



*A Week of Bible Explorations  
written by  
Allen Goddard*

## Introduction

Discipleship involves every area of living. In postmodern Africa Christians need to follow Jesus Christ in the face of so many challenges: greed and materialism, economic inequality and poverty, nationalism and ethnic conflict, women and children abuse, state and corporate corruption, the HIV/AIDS pandemic and the race by the super-powers for Africa's natural resources. The list is so long that environmental protection is sometimes forgotten. And yet the need for creation care is real. We have a growing awareness about destroyed habitats, polluted rivers, abused grasslands and wetlands, and careless mining activities that destroy ecologically sensitive places. But how do we respond in our discipleship? Does the Bible say anything to us about following Jesus, environmentally? In the following readings from Scripture we will discover that from beginning to end the Bible has a strong and clear message about creation and the centrality of creation care in the Christian life.

## **Sunday - We Believe in the Creator      Genesis 2:4-18**

This is the second creation story out of many creation stories in Scripture (Gen. 1-2:3, Prov. 8:22-31, Ps. 104, John 1:1-5). Like the others, this creation story has its own style of reporting the same event: the very beginning, when God created our world. The Genesis 2 creation story has a very different emphasis to the story in Genesis 1. God's first act in Genesis 1 is to create light, then sky, land and sea. In the Genesis 2 story God's first act is to prepare a beautiful and fertile garden before he makes any of the moving creatures (2:8). This garden in Genesis 2 is like the first three creation days in Genesis 1: God creating an environment that has beauty, complexity and biodiversity, the earth as he wanted it, our home (Ps. 95:4-7).

The creation of "man" and "woman" in Genesis 2 (2:7, 18, 21-22) is described differently to the sixth day of creation in Genesis 1 where God made "humankind" to represent and resemble him (1:26-27). Genesis 2 emphasizes that the man is part of creation itself, made of dust and Spirit, like every other creature on earth (2:19 cf. Ps.104:27-30). This reminds us about Day Six in Genesis 1, where God creates humankind with all other moving creatures and calls them all "very good" (1:31).

Today's story also describes humankind's rule (2:15) as mentioned in Genesis 1:28. How should we represent and resemble our Creator (1:26) as we rule creation? Tell him what you need to change today as his garden steward, to better care for this creation gift.

**Monday - God's Eternal Promise to Creation****Genesis 8:15–9:17**

Thank God before today's Bible reading for promises that he has kept to show you and your community his love.

Today's passage is the victory celebration of Noah and his family after the flood. Notice how God's voice, presence and actions in the story are the reasons for these festivities (8:15, 21, 9:1, 8, 12). Do you think all the creatures that came out of the ark (17) shared Noah's hope and joy at this moment (19-20 cf. Ps. 94:4-8)? Because of God's remorse about the suffering caused by the flood, he makes a decision about the future of the whole world, revealing his deep care for everything in creation (8:21-22 cf. John 3:16). Do you and your community share God's heart concern for his world, and particularly for the environment? What has shaped your environmental concerns? How do you think God feels about current events that negatively affect the environment on our continent today (See Hosea 4:1-3)?

The covenant promise God makes with Noah is also made between God and every creature that came out of the ark (9:10, 12, 15, 16) and between God and the whole earth (8:21, 9:11, 13, 17). This promise for salvation to everything in creation is explained in the New Testament by Paul in Romans 8:18-21. God also leaves a sign in creation to remind us about our past sin, and as a forecast the future fulfilment of his promise to creation (9:12). Praise God today for the hope that there is for everything in creation, to share in the joy of Christ's salvation (Is. 55:12-14, 65:17, 25, Col. 1:20).

**Tuesday - All Creatures of the King****Psalm 104**

Before today's reading remember one time in your life when you grew close to God because you were in nature. Thank God for how he spoke.

Today's Psalm is from Book Four of the Psalms (Psalms 96 – 104), which celebrates the LORD's kingship over everything in his world. Psalm 104 retells the creation story as a song of praise to the Creator King (1, 35). The action moves from Yahweh in heaven (1, 2), down to earth as Yahweh creates the world (2-5). The first nine verses describe the LORD building his own home in creation! Doesn't it amaze you that the God who is above and beyond creation, chooses to come and live in creation (Is. 66:1). The next section of the psalm tells how much God loves and provides for each and every creature which shares his home (10-23). If God nurtures creation so lovingly, how can we neglect or exploit nature?

Just like humankind, all creatures have a relationship of dependence on God (21, 24, 27), for food (28), and for energy and life (29). Birds, animals and humankind depend on the Holy Spirit, for each new day of life (29-30). The psalmist's biggest reason to praise is that he knows this earth and everything in it belongs to God (24 cf. Ps. 24:1). Take time to evaluate your attitude to creation today. Does your attitude acknowledge the King enthroned in heaven and over the earth? Ask the Lord of Creation to forgive and transform any sinful habits you may have regarding his creation (Heb 2:10-11).

## **Wednesday - A Whole New World**

## **Isaiah 35**

As you begin, think of a place in Africa that is being destroyed by industrial pollution, drought, flooding, social upheaval or war. Ask Jesus to help you see where his love may be at work in that situation.

The background of today's passage is the LORD destroying Edom's fresh water and fertile land (Isaiah 34) because the Edomites rebelled against the living God. The focus changes to the desert of Judea (35:1) which is transforming into a place more beautiful than Israel's most famous tourist destinations (2a). Why? Because the LORD places his own glory over the landscape for everyone to see (2b, cf. John 1:9,14). Do we and our church community see Jesus' glory in creation? If not, perhaps we need to pause and tell God the reasons why.

Isaiah then gives hope to the people as they prepare to be attacked by the Assyrian army (3-4). He prophesies that the LORD will not only rescue the poorest and weakest in the battle (5-6a), but will save and restore all the dried wetlands and ruined landscapes of Judea (6b-7). This is a foretaste of creation healed (65:17-25, Col.1:20). In the middle of this renewed and healed landscape there will be a walking path reserved for those who know and love the living God (8-9, cf. Is. 40:31). And the new creation will be God's dwelling place with the redeemed, forever (10 cf. John 14: 23, Rev.21:3-4). Thank God today that this prophecy has come true through Jesus (John 14:6) and that Jesus leads you along this new and living way in fellowship with God and the rest of creation (Luke 1:78-79).

## **Thursday - God with us, in Creation**

## **John1:1-14**

Think about how short your life is compared to the history of creation. Praise God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit today for God's life, which has no beginning or end.

Today's reading is John's introduction to the whole of the Fourth Gospel. Instead of telling the story of Jesus' birth, like Matthew or Luke, John takes us back in time, into the heart of God who is, Three and One (1:1 cf. Gen 1:2). John begins at a time in eternity, even before the act of creation (2). He shows us why it is impossible to talk about creation without talking about Jesus, and why it is impossible to talk about Jesus, without remembering creation (3). We also learn who it was who reflected the Creator's light and channelled life into creation (4-5).

After explaining the purpose of John the Baptist's ministry (6-9) John tells us one of the greatest mysteries about God and creation: Yahweh's ancient promise of salvation and healing for the whole of creation (Is. 9:6-7, Jer. 33:14-16) has come true in this man who is God (14a)! What a mystery! God adopts creatureliness and becomes a man in creation so that those who receive him might become the children of God (10-13)! Praise God for making his home with us through Jesus. And thank him for his promise to live with the redeemed in the new creation forever (Rev 21:5). Make time to recall everything you have learnt so far about God and creation this week. Take this new light you have received to live more responsibly in creation, for Christ's glory (14b cf. Ps. 119:105).

**Friday - Who is This?      Mark 4:35-41**

Be very still in God's presence today and prepare to hear his word in silence. Trust him to speak to you specifically.

Mark reports that Jesus was not frightened to hike into the wildest and most deserted places of Judea or Galilee (1:13, 35). The ease with which Jesus enjoys time in wild places is something Mark highlights (1:16, 2:13, 3:13 etc.) If we follow Jesus but feel uncomfortable about being together or alone in the wilderness, is there perhaps a part of Jesus we do not understand very well?

To really grasp today's reading it needs to be visualised with all our imagination, or even acted out. What sights and sounds create all the terror of the storm? Picture Jesus, fast asleep! The one who created the seas, now tempest tossed, is not awake! As the scene unfolds, how do you feel? Do you doubt if Jesus is truly sleeping? Think about his schedule before they climbed into the boat (4:1-34). Imagine the terrified sailors waking him? How do their voices sound in the chaos? How do Jesus' words sound? And the sudden silence? Make the disciples' question your question today (41). Who is this man who fears no lightning, thunder or rain, and silences a tempest? Do you really know this Christ who is completely at ease and in control of his creation (Col 1: 16-17)? Where is Jesus inviting you to go in creation to learn to follow him, environmentally speaking (35)? Will you follow him into a desert, forest or wetland wilderness trusting him to reveal himself as you obey?

**Saturday - The Garden City      Revelation 21:1-2:4**

Spend time identifying hopes and fears that you have about your future. Thank God for Jesus' imminent return.

Today's passage needs to be heard, and not just read silently. Enter this revelation like John, with all your senses. Sound the words. Hear the voices of the different speakers. There are also many other sounds to listen for, and sights, sensations and tastes to experience. See if you can see, hear, feel and taste them all. Enjoy the mystery and wonder of the new heaven and new earth with its garden city that God says is also the bride of Christ (2, 9).

The arrival of the new creation involves the passing away of some created things (21:1, 22-23) and the destruction of evil, suffering, sorrow, pain and death (21:4, 8, 27). God's new creation also involves him creating newness out of the old creation (21:5) At the same time the new creation keeps some of the most beautiful things in the Genesis creation exactly as they always were: light, flowering and fruiting trees, seasons, water, precious metals, and even the most valuable treasures of the nations (1:24,26). God, the creator and sustainer of the Genesis creation (Acts 17:24-27) and Jesus who was once made a part of creation (Phil.2:7) create and sustain this whole new world (21:22, 22:3) which we have seen is somehow part of the church (21:9-10 cf. Eph.2:19-22). Right now this mystery is unfolding (2 Cor. 5:17). Today, follow the Lamb who offers real hope that our polluted and degraded world will be renewed. Live into God's new creation (Luke 11:3)!

*Allen Goddard, the Founding Director of A Rocha South Africa, now co-ordinates its theology and citizenship programmes. He lives in Pietermaritzburg with his wife Joyann and their two sons.*