

# together With all creatures

CARING FOR GOD'S LIVING EARTH



**together**  
**With all**  
**creatures**  
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A Report of the  
Commission on Theology and Church Relations  
The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod  
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Highlighting with red letters and a larger font are used for key ideas and for Scripture references in this document to help the reader follow the train of thought and to facilitate its use as a Bible study.

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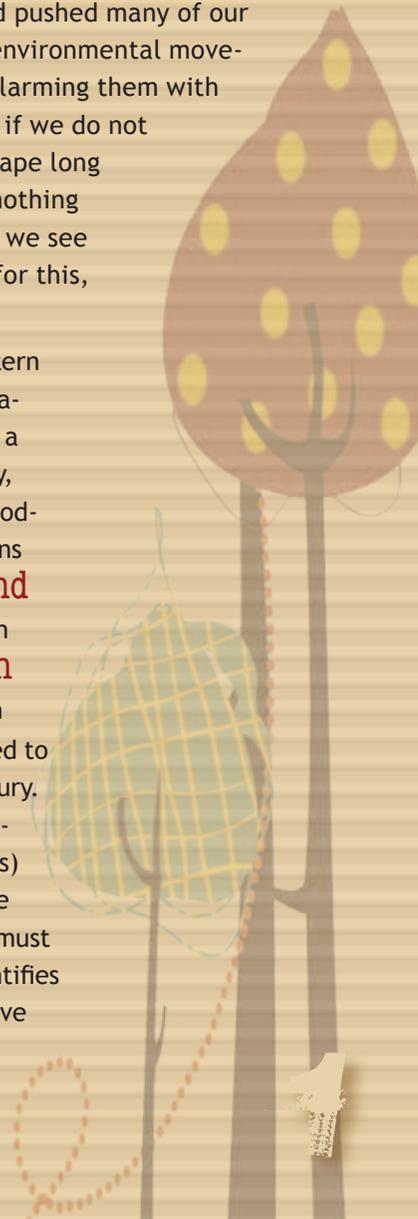
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# Together with All Creatures: Caring for God's Living Earth

In the last two centuries, we have acquired a mastery over the earth never before seen in human history. That mastery, fueled by the scientific and technological revolutions, has brought about dramatic improvements in human health and well-being but has also come with a heavy cost. The environmental movement has drawn attention to the way in which our domination has diminished the beauty of God's earth, damaged the health of its ecosystems, and pushed many of our fellow creatures to the brink of extinction. The environmental movement has also aroused people to take action by alarming them with doom and gloom scenarios that would take place if we do not act to avert them. But can the movement also shape long term attitudes and behavior? For that, we need nothing less than a fundamental reorientation in the way we see ourselves and our relationship to the earth. And for this, we need the Christian story.<sup>1</sup>

Two thousand years ago, Christianity gave western society a vision of the earth, rooted in the Old Testament, as a good creation brought into existence by a gracious God. In an age shaped by Greek philosophy, many considered the earth to be a prison and our bodies to be tombs. But in the Apostles' Creed Christians confessed that **God created the heavens and the earth (Gen 1:1)**. This Creator sent His Son into the world to become a human creature (**John 1:1, 14**) so that our bodies would be raised up on the last day (**1 Cor 15:51-57**). Christians need to reclaim the Creed's vision for the twenty-first century. Today we have come to see ourselves either as masters of the universe (given our technological powers) or as the worst thing ever to happen to the universe (given our ecological destructiveness). Instead we must articulate a view of human creatureliness that identifies where we fit within God's living earth and how to live generously with our fellow creatures.



# Where Do We Fit Within God's Living Earth?

*"God has made me together with all creatures . . ." — Martin Luther*

**t**he various ecological issues of our day raise more questions about *us* than about the environment. How do we see ourselves and our place within creation? The answer to that question will shape how we live on God's earth. For example, if we distinguish ourselves too sharply from creation we might seek to free ourselves from the constraints of the earth or to control it for purely self-centered purposes. If we identify ourselves too closely with the earth we might lose our distinctive identity to the point that we value nonhuman life above human life. The Christian story avoids these two alternatives by affirming **our common creatureliness as well as our distinctive creatureliness**. Within this story we confess that God has called us to care for His earth as creatures among fellow creatures.



# In the Company of Fellow Creatures

*“The whole creation, the entire cosmos,  
is on tiptoe with expectation for God’s glory  
to be revealed to his children.”*

— N. T. Wright’s paraphrase of Romans 8:21

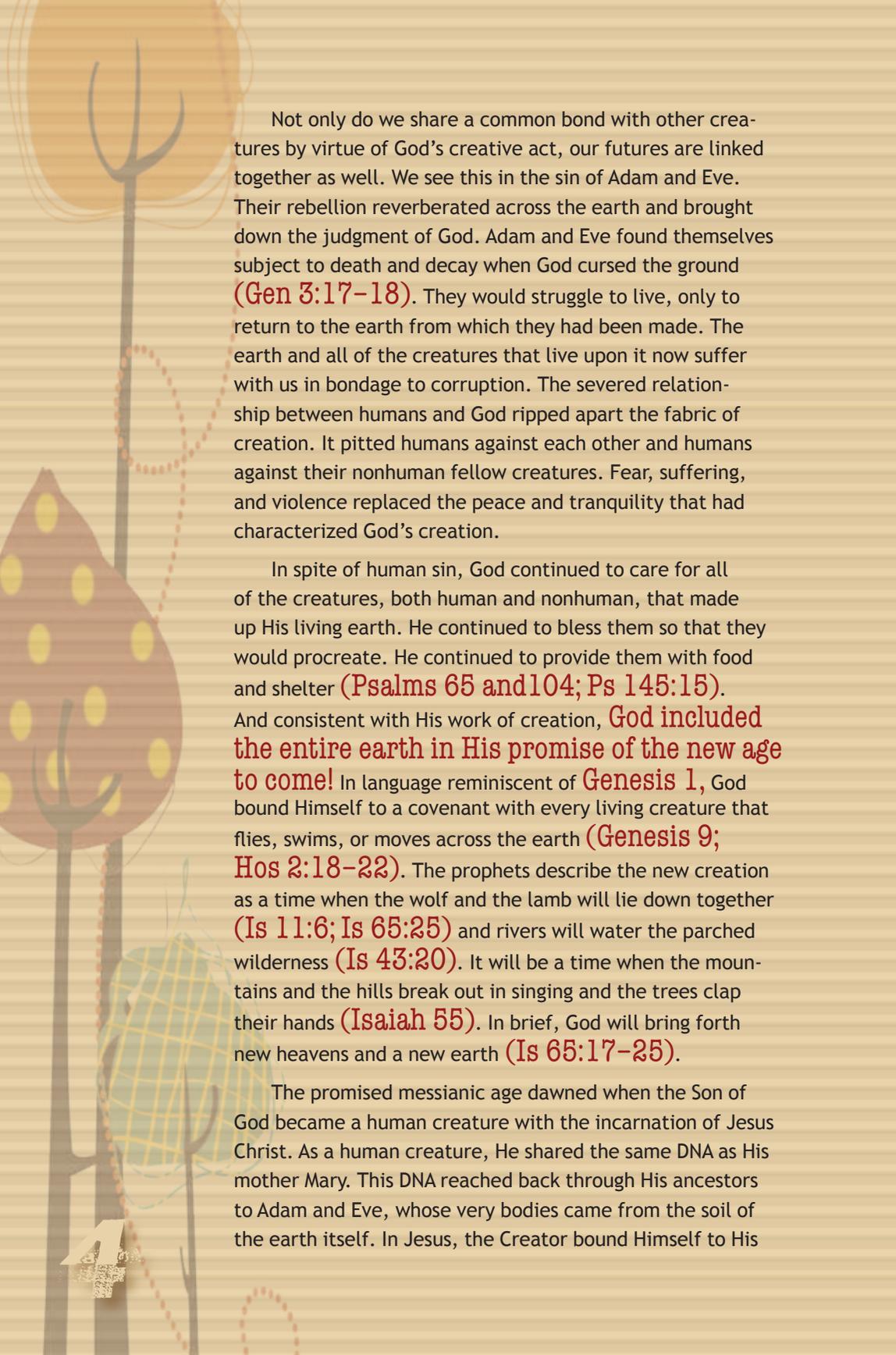
**T**he way we tell the Christian story says something about the way we see ourselves and our life on earth. Does that story include or exclude our fellow creatures of the earth? Are other creatures simply background scenery for our story or fellow participants in that story? So how do we tell the story? Does it go something like this?

God created us in His image, but Adam and Eve sinned and brought God’s judgment upon the whole human race. God then sent His Son Jesus to die for us so that when we die we will be with Jesus in heaven.

This is certainly true as far as it goes. But there is more to the story. The story continues and expands to include the resurrection of our bodies and the renewal of God’s entire creation.

When God created us, He formed us and our fellow creatures from the soil of the earth (**Gen 1:24; 2:7; 3:19; Job 10:9**). We are all made of the same “stuff,” as it were. **We share a bond with other creatures by way of the earth.** God provided all His creatures with food from the earth. We share a common table. God blessed all His creatures and so we share with our fellow creatures a common pattern of life. We mate, procreate, and raise our young. God gave all His creatures a place to live. We share the earth as a common home. God created all of His creatures for His delight and glory. He liked what He made and declared that it was all good. With our fellow creatures we praise God by living as the creatures God made us to be. While we do not think of birds, animals, and fish as our brothers and sisters, they are our fellow creatures and, in a certain sense, our neighbors.





Not only do we share a common bond with other creatures by virtue of God's creative act, our futures are linked together as well. We see this in the sin of Adam and Eve. Their rebellion reverberated across the earth and brought down the judgment of God. Adam and Eve found themselves subject to death and decay when God cursed the ground (**Gen 3:17-18**). They would struggle to live, only to return to the earth from which they had been made. The earth and all of the creatures that live upon it now suffer with us in bondage to corruption. The severed relationship between humans and God ripped apart the fabric of creation. It pitted humans against each other and humans against their nonhuman fellow creatures. Fear, suffering, and violence replaced the peace and tranquility that had characterized God's creation.

In spite of human sin, God continued to care for all of the creatures, both human and nonhuman, that made up His living earth. He continued to bless them so that they would procreate. He continued to provide them with food and shelter (**Psalms 65 and 104; Ps 145:15**). And consistent with His work of creation, **God included the entire earth in His promise of the new age to come!** In language reminiscent of **Genesis 1**, God bound Himself to a covenant with every living creature that flies, swims, or moves across the earth (**Genesis 9; Hos 2:18-22**). The prophets describe the new creation as a time when the wolf and the lamb will lie down together (**Is 11:6; Is 65:25**) and rivers will water the parched wilderness (**Is 43:20**). It will be a time when the mountains and the hills break out in singing and the trees clap their hands (**Isaiah 55**). In brief, God will bring forth new heavens and a new earth (**Is 65:17-25**).

The promised messianic age dawned when the Son of God became a human creature with the incarnation of Jesus Christ. As a human creature, He shared the same DNA as His mother Mary. This DNA reached back through His ancestors to Adam and Eve, whose very bodies came from the soil of the earth itself. In Jesus, the Creator bound Himself to His



creation in a most intimate way. He drank the water, breathed the air, and ate the food of the earth. When He embarked upon His messianic work, He went out to be "with the wild animals" (**Mark 1:13**) which did not harm Him during His forty days of fasting. The Messiah had come to restore His creation (**Is 43:20**). That work would center on those who had brought about its ruin—God's human creatures. Jesus fed, healed, and restored people in both body and soul. He died to reconcile them to God, and together with them reconciled all things to Himself (**Eph 1:10; Col 1:15–20**). **When He rose from the dead, He became the vanguard of the new creation.**

As the Lord of creation, Jesus Christ now works through the Holy Spirit to gather and renew His human community, to make them the children of God (**Rom 8:16**). God begins the renewal of creation at the point where its ruin began. **The rest of creation groans and sighs in the pains of childbirth as it eagerly longs for the day when the children of God will be glorified.** For at that time the earth and its creatures will also be released from their bondage to corruption. All of creation will then share in the glory of the children of God. In the meantime, we too groan inwardly as we await the redemption of our bodies (**Rom 8:19–23**). Until that day, we live in an age of ambiguity. We see all around us a beautiful yet

frustrated creation. Its beauty and goodness hint at the glory to come when creation is renewed. Yet we can hear its groaning in bondage to corruption as it longs to be freed in the age to come.

**When Christ returns He will raise up His human creatures from the dead and will renew His entire creation.** Just as Christ's resurrected and glorified body was the same body that He had assumed from His mother's womb, so Paul states that our resurrection bodies will be transformed and glorified (**Phil 3:21**). The same appears to happen with the wider creation as it is freed from its corruption, for "when humans are put right, creation will be put right."<sup>2</sup> The new creation will then come forth much as a butterfly from a chrysalis. Like Christ's body, it will be the same creation but transformed and glorified. The visions of the eschatological age described by Isaiah and the prophets will be brought to their full manifestation when the new Jerusalem comes down to the new earth. God will wipe away every tear and dwell with us here on the new earth (**Revelation 21**).





## Caring for God's Living Earth

*“The care of the earth is our most ancient and most worthy and, after all, our most pleasing responsibility.”—Wendell Berry*

So in light of Scripture’s story, in which God reclaims His creation in Jesus, how do we live within this groaning creation? On the one hand, the groaning of creation in bondage to corruption calls us to repentance, for on account of us the earth suffers under the curse and under human destructiveness. On the other hand, the groaning of creation in anticipation of its renewal calls us to embrace the goodness of creation and the goodness of our creatureliness. As new creatures raised with Christ, we have been set free from the need to possess the earth for our own selfish purposes. We are set free to recover our place within creation as those whom God created to live in a unique relationship with Him and with our fellow creatures.<sup>3</sup>

## God called us to care for His living earth.

He made us unique creatures among all of the creatures who share this earth. He made us in His image. God gave Adam and Eve a commission that was equally unique among all of His creatures (**Psalm 8**). He gave them the task of looking after His creation. **Genesis 1** describes this responsibility in terms of subduing the earth and exercising dominion over “the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (**Gen 1:28**). **Genesis 2** describes the responsibility in terms of tending or cultivating the earth and protecting or preserving the earth. We might summarize these four related tasks by saying that God gave man and woman the commission to care for His living earth. This calls upon us to make room on God’s earth and in our lives for all of His creatures, both human and nonhuman, so that they all may flourish (**Ps 72:16**).<sup>4</sup> What does this mean?

### First, God calls us to care for His creation.

Yes, God gave the earth to His human creatures (**Ps 115:16**). But He did not give it to us in such a way that He absented Himself from His creation or relinquished His ownership of it. The earth and every creature within it still belong to Him (**Dt 10:14; Ps 24:1; Ps 95:4–5, 7**), including every wild animal of the forest (**Ps 50:9–12**). Because this is His earth, it is a treasure to be cherished by us. In addition, God affirms it to be “good” or “very good” on six occasions. Scripture repeatedly declares that the earth is filled with and declares the glory of God (**Ps 72:19; Psalm 19**). We are responsible to God for the way we deal with the earth and treat His creatures so as not to diminish God’s delight in His creation or the glory of His work. “We must not use the world as though we created it ourselves.”<sup>5</sup> We do not have the right to do with it as we like.

Second, **God calls us to enter into His own work** of caring for and preserving the earth. God cares for it and He has committed himself to it. At the same time,

God has enlisted us to serve as the gloves on His hands as He tends to His creation. Our activity should reflect God’s own compassionate care for all creatures (**Ps 145:9; Ps 36:6**). Caring for the earth and our fellow creatures requires commitment and sustained effort. To restore impoverished farmland back to health or bring whooping cranes back from the brink of extinction may take decades. Such efforts require the sacrifice of time, energy, and resources. This is not to say that we place the lives of our nonhuman fellow creatures above the lives of humans. But it may mean that we choose to live in ways that promote the health of the earth or at the very least minimize the damage inflicted upon it.



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God has not only called us to care for His earth, but **He has called us to care for it as *creatures among fellow creatures***. We care for the earth not as “outsiders” but as “insiders.” God did not give this task of dominion to angels who are not made from the earth. He gave it to creatures who themselves came from the earth and are thus members of the entire community of life that comprises creation. If we forget this, dominion becomes domination. God gives us responsibility for the well-being of creation as those who live within creation.<sup>6</sup> Approaching our care of the earth and its inhabitants by respecting them as “fellow creatures” can alter the way we regard them and feel connected to them.<sup>7</sup> Francis Schaeffer, a strong advocate for the Christian faith, argues that we need to relate to other creatures both intellectually and psychologically.



Intellectually, “I can say, ‘Yes, the tree is a creature like myself.’” But psychologically, “I ought to feel” that “the tree has a real value in itself being a creature made by God.”<sup>8</sup> What does this mean?



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First, as creatures among fellow creatures, **we best care for creation by nurturing those webs of support that bind us together** with our fellow creatures as members of God’s living earth. This feature of human existence accords well with the central insight of ecology that nothing lives in isolation; everything is interconnected. On the one hand, we cannot care for each other apart from the nonhuman creation upon which we depend. For through the earth God provides us with “clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home.”<sup>9</sup> Through creation He provides us with inspiration for our art, literature, and music. On the other hand, our fellow nonhuman creatures cannot flourish apart from the spaces, habitats, water, and food upon which they depend. They cannot survive, much less thrive, apart from the deliberate choices that we make regarding our use or non-use of the earth.

Second, as creatures among fellow creatures, we best care for the earth **by bringing our thinking and acting into harmony with God's ordering of creation.** We do not *manage* the earth so much as work *with* the earth by cooperating with God's arrangement and ordering of His creation. This suggests that we need to "humble ourselves before nature's processes,"<sup>10</sup> and attend to the neighborhoods and particular places where we live alongside our fellow earth-born creatures **(Ex 23:10-11).** In the process, we must learn how this community of creatures can best live together in a groaning creation. As members of that community of creatures, we need to wrestle with the complex connections that exist between God's human and non-human creatures, between culture and nature, forest and orchard, prairie and field, between troublesome creatures and pleasant ones. "All neighbors are included."<sup>11</sup>

So how do we see ourselves? Where do we fit within creation? **We are neither separated from creation nor indistinguishable from creation.** We share a bond with God because we are made in His image. We share a bond with all the creatures of the earth because we are formed from the earth. These two features of our existence are brought to fulfillment in the new creation ushered in by Christ's resurrection. As Christians we now carry out God's commission to proclaim the Gospel **(Matt 28:19-20).** We also carry out His commission to care for creation **(Gen 1:28; Gen 2:15),** all the while longing for the renewal of creation at Christ's return.





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## How Do We Best Care for God's Living Earth?

*"Delight is the basis of right use."*— Joseph Sittler

**T**aking care of God's earth and our fellow creatures with whom we share it involves more than following a list of do's and don'ts. Such an approach can too easily become legalistic and develop into a new secular piety. One is then moved more by fear than joy. Instead, we need a fundamental orientation to God's creation that aligns us with His view of things. God liked what He had made. He took pleasure in it. It was very good (**Gen 1:31**). As His image-bearing co-workers, God invites us to delight in His good work as well. God's own pleasure in what He had made as good provides an avenue for our proper use and enjoyment of all created things. Delight brings us into accord and harmony with God's own view of His living earth.

# Delighting in the Bond We Share with Our Fellow Creatures

*“... life itself, which is membership in the living world,  
is already an abundance.”— Wendell Berry*

**m**any of us have lost touch with the land. We feel more at home surrounded by television screens, computers, and phones than we do in God’s creation. In order to delight in God’s earth as a treasured gift, we need to reconnect with it by rediscovering it and experiencing the wonder that comes from observing His handiwork (**Job 38–39; Psalm 8; Prov 6:4–8**). We have assistance in science and in field guides that help us develop an observant eye regarding the workings of creation. Nature writing and photography can help us experience its subtle beauty. Literature, poetry, and history can show us the interaction of creation and culture. Scripture and theology help open the eyes and ears of faith to hear the groaning of creation even as we see in it the promise of its renewal.<sup>12</sup>



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We begin our exploration with the discovery of our own creaturely bond to the earth. “God has made me . . . He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses.”<sup>13</sup>

**Our body joins us completely to the earth.** We inhale the air

that circulates around the earth. We drink the water that evaporates from oceans and falls to the earth as rain. We consume the energy of the sun that has been photosynthesized by plants. We ingest the minerals of the soil in the foods we eat. Take these away and we die. Our senses interact with the full range of phenomena in creation, thus connecting us more closely to the earth. By means of our senses we hear the howling of wolves in winter, smell the scent of lilacs in spring, feel a cool spring breeze on



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our face, taste the sweetness of watermelon on a hot day, and watch flocks of sand hill cranes coming in to roost for the night. We are attached to the earth not only physically, but also emotionally, psychologically, and even spiritually. Many of us find ourselves drawn to parks and beaches where our troubles drift away. Others of us are drawn to forests and mountains where we experience inner healing, spiritual refreshment, and even something of the presence of God. In some ways this should not surprise us. **God approaches us through His creation** not only to feed and shelter us, but to refresh and restore us, to humble and inspire us, and to elicit thanks and praise (**Psalm 148**). Yet even as we are drawn to God's world, we can find it a troubling and frightening place. For we



also encounter hurricanes and tornadoes, tsunamis and typhoons, earthquakes, and volcanoes. In all of this, we can hear creation groaning beneath the corruption to which it was subjected. So together with our fellow creatures we are “prisoners of the splendor and travail” of creation.<sup>14</sup>

As we expand our exploration outward we quickly discover that we are not alone. **We are members of a large community of creatures on the earth** that includes cranes and woodpeckers, snow leopards and tigers, whales and dolphins, prairie dogs and raccoons, and countless others. It is a world filled with a rich diversity of creatures. Genesis describes this eloquently. During the first three days of creation God carved out spaces for His creatures. He made room in the air, land, and water. During the next three days, He filled those spaces so that they are “teeming” with creatures of every kind. The Bible itself lists over a hundred different kinds of creatures (e.g., **Is 11:6-9; Job 39:19-27**). Scientists today estimate that between one million and ten million species of creatures live on earth. Many of them have yet to be discovered, and of those that have been named there is so much more to learn.

As we find ourselves members of a larger living world, **we also realize that we are emotionally connected to our fellow creatures.** There is something about the sight of other creatures that lifts our spirits (**Prov 30:18-19**). We find ourselves drawn to them and take pleasure in them. Again, this should not surprise us. God did not create us to live in a “mirror-lined box.”<sup>15</sup> He created us to live in the company of other creatures. God gave Adam the task of interacting with and naming his fellow creatures. Yet as we find ourselves drawn to those creatures we hear disharmony in creation. Some creatures pose a threat to human life and livelihood as predators, pests, and carriers of diseases. We in turn have responded by making less and less room for them on God’s earth and within our lives, thereby pushing some into extinction.

Finally, we can expand our discovery by exploring the wider ecology of the home that we share. Here we learn that not only has God created an amazing variety of different and beautiful creatures, **He has also given each a place and purpose within creation.** We might think of the earth as a home we share with many different roommates. In this home each creature has been given its own room in which to live out God's created purposes. Within the economy of the household each has its assigned chores. **Psalm 104** lyrically describes the ecology of our shared home. God has arranged everything to work harmoniously. Some animals come out by night to hunt for their food and the humans go in to sleep. Then the humans go out by day to farm and harvest and the animals go in to sleep (**Ps 104:20-23**). Each has its place. Each has its purpose. Each is cared for by God.

Of course, things did not turn out the way God intended. Violence and suffering, death and decay fill His earth. Yet God continues to create life



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in and through His earth and all its creatures. Despite the violence, pain, and suffering that are everywhere evident throughout creation, God has enabled His creatures to adjust and adapt and even to cooperate with each other for their mutual benefit. God's original word of blessing continues to nudge life into every nook and cranny of our world.<sup>16</sup> Today we see that the cycles of life in ecosystems work through death and decay. Death and decay return a creature to the ground and the organic material from which God which first created it. Out of that material God brings forth new life, despite the destructiveness and wastefulness of human activity.

# Living in Creaturely Humility

*“Learning to be creatures may be the most important work we have to do.” — Ellen Davis*

Once we have rediscovered our bond with God’s creation and embraced it as a delightful gift, we can begin to consider how best to care for His living earth. When we embrace our membership in God’s living world we can begin to learn how to live as creatures within a community of creatures. We need not rise above or seek to transcend our creatureliness to become like God. Nor do we need to seek ways by which we can possess and control creation. God is the Creator. We are His creatures. As such, we need to recognize that we are dependent upon God’s gifts and that life is best lived within the boundaries of our creatureliness as God designed it.

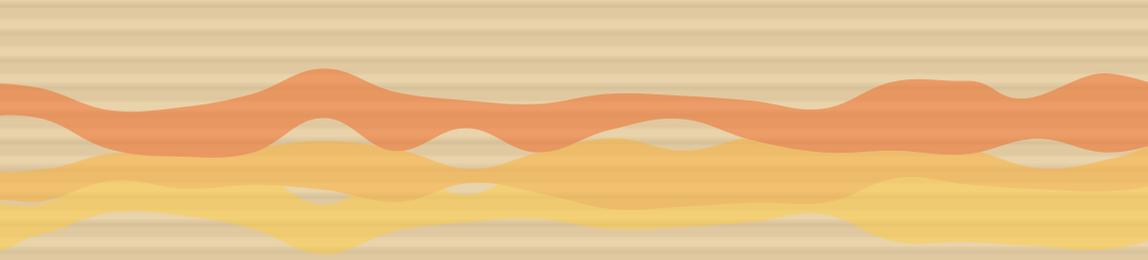
As creatures we are limited by our creaturely capacities and by the needs of the other creatures who call this earth their home. But as human creatures, God created us uniquely in that **He gave us the ability to make choices about the way we live on the earth with our fellow creatures.** Other creatures lack that capacity. They act out of necessity and instinct. But we can moderate our freedom out of respect for creation in the same way that family members voluntarily limit their freedom out of love for others. Unfortunately, when we seek to overcome the limits of our creatureliness we act in unrestrained ways. In so doing we repeat the original sin of Adam and Eve (**Genesis 3**). Limits and boundaries are not bad. God established those boundaries as something good in creation (**Job 38:8–11**). The Son of God embraced those boundaries when He became a human creature for us (**Luke 2:51–52**).

To live within our creaturely limits, then, means to **live responsibly with God’s gifts**—such as technology—which may help us to bear the burden of sin’s curse. But at times we need to ask, “Just because we *can* do something does it mean we *should*?” Our actions can exceed the boundaries of our vision and cause unintended long term damage for short term gains.

To act responsibly, we need to act in ways that do not exceed our vision.<sup>17</sup> The same applies to the way we consume, which can have as much of an impact upon our fellow creatures as anything we do. Do we take care of and repair what we have? Similarly, does it make sense to become a culture in which we value the disposable for the sake of convenience? What can more dishonor God's own work than to throw away what He has made? Ultimately, we need to ask, how much is enough? What constitutes a life well-lived?

God has not only given us the capacity to voluntarily restrain ourselves, He has also given us the capacity to **act kindly and generously in our treatment of the earth** so as to serve the well-being of all God's creatures. All creatures need food, water, habitat, and space. We are called to reflect God's own warm-hearted goodness toward creation as He cares for seemingly worthless sparrows (**Matt 10:29-31; Luke 12:6-7**) and unclean ravens (**Luke 12:24**). This involves living in "practical harmony" with the way God designed His creation to function.<sup>18</sup> It means becoming better acquainted with its processes and rhythms, and more astute in observing its needs and capacities.





To be sure, in this age there will never be a time when we do not cause some damage. But we can seek to limit that damage and patiently work to heal that damage as we await the final renewal of all things.

In order to work in harmony with God's earth we need to work with the distinctive features and needs of the land (Dt 20:19–20; Lev 19:9–10; Lev 23:10–11). Do we adapt ourselves to creation's rhythms by respecting rivers and flood plains or do we try to control and transform them? Do we exhaust water supplies in the dry southwest in order to have verdant lawns? In many ways, we interact most directly with creation through the act of eating. How we eat determines how our food is raised and how the earth is treated. God has allowed us to eat animals. But do we allow them to live their lives as God created them (Dt 5:14; Dt 22:4; Dt 25:4; Ex 23:5, 11–12; Prov 12:10)? How do we live with wild creatures? God made space on His earth for all of His creatures to live. Do we transgress those boundaries when we crowd them out until there is no longer any room for them to live or move along their ancient migration routes (Dt 22:6; Lev 25:7)?

Finally, we best take care of God's living earth when we do so to the glory of God. It would seem that **our work of caring for creation should be aimed at highlighting the beauty of God's own work.** After all, with our work we enter into His own work. G. K. Chesterton noted that His is a work that brings all things into existence out of nothing.<sup>19</sup> Our work involves taking God's created things and refashioning them into art, music, architecture, technology, and culture. But the things of creation that we refashion still belong to Him. Everything we do involves in some way a reworking of God's own creaturely works. Our work should be aimed at shedding light on God's own good work (like polishing granite or staining wood in order to bring out their hidden beauty). It should include producing things of both beauty and function that endure.

All that we do culminates in the sabbath restful delight. God finished His work on the seventh day, blessed the day, and sanctified it. Later, **Exodus 31:17** describes that day as a time when God rested and was "refreshed" or "inspired." We might say that God found delight in what

He had made. The Jewish rabbis thus said that God created the Sabbath as a day of shalom, delight, joy, tranquility, and harmony. This reflects the sense of walking by the “still waters” of **Psalm 23**. Our work should also culminate in restful delight in what God has made, as well as in what we have made from His work (**Ex 20:11**). Times of rest and refreshment provide opportunity to give “thanks and praise” for all that God has made. In that regard, God has given us the honor of leading creation in that praise much as a conductor leads a symphony orchestra. **All creation praises God by being what it is, His good creation.**

## Summary

**T**he Christian story provides a compelling—and much needed—vision for how we see our place and purpose within creation. God has called us to care for His earth as creatures among fellow creatures. Having made us new creatures and adopting us as His children in Jesus Christ, He has set us free to care once again for His creation as He first intended. But we care for a very different creation today. It is a creation that groans

under the curse imposed on account of human sin and beneath the weight of human abuse. It is a creation that longs for its complete renewal when we, God’s children, are revealed in glory. In the meantime the Gospel has set us free to embrace our human creatureliness, and with it, our care for all of our fellow creatures, both human and nonhuman. “Our faith should be at home with this earth, which after all is the realm of the new creation through Christ’s work of redemption.”<sup>20</sup>





## So Where Do We Begin?

In his explanation of the first article of the Apostles' Creed, Martin Luther leads us by the hand outward in a series of concentric circles, like ripples in a pond. He first helps us discover our own bodies as gifts from God. Then He leads us to discover the basic necessities of life, and finally the wider world. We might follow that same movement here as well. We begin with our bodies and their connection to the earth. Then we move to our homes. We expand our concern and action to church and community and from there out into the wider creation. Each of these widening circles will provide opportunities to reconnect with God's creation and to live as responsible creatures within creation.





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## 1. Our Body: Food and Drink.

- **Learn about the ways** in which our food is currently raised and produced. Few activities connect us to nature as does eating. How and what we eat affects our health and shapes the way food is produced.
- **Learn about the foods, fruits, and vegetables native to your area** and when different foods come into season by shopping at local farmers' markets.
- **Learn about the genetic engineering** of plants and what effect that might have on ecosystems, the diversity of flora and fauna, and on food.
- **Purchase and eat a diversity** of foods (grains, fruits, vegetables). These products will encourage the production of different varieties.
- **Consider purchasing some certified, organically raised** dairy products, eggs, cereals, fruit, and vegetables or range-fed beef, pork, and poultry.
- **Purchase shade-grown coffee** to help preserve the natural canopy of rain-forests for migratory birds.
- **When you eat, pause and reflect** on where your food came from and how long it took to grow. Give thanks.

## 2. House and Home.

- **Choose to live within or even below your means.** Distinguish between needs and wants. Ask yourself, “What constitutes a life well-lived?”
- **Replace** clothes, furniture, televisions, and computers, etc., only when they are worn out and beyond repair.
- **Purchase fewer** but higher quality items that last a lifetime, rather than things that need to be thrown away within months, only to end up in our landfills.
- **Choose energy efficient** appliances (refrigerators, ovens, washing machines, etc.) and home heating/air-conditioning systems.
- **Purchase products, whenever possible, from recycled materials.** Recycled milk jugs have been transformed into materials for decks, bird feeders, and other items.

- **Purchase recycled paper products**, such as towels, toilet paper, and writing paper to support the preservation of the boreal forests of the north.

- **Learn and be careful** about what you might unsuspectingly be putting into the water supply from pharmaceuticals, detergents, and lawn chemicals.

- **Take one trip** instead of several a week to the supermarket. Carpool to work, use public transportation, or when possible ride your bike to work or to run errands.



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### 3. Garden and Yard.

- **Learn how all the local organisms** (plants, insects, birds, animals) **interact** with each other and with the inorganic environment (soil, weather, seasons).
- **Learn how yard “waste” can be turned into compost** to improve the composition and nutrients of the soil and thus the health of your plants.
- **Learn how to fit in with nature** and patiently work with the conditions and schedules of nature rather than your own.
- **Grow varieties** of delicious heirloom vegetables and fruits that are not found in the supermarket.
- **Make room in your yard** for other creatures by planting native flowers, shrubs, and trees to provide shelter and food for migratory birds and butterflies.
- **Reduce or eliminate the use** of herbicides and pesticides on lawns and gardens as these affect the biotic life of your yard and the waterways into which they are washed.
- **Exercise caution** when buying invasive plants.

## 4. Church and School<sup>21</sup>

- **Design your worship and classroom spaces** to look out upon God's creation. Are the buildings cut off from creation or do they open up to it? Plant trees and shrubs and put up bird feeders.
- **Integrate elements of God's creation** in the interior design as Solomon did. Use live plants in the worship space and classrooms. Pattern designs from creation into the walls, pillars, and banners.
- **Incorporate creation themes** into prayers, hymns, and sermons in worship and chapel services, especially at the traditional times of planting, rogation tide, and harvest.<sup>22</sup>
- **Celebrate Earth day** during the Easter season in order to draw attention to the new creation ushered in by Christ's resurrection.
- **Plant a memorial garden** where people can plant trees or shrubs in honor of marriage, the birth of a child, or the death of a loved one.
- **Replace landscaping shrubs** with native shrubs and plants. How can one maximize the green space? Replace the grass and create a little garden sanctuary.
- **Plant a community garden.** Invite the neighborhood to participate in the planting and harvest. Take excess produce from the harvest to food pantries and homeless organizations.
- **Celebrate the harvest** with a meal/festival. In the Bible festivals and communities were built around the raising, preparation, and eating of foods.



- **Participate in local or community cleanups.** Participate in local park gatherings. Adopt a river or pond for cleanup.
- **Conduct an energy audit.** Become more energy efficient, recycle service folders, and avoid the use of Styrofoam.
- **Connect with the community** by cleaning the city's green spaces. Partner with other organizations in your area that work for the well-being of creation.
- **Include creation care** in mission programs here and overseas.



## 5. Neighborhood and Community.

- **Use all your senses** when you walk outside. Listen to birds singing, feel the wind on your face, smell the scents of the air, and feel the rise and fall of the ground.
- **Identify and learn the names** of the trees, plants, birds, and other animals that live in your area. Which are native? Which are invasive?
- **Learn about the natural and cultural history** of your community, state, and region.
- **Participate in citizen science projects** such as Feederwatch (Cornell Lab of Ornithology).
- **Seek out a local** garden club or wildlife conservation organization (e.g., Audubon Society).
- **Volunteer your time** at a local Humane Society or other pet and wildlife rescue groups within your area.
- **Explore** the kind of ecosystem in which your region resides: grasslands? wetlands? mountains? What is your watershed?
- **How has land use** where you live (agriculture, forestry, suburban development, etc.) disrupted or restored the area's ecosystems?
- **Listen to the “groaning” of creation** as you become more aware of the violence, suffering, and death found throughout the natural world.

## 6. The Whole of Creation

- **Learn about the needs**, habitats, and threats to various creatures around the country due to over-harvesting, invasive species, and habitat loss.
- **Learn about the rich diversity** of life on God's earth. It will teach you about different species, their lives, and the various habitats in which they live.
- **Think about the beauty** of nature in broader terms than the grand vistas of national parks. Think of it in the structure and functioning of ecosystems. You will then discover beauty even in grasslands, marshes, and swamps.
- **Learn about the threats** to our ecosystems from invasive species (e.g., the Purple Loosestrife, Kudzu, Zebra Mussel, Carp, etc.) ([www.invasivespeciesinfo.gov](http://www.invasivespeciesinfo.gov)).
- **Take a course** or read a textbook on environmental science or conservation biology. You will learn about ecosystems (forests, rivers, oceans) and ecosystem services (food, medicine, soil stabilization, flood mitigation, etc.).
- **Study** and learn about both sides of the climate change debate.
- **Become an advocate or supporter** for one particular species, bird, marine creature, land animal, tree, or plant.
- **Contribute** to the Humane Society of the United States or other organizations that offer protection to animals.
- **Purchase Migratory Bird Stamps** (Duck stamps). They provide a good way to support one our best kept secrets, namely, the National Wildlife Refuge System.
- **Identify and select a conservation organization** to support such as the Nature Conservancy, World Wildlife Fund, the American Bird Conservancy, etc. Check [CharityNavigator.org](http://CharityNavigator.org) to see how they spend their money.

## Conclusion

In the end, do what you can. No individual and no one congregation or school can single-handedly take on all the challenges facing us. Explore the possibilities and select a project or a cause that fits your interests and abilities. Then go for it! It may not seem like much. But as in baseball, the little things count. God has not called us to save the world. He has called us to tend our “little patch of earth” in accordance with the gifts and wisdom He has given us.



## (Endnotes)

- 1 Max Oelschlaeger contends, "There are no solutions for the systemic causes of ecocrisis, at least in democratic societies, apart from religious narrative." *Caring for Creation: An Ecumenical Approach to the Environmental Crisis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 5. Al Gore has acknowledged this as well in *Our Choice: A Plan to Solve the Climate Crisis* (Emmaeus, Pa.: Rodale Press, 2009), 305-10.
- 2 N. T. Wright, "Jesus is Coming—Plant a Tree!" in *The Green Bible* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2008), 1-75.
- 3 "Not only our relationship to God and ourselves is made new through justification by faith but at the same time our relationship with 'all creatures' is renewed." Oswald Bayer, "Justification as Basis and Boundary of Theology," *Lutheran Quarterly* 15 (2001): 274.
- 4 See Norman Wirzba, *The Paradise of God: Renewing Religion in an Ecological Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).
- 5 Wendell Berry, "The Gift of Good Land," in *The Art of the Commonplace: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*, ed. Norman Wirzba (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2002), 296.
- 6 Richard Bauckham, "Human Authority in Creation," in *God and the Crisis of Freedom: Biblical and Contemporary Perspectives* (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 174.
- 7 Francis A. Schaeffer and Udo Middelmann, *Pollution and the Death of Man* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1970), 53.
- 8 Schaeffer and Middelmann, 78.
- 9 Martin Luther, *The Small Catechism, Lutheran Service Book* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 322.
- 10 Norman Wirzba, *The Paradise of God: Renewing Religion in an Ecological Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 138.
- 11 Wendell Berry, *Sex, Economy, Freedom and Community: Eight Essays* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993), 15 (emphasis original).
- 12 Martin Luther points out that faith enables us to see creation as "our Bible in the fullest sense, this our house, home, field, garden and all things where God does not only preach by using his wonderful work, but also taps on our eyes, stirs up our senses, and enlightens our heart at the same time." Quoted in Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 111.
- 13 Luther, *The Small Catechism, LSB*, 322.
- 14 Elizabeth Coatsworth, ed., *The Best of Beston: A Selection from the Natural World of Henry Beston from Cape Cod to the St. Lawrence* (Boston: David Godine, 2000), 18.
- 15 David Midgley, ed., *The Essential Mary Midgley* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 377, cf. 374-75.
- 16 Coatsworth, 18.
- 17 Wendell Berry, "The Use of Energy," in *The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture* 3rd ed. (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1996), 83-84.
- 18 Wendell Berry, "A Practical Harmony," in *What Are People For?* (New York: North Point Press, 1990), 103-108.
- 19 G. K. Chesterton, *What's Wrong with the World* (Peru, Ill.: Sherwood, Sugden and Company, 1942), 35.
- 20 Joel Kurz, "A Few Words on Behalf of Creation," *The Cresset* (Easter I, 2007): 59.
- 21 See Edward R. Brown, *Our Father's House: Mobilizing the Church to Care for Creation* 2nd ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008).
- 22 Rogationtide (days of prayer) refers to those days just prior to the Ascension when the congregation would process through the fields around the church and pray that God would bless the fields and crops, send good weather and rain, and protect all from pestilence and disaster. See for example, one of Luther's rogationtide prayers in *Luther's Works, Devotional Writings I* vol. 42 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1969), 87-93.



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