

CREATION IS GOOD

THE GOODNESS OF GOD 2

Creation can teach us about the goodness of God.



T. M. MOORE

A REVISION STUDY FROM
THE FELLOWSHIP OF AILBE

Creation is Good
The Goodness of God 2
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The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Welcome to *Creation is Good*

At the end of the six days of creating the cosmos, God pronounced all things very good. The creation is good, and even though it is roundly affected by the sin of humankind, still, much of goodness remains.

We can learn about God's goodness by paying more careful attention to the creation. Since it is that – creation, not *nature* – we expect to see in it various indications of the goodness of God. God surrounds us with His goodness day by day, and creation can teach us what good works we must do to bring the goodness of God to light in the land of the living.

ReVision studies are designed as brief introductions to the subject under consideration. We hope they will enlarge your worldview, help you to become more firmly rooted in Scripture, equip you to minister to others, and stimulate you to want to learn more about the Word of God and the Biblical worldview.

We're happy to provide this study at no charge. If you find these studies helpful, we hope you'll consider sending a gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, to help us in making these resources available to others.

May the Lord bless your study of His Word.

T. M. Moore
Principal

1 Good, but Groaning

For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer. 1 Timothy 4.4

Goodness for granted

God is good, and we can learn about what *goodness* is, and thus how to pursue a good life, by looking to God as He reveals Himself in His Word. The Scriptures consistently show us the unity of the Persons in the Godhead, and the holiness, harmony, order, creativity, and love They enjoy and express. Since God is good, these attributes must also be good. This is how the Bible teaches us to think about God, goodness, and the good works and good life to which we aspire.

But God does not reveal Himself to us through the Bible alone. While this is the *primary* light within which we may see the Lord, and the *defining* light for all other revelation of God (Ps. 36.9), it is not the *only* source of revelation from which we can learn more about God and His goodness.

The creation around us is also a source of divine revelation. God makes Himself known, and reveals His glory, through the works of creation:

*The heavens declare the glory of God;
And the firmament shows His handiwork.
Day unto day utters speech,
And night unto night reveals knowledge.
There is no speech nor language
Where their voice is not heard.
Their line has gone out through all the earth,
And their words to the end of the world.* Psalm 19.1-4

So clear and convincing is this revelation of God in creation, that it is sufficient to instill in every human being an undeniable and irrepressible knowledge of God: “For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse...” (Rom. 1.20) Every person thus *knows* God, but most people do not *acknowledge* Him, saying to themselves instead, “God does not exist” or “God doesn’t matter to me” or “I can make my own gods and serve them as I wish” or even “I’m more qualified than God to be god for me.”

Imagine how difficult that must be for unbelieving people! Here they are, made in the image and likeness of God – His handiwork, stamped with His divine essence – and all day long the creation is revealing their Creator and calling them to acknowledge and seek Him. Yet so often and so fervently have they said to themselves, like Sportin’ Life in *Porgy and Bess*, “It ain’t necessarily so,” that they’ve convinced themselves it necessarily is *not* so, and they go about being little deities unto themselves.

The persistent creation

Yet the creation does not relent. Every creature in creation is good. The creation is sanctified and special because God created it and is in it, throughout it, under it, and over it all. His grandeur oozes forth and flashes out continuously and often unexpectedly (Hopkins), and can catch even the most hardened unbeliever off guard, so that he finds himself standing amazed in the presence of God. Artists and tourists and lovers of nature in every generation have understood the unrelenting goodness of creation.

As in the closing scene in the film, *Grand Canyon*, when several troubled people, whose ways and woes have been detailed throughout the film, and whose troubles and worries seem to have no solution, come together

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to stand on the lip of the Grand Canyon. There, before the grandeur and majesty of that magnificent work of God, their fears dissolve, their woes are lifted, their haggard faces flood with peace, and they stand bonded together in wonder and love.

Creation witnesses continuously to the goodness of God. And even though people “have trod, have trod” on the creation, smearing and blearing it with their self-interested, ravenous ways, still, “nature is never spent;/ There lives the dearest freshness deep down things...” which, upheld by the Word and Spirit of God, never fails to gleam and glisten with the glory and goodness of God:

And though the last lights off the black West went

Ob, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs —

Because the Holy Ghost over the bent

World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings. (Gerard Manley Hopkins, “God’s Grandeur”)

Groaning and waiting

Still, creation “groans” under the burden of sin which humankind’s rebellion against God has occasioned (Rom. 8.19-22). Its goodness is too often concealed from us. The glory which creation everywhere refracts is smeared and bleared, and the creation awaits the liberating work of the sons and daughters of God, that it might fulfill its role in making known the goodness and glory of God.

We can look to creation to learn more of the goodness of God, and to be instructed, in the light of Scripture, how to know, enjoy, and promulgate His goodness in the land of the living. Let’s take a closer look.

For reflection

1. Is it preferable to speak of the world and its creatures as *creation* rather than as *nature*? Explain.
2. Can you think of some ways the creation has impressed you with the goodness of God?
3. Paul says the groaning creation waits to be delivered “into the glorious liberty of the children of God” (Rom. 8.21). What does he mean? What obligation does this impose on us, with respect to the goodness and glory of God?

Next steps – Transformation: Start looking for evidence of the goodness of God in creation. Write down what you observe, and plan to meditate more deeply on your observations at some point.

2 The Unity of Creation

*“Can you bind the cluster of the Pleiades,
Or loose the belt of Orion?
Can you bring out Mazzaroth in its season?
Or can you guide the Great Bear with its cubs?
Do you know the ordinances of the heavens?
Can you set their dominion over the earth?”* Job 38.31-33

Everywhere the same

On clear winter nights, as I take our dogs out for the last time, I look upwards, a bit to the southeast, until I can discern the three stars that mark the belt of Orion, the Archer. As I study to discern all the stars outlining this constellation, I’m reminded of three things.

First is the scene from *Men in Black*, in which Zed insists that the “galaxy” cannot be on “Orion’s belt” because all that’s on Orion’s belt are stars. J can’t figure it out, but it will come to him soon enough that (a) Orion is a cat, and (b) his “belt” is what his alien master, fumbling with English, called his collar, and (c) not all galaxies have to be, well, galactic in size. Even *miniature* galaxies can be galaxies.

Fun, but not as important as the fact, second, that Orion has been known as such at least since the writing of the book of Job. The Greeks apparently first identified and named this constellation, and the Hebrew word for it is not Orion but **לִּישׁוֹן** (*chsil*), a word that is related to the idea of stupidity (Does this indicate what the Hebrews thought about Greek mythology?). What unites the two words into a single referent is the “belt” – the most readily identifiable indicator of the constellation Orion.

I muse on these observations, and, third, I marvel at the unity of the cosmos: How ancient Greeks and Hebrews made similar observations, but regarded them differently. How that cluster of stars remains unchanged to this day. How Orion could be such a familiar marker in the night sky that even pop culture could put it to good use in a comic story line. How we so easily take for granted the unity of time and the cosmos, the minds of people, and the continuity of past and present.

Then I hear the voice of the late Carl Sagan, saying, “The universe is everywhere the same.” By which he meant that the laws of physics are reliable and sure throughout the vast universe, creating a unity that holds the cosmos together, which, for those who inhabit it, is a very good thing. So true.

Except for one thing: There are no laws of physics uniting the cosmos.

The Word of His power

Jonathan Edwards reminds us that what secular scientists glibly refer to as the “laws of physics” are not actual laws, which must be as they are because of the unique characteristics of matter in its various forms. These “laws” are merely descriptions, like Orion and *chsil*, of what we may observe of the matter of the cosmos. They *determine* nothing, but *describe* much. Physicists explain that the cosmos holds together on the strength of four unifying forces – gravity, electro-magnetism, and the strong and weak force in the atom. These, in turn, spawn the “laws” that keep Orion’s stars in place relative to one another and the night sky, and the brains of humans working as they do from ancient times to the present.

“The laws of physics are everywhere the same,” Carl Sagan insisted, as a further explanation of his first dictum. It is a very good thing that the universe holds together, and that it is united by powers and forces that keep it from flying off in all directions, and us from falling off on our heads or disintegrating into nothingness.

But the power that holds the universe together, that power which is so very good, is a power over and above and throughout and yet different from and responsible for the “laws of physics.” As Jonathan Edwards correctly noted, “It is by the immediate influence of God upon things according to those constant methods which we call the laws of nature, that they are ever obedient to man’s will, or that he can use them at all” (*An Humble Attempt*). We can only do science, or make good use of the matter of the cosmos, because God continually and immediately upholds and unifies the cosmos by His Word of power, even our Lord Jesus Christ:

God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high... (Hebrews 1.1-3)

Thus the entire, unified cosmos serves the good purposes of God:

*Forever, O LORD,
Your word is settled in heaven.
Your faithfulness endures to all generations;
You established the earth, and it abides.
They continue this day according to Your ordinances,
For all are Your servants. Psalm 119.89-91*

Divine unity

Wherever we observe the unity of the cosmos, we see evidence of the divine unity, expressing God’s goodness into His creation. Unity is good, and the creation everywhere bristles with it. The ways of bees, ants, musk oxen, geese flying in a chevron, humans living together in communities, the movements of a classical concerto, the design of a building, the workings of far-flung corporate offices: Without unity in these and myriad of other creational forms, we would have chaos, confusion, disintegration, and disillusion. Nothing would work, and, in a short time, nothing would survive.

Unity is good, and the creation everywhere testifies of the unity within the divine Godhead and the importance of seeking unity in all we do. We can learn about the nature of unity and how to achieve and sustain it by studying the works of God in creation. This, after all, is what modern scientists do, even though they – unlike the founders of the scientific enterprise – refuse to acknowledge God as the ultimate force back of the unity and success of all scientific endeavor.

Let one star from Orion’s belt be missing of a clear evening, and I and everyone who watches such things, will become deeply troubled. Where unity is lacking – whether in our souls, marriages, business ventures, churches, communities, musical compositions, or the ecosystems of the world and the galaxies and constellations of the cosmos – we experience a kind of dissonance and disturbance that makes us want to restore unity, even if it means we must make some sacrifice on our part. Unity is good, because unity issues ultimately from God. As we grow to know and love God more, in His Word and His world, we will value unity as a form of good to be sought and maintained, even at great cost.

For reflection

1. Right where you are at the moment, how many different forms of unity in the creation can you observe. Are these good? Why?
2. Secular science looks to *chance* as the explanation for the unity of the cosmos. Why is that an irrational idea? Why is the writer of Hebrews’ explanation so much more valid?

3. What makes for unity? That is, how is unity achieved? What is necessary for unity to exist at all? Should we be more conscientious about working for unity in our lives? Explain.

Next steps – Demonstration: Can you identify any areas in your life where greater unity would bring good to everyone involved? What can you do to start working for such unity?

3 The Holiness of Creation

So when the Lord saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then He said, "Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground." Exodus 3.4, 5

The sacramental world

I have my own theory about God's instructing Moses to take off his shoes because the ground was holy. Commentators tend to see this as a sign of Moses' shedding his sinfulness before entering the presence of God, but I think there's more to it than this.

Everything about God's encounter with Moses in these early chapters of Exodus was designed to say to him, "I am with you. I am more powerful than anyone who might oppose you. I will do what I have promised. I will never fail you nor forsake you. And you will glorify Me." Moses needed to be fully assured of this, because he was about to walk back into the lions' den of Pharaoh's Egypt, from which he had fled for his life forty years earlier.

Moses would not have been able to undertake that mission without the full and complete assurance of God's presence and help. So, God appealed to Moses through all his senses, to convince him that His presence would go with him throughout this mission.

God appeared to Moses in a bush, not as a gleaming angel or in a vision, as with Jacob. Bushes are everywhere in that region of the world. Angels and visions, not so much, at least, not immediately to our eyes. Every bush Moses saw would remind him that God was with him. God burned with holy presence from within that bush, not because He was in the bush *then*, but because He wanted Moses to know He is *always* in the bushes. Moses *heard* the voice of God telling him to remove his shoes. And the reason God did this was to go "skin-on-skin" with Moses. God was in the bush, but God was also in the dirt beneath Moses' feet, as He explained, and He wanted Moses to see and hear His presence, and to feel it with his skin as well.

God is still in the creation, making Himself known, and inviting us to experience His presence with all aspects of our being. And because God is in the world, the world, though fallen and groaning, is *holy* – holy, because the holy God is in it. And the holiness of God which we may discern in the world is good.

A means in itself

The problem with almost every one of us is that we do not see the world as *holy*. With respect to creation, holy does not mean perfect; it means set aside for *divine* use. *We* see the world as *useful*, but primarily for how we can advantage ourselves. Alexander Schmemmann reminded us, "When we see the world as an end in itself, everything becomes itself a value and consequently loses all value, because only in God is found the meaning (value) of everything, and the world is meaningful only when it is a 'sacrament' of God's presence" (*For the Life of the World*).

Schmemmann insisted that the world is "the gift of God to man, the means of man's communion with God." What gift could God possibly give us that would not be, in some very real sense, holy?

The world is not an end to itself, but a sacramental gift – not a sacrament, but a *sacramental* gift – in which God displays Himself and His glory, so that the faint echoes of holiness, the background noise of God's image in our souls, are amplified through the goodness we discern in the works of creation.

The world for holy purposes

The world is holy because God made it, sustains it, and is in it, and has given it to us that we might liberate it

from its groaning through good works that glorify Him. When we regard the world as holy, we seek the good in it that expresses that holiness – its fecundity, beauty, generosity, whimsy, and, yes, utility. And that goodness teaches us how to use the gift of creation as God intends, for His glory and for the life of the world.

But we can only do this consistently through Jesus Christ. As Schmemmann explained, “There must be someone in this world...to stand in its center, and to discern, to see it again as full of divine riches, as the cup full of life and joy, as beauty and wisdom, and to thank God for it. This ‘someone’ is Christ, the new Adam who restores that ‘eucharistic life’ which I, the old Adam, have rejected and lost; who makes me again what I am, and restores the world to me. And if the Church is *in Christ*, its initial act is always this act of thanksgiving, of returning the world to God.”

As we observe and experience the holiness of the creation, seeing it with the mind of Christ, we will, first, give abundant thanks and praise to God for the witness He provides of Himself, then take up the work of redeeming creation, and pressing its holiness against the skin of our neighbors by the ways we use this holy and good gift.

But we must be often with Jesus if we are to perform this work of discerning the goodness of our holy God in the world and holding it out for others to know. Fr. Schmemmann was right to say, “It is only as we return from the light and the joy of Christ’s presence that we recover the world as a meaningful field of our Christian action, that we see the true reality of the world and thus discover what we must do.”

The true reality of the world is that it is holy, and being holy, it is good. And it is God’s holy and good gift to us, that the goodness of God may once again be seen in the land of the living.

For reflection

1. Is it a stretch to say that the world is holy? Explain. In what sense does its being holy make the world good?
2. Does it make a difference if we view the world as a holy gift of God, as opposed to say merely a bank of resources to use as we like? Explain.
3. What does it mean for you to press the holiness of the world “against the skin of [your] neighbors”?

Next steps – Transformation: How many different ways can you see the world around you as holy, that is, as refracting the presence of God to the world?

4 Harmony in Creation

*Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad;
Let the sea roar, and all its fullness;
Let the field be joyful, and all that is in it.
Then all the trees of the woods will rejoice before the LORD.* Psalm 96.11, 12

All nature sings

The Greek philosopher Pythagoras (570-500 BC) expressed the idea that the cosmos is filled with music, music so sublime as to be inaudible to the human ear. The “music of the spheres,” as he referred to it, captured what Pythagoras, that quintessential mathematician, and the discoverer of musical intervals, regarded as the harmony that exists everywhere throughout creation.

He was only echoing what the psalmist understood and celebrated as well.

Hymnist Maltbie Davenport Babcock (d. 1901) lay hold on Pythagoras’ idea to express the Biblical view that the creation everywhere refracts in glorious harmonies the divine presence and glory in his hymn, *This Is My Father’s World*:

*This is my Father’s world,
And to my listening ears
All nature sings, and round me rings
The music of the spheres.
This is my Father’s world:
I rest me in the thought
Of rocks and trees, of skies and seas;
His hand the wonders wrought.*

Biblical revelation, pagan philosophy, scientific observation, mathematical reflection, and simple common sense lead to the same conclusion: Harmony exists throughout the creation, and harmony is a good thing.

Ecosystems

The harmony of creation is perhaps most readily observable in the various ecosystems of the earth. An ecosystem is defined as “a biological community of interacting organisms and their physical environment” (*Oxford English Dictionary*). Ecosystems are many and varied, including deserts, coral reefs, the frozen tundra, and your nearest local pond or woods. In an ecosystem, the various life forms interact with one another and their natural environment, enhancing and contributing to one another to create a vibrant community, replete with beauty and flourishing with resources of various kinds.

That ecosystems are good and necessary has become common knowledge in our day, and many organizations exist to promote the care of ecosystems and their life forms. One important effort in the mode of Rev. Babcock is the work of Nate Simon and [Blue Heron Ministries](#) in Angola, Indiana.

Nate and his staff and teams of volunteers are dedicated to serving the Lord and their local communities by working to ensure that the various ecosystems in their area remain healthy and are able to thrive. They undertake various efforts throughout the year to clean-up the environment, conduct controlled burns to reduce pests and invasive species, catalog and inventory local flora and fauna, replant native flora, and educate themselves and their neighbors on properly appreciating and caring for the Lord’s creation. Blue Heron’s stated purpose is to “build communities where creation is kept and to keep creation so that community may be restored.”

In other words, to learn, observe, enjoy, and maintain the harmony God has built into His creation.

Bearing witness to God's harmony

Human beings are made in the image of God, and God exists in harmony within Himself. There is thus a notion or sense of harmony in the soul of every human being, and that notion of harmony resonates with the harmony of creation. The harmony in our souls is troubled when the harmony of creation is in jeopardy, and we are moved to take action to restore the harmony in creation and with it, the harmony in our souls.

Here in the Champlain Valley, Vermont, much concern is being expressed for the overall health of the ecosystems around and within Lake Champlain, or as the native Abenaki call it, Bitawbagok (“Lake in the Middle”). Everyone recognizes the importance of maintaining the harmony of all components of this system, and where damage or depletion is evident, various groups collaborate to redress the imbalance and restore the harmony inherent in Bitawbagok’s creation song.

Harmony exists when all the components of an ecosystem are mutually enhancing and edifying. Think of the yard or garden of your home. Here is an excellent opportunity for Christians to strike a chord of harmony in the human soul by making our yards and gardens as harmonious as we can, keeping our grass neatly trimmed, our bushes pruned, leaves raked, beds weeded, and gardens well-groomed. God assigned Adam and Eve the task of maintaining the good harmony of the garden in Eden, because He understood the importance of harmony for the health, not only of creation, but of the human soul.

By studying and understanding the way creation sings its harmonies of praise to God, we can participate in this aspect of goodness, exercising dominion wherever we can in God’s creation, so that the goodness of the Lord comes to light in the land of the living.

For reflection

1. How would you explain the idea of harmony? Is it something that you just know it when you see or hear it? Or can you be more specific?
2. How does the “green movement” of recent decades bear witness to the importance of maintaining the harmony of creation’s song? Is this something Christians should be concerned about as well?
3. What specific aspects of creation are part of your stewardship and calling from the Lord? How do you work to make these as harmonious as possible?

Next steps – Preparation: Take a hard look at your part of the creation – your yard or landscaping or even your neighborhood and community. Can you see any areas of disharmony? What can you do to bring more harmony to the creation?

5 Order in Creation

*He sends out His command to the earth;
His word runs very swiftly.
He gives snow like wool;
He scatters the frost like ashes;
He casts out His hail like morsels;
Who can stand before His cold?
He sends out His word and melts them;
He causes His wind to blow, and the waters flow.
He declares His word to Jacob,
His statutes and His judgments to Israel.
He has not dealt thus with any nation;
And as for His judgments, they have not known them.
Praise the LORD! Psalm 147.15-20*

The extraordinary ordinary

That creation is orderly is such a common understanding that we can easily take it for granted. The order of creation is on display continuously around us. Night follows day, spring precedes summer. The forests green from the ground up. The earth orbits the sun at the same rate, year after year. Low pressure brings rain, high pressure provides clear skies. Red sky in morning, sailor take warning. Mosquitos come out in the summer just about the time you'd like to go outside and enjoy a relaxing evening.

We take the orderliness of creation for granted, but this has not always been the case. At the beginning of the modern scientific enterprise, Christian thinkers, who understood that God is orderly, banked on His unchanging ways to investigate the order in creation, to discover what they might learn about it and Him, so as to make good use of God's works and praise Him accordingly.

The first natural philosophers – what we today refer to as scientists – were Christians, almost to a man. They studied the order of the cosmos, the circulation of blood, the variety and species of plants and animals, the workings of gravity, electricity, molecules, genes, and more. Banking on the unvarying orderliness of the creation, those early scientists resolved many of the mysteries underlying the order of the world, and laid the foundations for all modern scientific achievement.

There was nothing ordinary about the order in creation to the likes of Galileo, Newton, Linnaeus, and Ray. They knew that order is good, because the order in creation, which is a reflection of the order in the divine Trinity, can help us know the world and exercise stewardship in it for good.

John Ray

One of the most articulate observers of creation's order was the British naturalist John Ray (1627-1705), who was the foremost observer of creation in his day. He wrote papers and books on plant and animal life and established the foundations of plant taxonomy. His work remains today as a landmark and touchstone for scientific work in biology and botany.

In his book, *The Wisdom of God Manifested in the Works of Creation*, he explained many of the wonders of creation by which God blessed the world and glorified Himself. The purpose of this book, as Ray explained it, was “to run over all the visible Works of God in particular, and to trace the Footsteps of His Wisdom in the Composition, Order, Harmony, and Uses of every one of them...” He insisted that this effort would be useful, first, to help establish belief in God, and to promote pure worship of Him. He also believed that by surveying, describing, and classifying the various species of plant and animal life, he might make a

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contribution to silencing the growing voices of atheism, which were working at that time to redefine all knowledge without the need of God. Third, he hoped that his detailed observations and analyses would illustrate some of the principal attributes of God, “namely, his infinite Power and Wisdom.” He further believed that a better knowledge and appreciation of flora and fauna would help to promote “the Publick Good.” And he hoped “to stir up and increase in us the Affections and Habits of Admiration, Humility, and Gratitude” to God, Who is so wise, generous, and sure.

Ray argued, “There is no greater; at least no more palpable and convincing Argument of the Existence of a Deity, than the admirable Art and Wisdom that discovers itself in the Make and Constitution, the Order and Disposition, the Ends and Uses of all the Parts and Members of this stately Fabrick of Heaven and Earth.”

The order of creation is good, John Ray insisted, and the durability of his research and writing confirms that claim.

John Ray’s work of observing, recording, and explaining the order in creation laid a solid foundation for later developments in biological and botanical sciences. So important was Ray’s work, that at least three societies exist today to continue promoting his research and writings, and to carry on his love for creation and its order.

Order is good

The witness of creation is that order is good, and in our souls we know this implicitly. Everything about our lives depends on order: when we eat, how we work and conduct our relationships, how we dress our bodies, arrange food on a plate, schedule and fulfill meetings, mow our lawns, hang our clothes in the closet, arrange books on a shelf, attend to matters of personal hygiene, use an app, send a text message, and much, much more – all depend on order. And as we bring order to bear on our lives, in all aspects of our lives, we reflect the order we observe and learn in the creation around us, and together with it, refract the order of God, and enjoy and display His goodness.

For reflection

1. Why is it so easy to take the order in creation for granted? How can we keep from doing this, and why should we?
2. Meditate on Psalm 8.1, 2. How can the order in creation provide a convincing argument for the existence of God?
3. What would the world be like if order were optional in human life? How does the order we witness in creation helped to bring out the goodness of God in our lives?

Next steps – Preparation: Today, make note of all the different kinds of order you observe in the world around you. Give thanks to God for each one.

6 Creative Creation

*Bless the LORD, O my soul!
O LORD my God, You are very great:
You are clothed with honor and majesty,
Who cover Yourself with light as with a garment,
Who stretch out the heavens like a curtain.
He lays the beams of His upper chambers in the waters,
Who makes the clouds His chariot,
Who walks on the wings of the wind...* Psalm 104.1-3

So many greens

A few years back, Susie and I lived in rural West Virginia. From the front porch of our home, we had a view of Laurel Mountain, as it stretches north to south, east of Belington. During extended periods of solitude, I would sit on the front porch and watch the mountain, as the sun, clouds, and winds played against it creatively.

What I remember most about those mornings and afternoons of solitude and observing was the way Laurel Mountain changed colors with the movement of the sun. During the morning hours, when the sun was on the far side, shades of dark green would prevail, each new tone gradually unveiled by the morning mist as it retreated up the side of the mountain. By early in the afternoon, this palette had been replaced by various bright green tones, that shimmered as the breeze worked the trees, or faded to dark green and back under a passing cloud. Late in the afternoon, more subdued colors of green would come in, more like the true colors of the various trees, with the sunlight from behind me being reflected off them more directly in my direction. So many greens, I remember thinking.

But now we live in Vermont – *Ver-* as in *verde*, green; and *-mont* as in mountains. The greens of Vermont make the greens of Laurel Mountain look like distant runners-up in a greens beauty contest. Sometimes we have occasion to drive a few miles north to St. Albans, and I can never get over the seemingly infinite shades of green that deck the forest on either side of Highway 89. The Champlain Valley is like an ever-changing kaleidoscope of greens.

So many greens!

Whether we like it or not

Shift frames to another favorite pastime – watching The Weather Channel™. I'm fascinated by the way atmospheric components come together and move across the country to create the weather we experience each day. Jet streams, cold and warm fronts, high and low pressure, wind, and water vapor combine and cavort in endlessly creative ways. Sometimes during the summer months, our granddaughter Reagan and I will study the clouds overhead, to discover how many different objects or scenes the skies present. (I'm Charlie Brown to her Linus, believe me.)

The late Vance Havner, that wonderful southern evangelist, encouraged us not to fret about the weather, but to enjoy it, since we can't do anything about it. He would say, quoting from an anonymous poet, "Whether the weather be cold, or whether the weather be hot, whatever the weather we'll weather the weather, whether we like it or not."

The weather is creative. Enjoy it. The skies and clouds are creative. The breezes and trees are creative, as are rippling streams and gently-gliding rivers, the white caps on Lake Champlain, and the mouse-eared chickweed that faithfully returns to my yard every year, albeit not always in the same place.

Creation is Good

Creation is creative, mixing forms, colors, moods, temperatures, and things in infinitely diverse ways, to remind us that God Who controls the weather, sustains the creation, and gives us the ability to discern colors, is a creative and beauty-loving God. The creativity of creation is good, but we have to be willing to observe and contemplate it if we're going to appreciate the goodness it proffers.

Stimulus to creativity

Friends I know have come to enjoy the surprising creativity of creation that most of us take for granted. To be astonished to turn a corner and encounter a super moon, to be dazzled by a wildflower, left speechless by a frost-covered field, or reduced to reverence by a flock of vultures, soaring above a valley floor, is to encounter the creativity of creation in ways that resonate with the image of God in our souls. To shudder beneath a thunderstorm, marvel amid the silence of a snowfall, stand in hushed silence while the wind rushes through the trees, or wonder at the shimmering greens of hillside, is to be taken up into the creativity of creation and caught up in its witness to our creative God. No matter where we look, we can see beauty in ordinary things, and be overwhelmed by the infinite variety of ways creatures can cause us to wonder, laugh, shout, or pray.

The creativity of creation has stimulated artists, philosophers, poets, choreographers, composers, scientists, and ordinary folk like you and me to undertake exercises in creativity that have brought much good to the world. Every one of us has creative potential, the ability to combine things and ideas into new forms and operations, that bring meaning and delight to our lives. How dull the world would be if nothing ever changed, if no new forms or patterns ever came into being, or if every creature always acted exactly as we expected it would. By observing God's creativity in His creation, we are stirred in our minds and hearts to try new things, think new ways, and enjoy living and working creatively in all-too-familiar places, and to worship the God Who makes and keeps such a creative world.

The creativity of creation can encourage us to live humble, reverent, and creative lives, and thus to bring the creativity and goodness of God to light in the land of the living.

For reflection

1. Do you agree that creation is creative? Can you give an example that especially sticks with you?
2. How would you explain the idea of creativity? Why should Christians be encouraged to observe the creativity of creation?
3. How many different forms of creativity in creation can you observe out a window just now?

Next steps – Preparation: Creation is creative because, while in many ways it stays the same, it seems always to be changing, if only just a little. What can you observe of the creativity of creation today? How does that observation affect you for good?

7 Tokens of Love

“Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.” Acts 14.17

The Mourners

The tragedy of death does not escape the beasts. This morning, near the stream that flows this time of year, a neighbor’s cow the throes of death endured, succumbing to her fate while giving birth. Her calf, still wrapped within the birth sac, never drew first breath, but lay beside its wasted mother as the day broke clear and warm. To the onlooking crows’ chagrin, the farmer came, and with his back hoe laid the stricken mother and her still-born seed beneath the earth. No grieving, and no need for ceremony; no respects were paid.

This afternoon three somber mourners made their way to paw the ground where they were laid.¹

Do creatures love?

I’m sure I will never forget that tragedy as it unfolded one spring day in the meadow just south of our home in West Virginia. I relive it every time I see a bird feeding its frantic fledgling at one of our feeders, or watch a grass spider gathering up its egg sac and scurrying away from my hoe.

Do animals have emotions? Do they feel love? And if so, do other elements of creation feel love?

I’m not sure those are the right questions. What, after all, is love? The love that God embodies is self-denying, giving, and even sacrificial. God is not captive to emotions, so that He’s led around by feelings like we tend to be. His affections are always what they should be, and, as important, His actions are always in line with His affections.

I don’t know if a grass spider feels love for its unborn offspring, or if a mother bird finds that furious flapping and pleading amusing or lovable. But their actions speak of what love *does*, and if the only love we ever experience is what we *feel*, then we need to look to creation to show us what love looks like as it acts.

Witnesses to divine love

I’m convinced that at least certain of God’s creatures, other than humans, have feelings of all kinds, including feelings of love. But many aspects of creation bear witness to God’s love, and can thus teach us how to do good works of love for others.

I doubt that the people of Lycaonia ever thought about their annual harvest as a token of God’s love. Certainly they regarded it as good, but probably only in the sense that the grain they sowed, tended, and harvested each year meant they would have food on the table. That was good.

Paul saw the workings of creation in a different light. God, he told the Lycaonians, did *good* to them by so

¹ From *Fault Lines*. To order, [click here](#).

Creation is Good

managing the order, harmony, and creativity of the cosmos as to cause their grain to flourish and their pantries to bulge. And He did this, Paul knew, because He *loved* them.

The fields and rains obviously don't feel love. But they *express* love, *God's* love, and we can learn from these and many other components of creation what love *looks like* when it is being expressed. Love is patient, kind, generous, self-giving, consistent, determined, and more.

The creation affords many opportunities for us to study the workings of love, and to improve our ability to love the way God loves, and thus to fulfill our calling as His image-bearers.

Love and affection

But human beings, like many other creatures, can actually *feel* love, and, while *feeling* love is not essential to *loving* someone, it can be an important impetus to love, and can make our loving actions more enjoyable for us and effective in touching the people around us.

Those cows, pawing at that freshly-dug grave, were mourning. I'm convinced they loved their departed friend and her calf, and that somehow, in working out their grief, they were expressing their love.

The creation groans under the burden of sin. It is "bleared" and "smeared" (Hopkins) by the thoughtless ways humans scorn God's love, by taking His creation for granted or trampling it under foot. The unfailing beauty and fecundity of creation, despite its deep and pervasive groaning, bears witness to the God Whose love never fails, just as Jesus, groaning from the cross, declared and fulfilled the Father's love for lost sinners such as we.

We should groan and mourn with creation as it endures the consequences of our sins; but we should also learn from God's works in creation, what love looks like, and how, by loving like God does through creation, we can bring His goodness to light in the land of the living.

For reflection

1. Can you think of some ways creation teaches us about the love of God?
2. Do you agree that studying creation, or at least observing it more carefully, is a good way to learn about how to love? Explain.
3. What can you see of God's love in His works of creation immediately within your sight at this time?

Next steps – Transformation: Be alert to the opportunities for learning about God's love from the creation, and give Him thanks for each instance you observe.

Creation is Good

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. Why should we expect that creation can teach about the goodness of God?
2. What are some aspects of creation that speak to you about the goodness of God? Can you give some examples?
3. How can we make observing the creation for what it teaches about the goodness of God a more consistent part of our spiritual lives?
4. How can the goodness we see in creation help us to grow in love for God?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from this study? How are you putting that lesson to work in your life?

For prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Thank you.