naomi was weary and had no means of providing for her daughters-

in-law. Wanting the best for them she urged them to return to their families, praying that God would provide for them there. Meanwhile, she planned to return to Judah.

Obedying her mother-in-law, Orpah kissed Naomi farewell and returned home. But Ruth clung tight to Naomi declaring she would follow her wherever she goes. Together, they set off for Judah.

Since the very beginning, God has shown that he cares for those on the margins, people like Ruth and Naomi. He designed a 'food supply' system to ensure the poor would be nourished by the Earth.

In Leviticus we hear the Lord declare,

'When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest . . . you shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the Lord your God,' —Leviticus 19:9–10.

Nearing the end of their travels, Ruth and Naomi arrived at a field belonging to Boaz. Obeying the Lord's command, Boaz allowed Ruth to work and gather food for herself and Naomi. He offered her fresh water and protection from other workers.

In the same way Boaz nourished and protected Ruth, God has always been the provider through the way he created the Earth to produce food and water. And he sent his son Jesus to provide a way to him, to restore brokenness and to nourish us.

Baptist World Aid's model of community development often reflects the God-given practice of caring for the poor, like Boaz did. We partner with local Christian partners that offer opportunities, like farming training, to community groups so they too can work the land and be nourished. Like Boaz, our Christian partners are a witness of God's generosity, love and provision from the Earth.

Dig Deeper:

1 What new insights did you gain from reading through the book of Ruth?

2 Can you think of any modern-day examples of gleaning?

3 How can you create opportunities for the poor and marginalised in our society or abroad so they can have food that nourishes them?



Prayer:

Dear Lord God, thank you for your everlasting provision and restoration of all things. Thank you for laying the foundations of generosity. Help me to be like Boaz and generously share my abundance with others. In Jesus name, Amen.

DAY FOUR:

Then Sings My Soul

By Samara Linehan



'Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made,' —John 1:3.

There's something about being out in creation. I don't know if it's the deep lungfuls of fresh air, or the sound of the leaves rustling in the trees. It's simply good for my soul.

Or maybe it's more than that. Maybe it's that, for one precious moment in my week, I am able to revel in the good gifts that my spirit somehow remembers were created *for* me. I am returning to where it all began. And in that moment, my heart cries out in worship.

'Then sings my soul . . .'

This line from the beautiful old hymn, 'How Great Thou Art', reminds me that this reaction is nothing new. I am not the only one to have felt

this stirring. Nor is my response something that's unique to Christians alone.

You only need to consider the market value of water views, or the growing popularity of making a sea or tree change. People want homes by the water. They prioritise a quiet life where Aussie bush surrounds it. Perhaps it's the result of the human spirit yearning to return to where it was created to be in the beginning.

'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning,'—John 1:1–2.

Before time, he was. The Word. Jesus. Life. The light of all mankind.

He was with God in the beginning and, through him, the stars, the rolling thunder and *everything* was made. No wonder time spent in the gift of creation always draws us nearer to the one who created it for us to enjoy.

How great thou art!

In the six years I've been with Baptist World Aid, I've been fortunate enough to experience some incredible corners of God's Earth. Sheer clifftops in Nepal where my praise was the sound of silence. The fascinating and varied bird life of Uganda. Kenya's red earth. Some of our neighbours in otherwise vulnerable communities live amongst God's beauty, a gift of mercy to be sure.

The truth is, though, we don't have to travel to any of these places to be nearer to him. His creation is everywhere. He is everywhere. All we need do is open our front door, step outside, and enjoy this wonderful gift he has given to us—and to all of his people throughout the world.

Dig Deeper:

1 Consider this beautiful rendition of How Great Thou Art, released by Hillsong. May it inspire your soul to sing! www.youtube.com/watch?v=8wMN12KXZpE

2 Sit quietly outside for ten minutes. If it's raining, switch off the lights, put away your phone and sit by a window instead. What can you see? Close your eyes. What do you feel and hear? Give thanks to God for these precious gifts.

3 Gifts from loved ones are special and appreciated. We treat them with loving care. How are you caring for God's gift of creation?



Prayer:

Lord Jesus, through you, all things were made. Please help this truth change the way I see creation. Reveal to me your precious gift anew, each and every day. And may each new revelation remind me of how great you are! Amen.

DAY FIVE:

The Son At Creation's Beginning

By Meredith Benson



**'The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth . . . ;
— Colossians 1:15 -16**

(Take time to read and reflect on the first chapter of Colossians.)

One of the greatest questions people have asked throughout history—and still do—is who is this Jesus Christ?

In the book of Colossians, Paul is writing to address false teaching that could diminish the church's view of Jesus. But Paul makes sure his friends know the truth as he announces the supremacy of Jesus. He is the image of the invisible God. Jesus—fully man, fully God—is reconciling all things to himself and is making peace through his blood.

He is reuniting heaven and Earth through his body.

It's Gospel 101 really. Jesus, after all, was there in the beginning when God made the Earth. Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah the prophets of Israel pointed

to throughout the Old Testament. And his life, ministry, death and resurrection has ushered in a new kingdom, one of reconciliation and peace. Through him *all things* are being reconciled.

This view of Jesus drove Paul's mission and animates our lives too as we follow Jesus. We are living in the middle of the heaven and Earth reunification project.

Our view of Jesus will shape the way we live. It shapes how we treat people, how we care for those most vulnerable, and it shapes how we care for the created world.

This passage shows us Jesus as both the creator and the reason for creation. All things have been created through him and *for him*. The created world is in a constant state of worship, as the Psalmist says, 'The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands,' (Psalm 19:1). So, when we

care for the Earth, it's no wonder we find ourselves oriented toward worship.

But to use the Earth only for its resources is the result of a diminished view of Jesus. If we follow him, we'll see the earth as the expression of his supremacy and beauty. When we see Christ in all and above all, we can't help but love our neighbour as ourselves. This is worshipping the God who created them.

When we use the Earth and don't care for it, that also stems from a diminished view of ourselves and our purpose. But if we say we follow Jesus, we are invited into the reconciliation process—the reconciliation of heaven and Earth where we care well for all of creation.

At Baptist World Aid Australia, we see God at work daily in broken places. He is restoring and making things new because through him all things are being reconciled. And we know that Jesus has not saved us simply to be reconciled to him and enjoy eternity with him. We've been invited into his Kingdom here on Earth, to reflect the very character of our Lord.

As image bearers we are called to love and care for people as Jesus does. As image bearers, we are called to love and care for this beautiful creation that he made for us. And in caring for creation, we honour who God is and are compelled to worship the 'image of the invisible God!'

Dig Deeper:

- 1** Think about ways that you 'use' the earth. How could you shift into a posture of worship in those spaces specifically?
- 2** What changes when you view the created world as an expression of the nature of Jesus?
- 3** What does it mean to you that Jesus was at the beginning when God created the Earth?



Prayer:

We worship you, Jesus, as the beginning and the end, the one true God who is in all and above all. Teach us, Lord, to see ourselves in your creation, to understand your purpose for the created world and to join in the worship chorus creation sings every day, inviting others into your kingdom. Amen.

DAY SIX:

Convenience's Cost To Creation

By Matthew Smeal



'For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things and in him all things hold together,'—Colossians 1:16-17

'All things have been created through him and for him.' It is a profound sentence to ponder, to meditate on. So is the next verse: 'And in him all things hold together.' God has called us as Christ's followers to be stewards over the creation he holds together.

These verses help us understand the significance of what he has done and what he asks of us. Especially because convenience surrounds our modern life and can easily distract us from our responsibility as stewards. Such convenience has replaced quality and created a destructive, disposable way of life. It has become too easy to take, use and dispose, without knowing how something was made or where the waste ends up, nor the long-term impact of both.

Plastic, for instance—particularly single-use plastics like drinking straws, food containers, drinking cups and shopping bags—is the obvious and

topical convenience issue. Walking through any shopping area at lunch time, we see rubbish bins overflowing with cups, straws, lids, bags, containers, and packaging; used once and cast aside where they will end up in landfill or the ocean and, depending on the type of plastic, not break down for hundreds, and sometimes thousands of years. One lunch container from just one person's lunch, from just one shop, may still be in the environment several hundred years from now. Multiply that by millions—every single day.

The cheap 'fast fashion' clothes we consider 'value' come at an enormous cost both ethically and environmentally. So, too, our dependency on cars. So too our desire for instant warmth or cooling down—both are just the push of a button away.

What is quick, easy, and convenient, has an environmental impact we don't see. They are out of sight and therefore

out of mind. But if 'all things have been created through him and for him and hold together in him', what are our convenient lifestyles doing *to him* or *for him*? We need to bring our lifestyle choices into our vision and into our understanding of faith.

I've seen horrifying images of whales, birds and other marine animals that have choked to death on our discarded waste, or washed-up dead on a beach with stomachs full of undigested plastic. Our Great Barrier Reef is dying from rising sea temperatures – bleached coral, a skeletal reminder of what was once God's colourful creation. Vast areas of pristine forest are mown down for cheap furniture or to make room for more destructive monoculture farming or for cattle grazing to supply fast food restaurants. The Arctic ice cap is melting, millennia-old glaciers are falling into the sea and receding at an alarming rate. And the frequency and severity of storms and other weather-related events have increased.

If 'all things have been created through him and *for him*', how can we best honour Jesus in caring for these environmental issues?

Certainly, he does not want our thoughts centred on convenience or instant gratification. Rather, he invites us into his love and care so that we can care for others in how we live out our daily choices. As stewards of God's Earth, we are to set our thinking on what the cost is to his creation, everything in it, and all who live in it. Every day. How, for instance, might those in poverty benefit when we make better choices?

After all, all things have been created through him and for him. And only his mercy will hold all things together on this Earth—through us.

Dig Deeper:

- 1** What actions have you taken to care for God's creation and help others do the same?
- 2** Re-use and recycle are great steps toward stewardship. But what about 'refuse'? What if you considered not purchasing something because of its packaging or unethical farming, fishing, or manufacturing? Could you take that further and notify the company or shop that you will no longer purchase their product?
- 3** What choices could you act on to give back to God's world?

Prayer:

Dear Lord, forgive me for my selfish and thoughtless consumption of the gifts you've given me. Thank you for the amazing planet that you have provided for me. Please give me wisdom to make good decisions that will care for your creation and for our neighbours around the world. Amen.

DAY SEVEN:

Beauty Instead Of Ashes

By Samara Linehan

'I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth;'
—Genesis 9:13.



Last month, my dad passed away. He died on an *incredibly* beautiful day, the sun shining, a breeze through the trees.

As I said my final goodbyes, light and shadow danced with one another across the hospice walls. And as my family and I made our sad exit from the building, the weak winter sunlight warmed our skin, greeting us with its loving rays.

Although this might seem a silly or frivolous thought, I was so thankful that it happened that way.

It's been a tough season. But through it, I've come to learn what I believe is an important lesson:

Beauty plays an essential role in this broken world of ours.

In fact, all through my dad's battle with cancer, I found myself searching out moments of beauty. Longing to catch hold of them, fleeting though they might be. Perhaps that's why this last day—so drenched in loveliness—meant so much to me when he died.

Like a rainbow after the storm that resets humanity, its beauty felt something like a promise. A reminder that I have a loving Creator. Sunlight on our skin, like the certainty that joy will always come in the morning (Psalm 30:5).

But I suppose that shouldn't surprise me. I've seen beauty at work before.

I remember strolling through flourishing fields of green in the middle of bone-dry Kenya. An oasis in the middle of seemingly nonarable land. Food instead of hunger, plenty instead of poverty, beauty instead of ashes. That is the fullness of life as God intends, that we at Baptist World Aid view as our vision.

What a good and loving Creator we serve! He cares so much for us that he chose to give us beauty in the midst of ashes, new life that comes from death, hope in the form of a rainbow after a storm.

Dig Deeper:

1 Search for the beauty. Start a journal or create a list on your phone. Reflect on God's good gifts of beauty and give thanks.

2 When was the last time you witnessed a rainbow? Did it remind you (as it does God) of the covenant he made with the Earth? Or was it just another rainbow? Re-read the story of Noah and the flood (Genesis chapters 6–9).

3 Isaiah 61 describes the Messiah to come. After reading through the beauty of the passage how do you see the relationship between beauty and hope?



Prayer:

God, thank you for the moments of beauty (big and small) that you send my way. The sound of a bird's call, the smell of the ocean, rainbows—these are all precious reminders of your amazing love. Help me to watch faithfully for these good gifts, these moments of beauty in my everyday life, as you intend. Amen.

DAY EIGHT:

That 'Who Is Our Neighbour' Question

By Meredith Benson



**"Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?' The expert in the law replied, 'The one who had mercy on him.' Jesus told him, 'Go and do likewise.'"—Luke 10:36–37
(For context, read the full parable in Luke 10:25–37.)**

This famous parable challenges me every time I read it. As a kid it taught me that Jesus values kindness and generosity indiscriminately. But as an adult who seeks to do likewise in my life and community, I am floored by its message and drawn into a place of deep reflection about my definition of love and of neighbour.

While I hope to see myself in the Good Samaritan, if I'm honest, I'm more like the teacher of the law, hoping for a story to reassure me of my position in the kingdom. I love God, I love people. But when I ask Jesus, 'who is my neighbour?' I hear the lesson he's teaching in this parable. And it's not a comfortable one.

Because in our house, we recycle, we compost, we turn off the lights. And then we sleep comfortably in our warm beds, sheltered by a sturdy roof, kept safe by doors and fences. And I toss and turn

at the great imbalance that exists in the world. I'm conscious of it but I don't always know how to address it. And so I roll over, fall asleep and wrestle with the same issues the next day.

Then I reconsider the story of the Good Samaritan. This kind soul who stopped to help a stranger was considered an outsider. At this time, the teacher testing Jesus saw the Samaritan as anything but an equal, especially in 'religious terms'. The teacher saw himself as 'in'. And in theory, so did the Levite and the priest. The Samaritan, though, was firmly 'out'. The Samaritan was alien, he was not *one of them*. He was different in every way . . . in their narrow thinking.

And yet it's the Samaritan who Jesus says embodies the essence of God's kingdom. He is the inheritor of eternal life because he loved his neighbour—whom he didn't know, who was

probably different from him in every way—as himself.

So, when I find myself beside Jesus, asking, 'What can I do, Lord, to help the many vulnerable people overlooked on the road, the victims of so many crises in our world?' I come back to this parable.

Suddenly, he reminds me of someone I might consider an 'outsider', someone who is not necessarily a church-attending Christian. He points me to 'radical' advocates for justice, to scientists warning of the widespread destruction of our planet—the planet we were given as a gift. He shows me people addressing the impacts of the Earth's destruction on the world's poor. They are people who are not preaching the gospel but reflecting it in innovative ways, providing food for children living on trash heaps. Or teaching agricultural techniques to farmers whose land has been stripped. Or risking their lives to stop bush fires from spreading. And Jesus says—go and do likewise.

Sure, it wasn't the Levite or the priest who beat the man. They didn't do the damage, so maybe they felt free to walk past it. But in the Samaritan, Jesus presents the way of the Kingdom—mutual responsibility; sacrificial generosity; and willingness to get my hands dirty in the process of loving, and showing mercy, to those who need it most. Especially my neighbours across God's Earth most affected by the roads we walk down every day.

Dig Deeper:

- 1** As we think about caring for God's creation, what can the Good Samaritan teach us about who 'our neighbours' are?
- 2** How do you think caring for the Earth helps us love our neighbours in poverty?
- 3** What are some environmental ways you can daily show mercy to your neighbours?



Prayer:

Jesus, thank you for the gift of your teaching and for your gentle conviction that comes when we listen to you. Give us ears to hear what you would teach us through this parable today so that we may care for those hurt by the systems and consumption of the world. Amen.

DAY NINE:

The Creator's Character

By Bethany Cliff



'By wisdom the Lord laid the earth's foundations, by understanding he set the heavens in place; by his knowledge the watery depths were divided, and the clouds let drop the dew,' —Proverbs 3:19–20

As I think of the ocean, I hear the roaring of waves, feel the gentle breeze as it whips pieces of hair across my face, and taste the salty air with each breath. Waves are fun when I'm in the water, getting tossed and turned about or riding along on a boogie board. I've tried surfing but unfortunately, I lack the balance and coordination needed to stand up!

My favourite moments, though, are when the water is flat with only a small rise and fall. Up and down like gentle breath. The sunshine reaches down to the water and reflects thousands of tiny diamonds, speckled right across the surface. It's beautiful. And it makes my racing thoughts stop for a moment in time.

When I first read over Proverbs 3:19–20 I was struck in the same way, because of what it tells us about God's character. Through wisdom, understanding and knowledge our loving God created the world! Through his creation we can see reflections of his character, like the tiny diamonds reflected on water.

I'm someone who likes to know what a plan is and then stick to it. I like details and thinking things through over and over and over again (sometimes, too many times). God had a plan when creating the world, a perfect plan of how everything would fit together.

The same God that knows intricate details, like how many hairs are

on my head (Matthew 10:30) used knowledge, wisdom and understanding to create the world. It isn't just coincidence that trees create oxygen, plants provide nourishment and sunlight gives us important vitamins. God is wise and all knowing. And his plan is in the details.

The same God who crafted the beautiful glisten and shine of sunlight reflecting on water crafted a delicate ecosystem where everyone and everything within it has a role to play. There is beauty everywhere you look in creation.

And when I look at such beauty, I realise that God has given me—and all of us—a privilege and a responsibility to care for and tend to his creation and all we see in it (Genesis 2:15). I know I have a long way to go. Sometimes I choose the takeaway cup over a Keep Cup for convenience or I'll toss something in the wrong bin mindlessly. But I know that I am made in God's image, and I know I can look to him for guidance.

Because whether I'm at the beach or in a village in Cambodia, I can learn more of his character. The same wisdom and understanding he used to create this world are for the good of all people. And that includes those who may never have a chance to jump on a surfboard.

Dig Deeper:

1 Where in creation do you most see God's character, his understanding and wisdom, reflected?

2 How can you reflect God's character in your own life?

3 God's wisdom and understanding established the Earth. But he is also a God of justice. In what ways can you pursue his justice for those in vulnerable or unjust situations?



Prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for creating a beautiful and intricate world. Thank you for the peace and calm I feel by the ocean. And thank you for showing us your character through your creation. Help us to be more like you, to care for the earth and all who live in it with knowledge, wisdom and understanding. Amen.

DAY TEN:

Living Water From Dry Land

By Jo Kadlecek



“The poor and needy search for water, but there is none; their tongues are parched with thirst. But I the Lord will answer them; I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them. I will make rivers flow on barren heights, and springs within the valley. I will turn the desert into pools of water, and the parched ground into springs. I will put in the desert the cedar and the acacia, the myrtle and the olive. I will set junipers in the wasteland, the fir and the cypress together, so that people may see and know, may consider and understand, that the hand of the Lord has done this, that the Holy One of Israel has created it.”
—Isaiah 41:17-20

(Take a minute to re-read this passage slowly to consider its many truths about our Creator.)

I've always loved the book of Isaiah. So much of the prophet's words are poetic and charged with God's beauty and justice. Somehow Isaiah was always able to find that balance of challenging God's people to repent and yet to hope in his promises.

After all, Isaiah knew full well how God, the Creator of the Universe, had long provided for the people of Israel. Even so, they'd ignore his words, and

wandered in the wilderness until God again showed mercy. Each provision pointed to the ultimate provision of Jesus, the Messiah who would come to offer living water to all who are thirsty.

So this passage in particular reminds me of God's heart for the poor and needy. Still, I often feel unable to care directly for those around the world whose livelihoods have been shattered by a devastating flood. Like when I learnt of fires raging through a refugee camp in Bangladesh, I felt helpless. Broken. People who had already lost so much from the conflict

in their home country now once again were left to 'wander.' Without a country or a home.

Such images from the news can leave me crushed. The poor and needy in various parts of the globe now include so many thousands left hungry, thirsty and vulnerable, in large part because our 'first world' choices and conveniences have damaged the Earth. The ripple effect is real. What we do in our corner of the world affects families in Uganda, children in Nepal, refugees in Lebanon and garment workers in Bangladesh.

And yet Isaiah's promises reflect God's deep love for those who suffer injustice. Not only does he promise living water to parched tongues, he plants some of the greatest trees he's ever made in dry and dusty deserts! In other words, his care for the thirsty and hungry is extravagant. He provides springs of water, pines and olive trees and a full range of amazing trees to reflect the diversity and provision of his creation.

God's deep desire is for the poor to know the fullness of life he's intended since he walked in the Garden of Eden. He provides through people like you and me, so that the needs of those in poverty are addressed, providing great trees and springs of water! Because then, all may 'consider and understand together, that the hand of the Lord has done this. The Holy One of Israel has created it!'

Dig Deeper:

- 1** What part of Isaiah's passage most encourages you about God's promises to care for those who are poor?
- 2** How do you respond when you hear of global disasters and how can you join God in his response?
- 3** What other passages about God's creation and our stewardship response can you study in the Bible? Why not consider writing them here?



Prayer:

Oh Great God of the Universe, thank you that you stepped into this world you made, to bring us to yourself through your son Jesus. Thank you for the joys of your creation and all you want us to experience in your fullness of life. And thank you for the opportunities and responsibilities you've given us to join you as you care for the 'poor and needy' in providing living water. Amen.

AFTERWORD:

The Earth IS the Lord's!

Thank you for joining us in exploring some of what the Bible says about God our Creator and his creation. When we see creation as God's gift to us, we recognise our privilege to care for it as his stewards. And because of our mission at Baptist World Aid, we can focus on the gift of creation as it connects us to those living in poverty.

So if the earth *is* the Lord's—as we say we believe—then how can we better love God in caring for the Earth, especially as it affects our neighbours in vulnerable or polluted communities? What does love look like for you and your church community in this context of caring for God's creation?

How is caring for God's creation an extension of your faith journey, your love for Jesus and your neighbour?

We pray this devotional has helped you consider more of what these questions mean, so that you might continue to respond to God's call for us in stewarding the Earth. As we wrestle together, we hope you'll seek out other Biblical passages as well as other voices of wisdom and insights to guide you.

Resources:

Here are a few additional resources that we hope might be as helpful to you in your journey as it has been for us:

- 1 ARRCC – Christian climate action kit**
 - https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/arrcc/pages/110/attachments/original/1500261429/Christian_Climate_Action_kit_2017.pdf?1500261429
- 2 CAN DO and CAN Publications**
 - <https://www.unitingworld.org.au/projects/disaster-preparation-climate-change/>
 - <https://unitingworld.org.au/theologydisasterresilience/>
- 3 Common Grace**
 - https://www.commongrace.org.au/climate_justice_resources
- 4 A Just Cause**
 - <https://ajustcause.com.au/environment/>
- 5 Stewards of Eden**
 - <https://www.ivpress.com/stewards-of-eden>



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