

## Day 1

The LORD God took the human and put it in the garden of Eden to [till and keep] it (Gen 2:15).

To understand the relationship God intends for us to have with the rest of creation, it might help to reflect on the creation story itself. The original audience for the Hebrew text would have understood the value of Eden as a garden, as a shady natural retreat from their hot and dirty urban lives. Eden was not only a place free from the toil of labor, it was a place where humans could interact and delight directly in God's creation.

Pope Francis, in *Laudato Si*, recognizes the nuance of the Hebrew phrase translated in the NRSV above as “till and keep.” He explicates the mutual relationship between humans and nature that this phrase entails: allowing people to use the land for sustenance but also to guard it, protect it, and care for it as stewards. God intends for us to use creation for our needs—but not beyond our needs. Being in the world entails a responsibility to it.

Today, reflect on what a mutual relationship between nature and yourself might look like. Are there ways that you could treat creation more compassionately?

## Day 2

God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth” (Gen. 1:29-28).

The Genesis creation account also tells us that all humans are made in God's image and that he grants them dominion over "every living thing that moves upon the earth." Sometimes, Christians interpret this verse as God giving them unparalleled rule over the earth. They argue that this rule allows them to use as many resources as they desire, to take what they want, to pollute as they see fit.

But this doesn't sound anything like God's intended relationship for man and creation. Religious scholar Paul Maltby notes that the Hebrew concept of "hav[ing] dominion" is equivalent to a more medieval concept of lordship. That is, our rule over the earth creates a kind of contract. When God gave us this power, it came with contractual duties and obligations. We must constantly strive to fulfill our duties to preside over, protect, and care for the land, using it as fits our needs.

Today, reflect on how you can better approach your duties as a steward of creation. Are there ways in which you irresponsibly use what God has given?

### Day 3

For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, provided it is received with thanksgiving (1 Tim. 4:4).

When God looks over his work in Genesis, it is repeatedly mentioned that he "saw that it was good." Creation, as a whole, is described as "exceedingly good." God's handiwork as evidenced by the natural world is designed to express goodness, and we are enjoined to receive this goodness with gratitude.

So what does gratitude look like when we reflect on the natural world? Perhaps, since God's work is already inherently good, gratitude could simply be allowing nature to unfold undistributed. By nature simply doing what it was intended to do, it reflects God's goodness and design. Thomas Merton writes of how "the leaf has its own texture and its own pattern of veins and its own holy shape, and the bass and trout hiding in the deep pools of the river are canonized by their beauty...nothing else in the world ever did or will imitate God in quite the same way...that is their sanctity."

Today, reflect on how nature expresses God's design simply by being itself. What are some things that you find miraculous in nature? Why is it important that those things are protected?

#### Day 4

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." There is no commandment greater than these (Mark 12:30-31).

Jesus directly tells his followers the commandments that he considers the greatest. They boil down to loving God fully—with every aspect of one's being—and the great exhortation to love others as we love ourselves. We've seen how nature, by simply acting in accordance with God's intention, expresses the goodness of God. We can too, if we act as God intends.

These verses are exhortations to love. They tell us to love everything. Not only are we to love God, we are to love him with all we have to offer. Loving God in this way means loving his works, caring for them in the way he intended. And, of course, we are to love one another. As Thomas Merton realized,

God's design and intention for humans is to love, to love unconditionally and unrestricted each other, God, and his creation. By enacting this Christ-like love, we evidence the goodness of God's design.

Today, reflect on the kind of love Christ intends us to have for God and one another. How is it different to love with your "heart, soul, mind, and strength"? Which of these comes most naturally, what is most difficult, and what—to you—does each look like?

### Day 5

He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and a servant of all" (Mark 9:35).

God's instructions and commandments never promote a life of ease, of relaxation, or of leisure. God continually calls believers to active labor and care. His blessings come with responsibilities, as we've seen with the contract created between the first people and the land.

The current age provides us with the unique opportunity to act out these instructions. As COVID-19 showed us, we can not separate ourselves from the global community. In this world, where we are connected with all, we can be servants of all too.

The natural world is something that everyone relies on for survival. When we act in ways that use up more resources than we need, we are taking them from someone else. When we pollute our waterways, they poison the world's oceans—from which humanity eats. Christ's instruction to his followers to

serve “all” can easily be read in the context of caring for the environment with an eye towards saving its use for others.

Today, reflect on what Christian service looks like to you. What acts of service have people done for you? What can you do for others? What can you do for people you’ve never even met?

### Day 6

[He] alone does great wonders, for his steadfast love endures forever (Pslm. 136:4).

The ways in which we depend on the natural world are, in some ways, quite obvious. We must have clean land to grow food, clean waters to drink from, and clean air to breathe. But, creation can be used as a spiritual resource as well. It is something laden with wonder, with beauty, with a craftsmanship unrecognizable in anything created by humans. Preserving the beauty of creation allows us to conserve humanity’s greatest spiritual resource.

Think of the peace that can be felt in the calm and quiet of nature. Natural spaces, then as in the ancient world, offer us relief, places of quiet in a noisy world—spaces not only to view God’s “great wonders” but to experience them. It shouldn’t be surprising that one of history’s most famous conversions happens in a garden, as St. Augustine reads in its “silence” underneath “a fig tree,” experiencing a “light of full certainty” in his spiritual alcove.

Today, reflect on how the natural world can be used as a spiritual resource. What moments of wonder have you had in nature? Have they reminded you of God?

## Day 7

Throughout history, poets have looked into nature and found beauty, tranquility, and wonder in creation. Look, for example, at the similarities between Psalm 104 and a Hopkins sonnet:

<p>The trees of the Lord are watered abundantly, the cedars of Lebanon that he planted. 17 In them the birds build their nests; the stork has its home in the fir trees. 18 The high mountains are for the wild goats; the rocks are a refuge for the coneys. 19 You have made the moon to mark the seasons; the sun knows its time for setting. 20 You make darkness, and it is night, when all the animals of the forest come creeping out. 21 The young lions roar for their prey, seeking their food from God. 22 When the sun rises, they withdraw and lie down in their dens. 23 People go out to their work and to their labor until the evening.</p> <p>24 O Lord, how manifold are your works!</p>	<p>Glory be to God for dappled things – For skies of couple-colour as a brindled cow; For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim; Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings; Landscape plotted and pieced – fold, fallow, and plough; And áll trádes, their gear and tackle and trim.</p> <p>All things counter, original, spare, strange; Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?) With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim; He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change: Praise him.</p>
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Today, reflect on what it is both of these poets found in nature, and could they have found it elsewhere? The Hopkins sonnet is well known for the seeming mundanity of things (cows, trout, and plowed landscapes) in which the author still finds reason to “praise him.” What mundane things do you overlook that are nevertheless wonderful?

## Day 8

‘To love one’s neighbor as oneself,’—this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices. When Jesus saw that he answered wisely he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God” (Mark 12:33b-34a).

In Mark, much of Jesus’ sayings and teachings revolve around the idea of “the kingdom of God.” He tells his followers that this kingdom is at hand, but he also exhorts people strongly to enter into it. Biblical scholars, like Bruce Metzger, have suggested these seemingly contradictory actions suggest that the kingdom of God is both a coming age—where God’s rule over humanity will be restored—and a way of life.

This way of life that Jesus exhorts his followers to is righteousness, actions that justify believers before God. Theologian Laura Yordy approaches Jesus’ teachings about the kingdom of God from an ecological perspective. She argues that the kingdom of God, the righteous way of life Jesus refers to, means treating God’s creation the way that God would. That is, treating it the way he did originally and, to Jesus, is going to do so when he returns.

Today, reflect on the kingdom of God Jesus refers to in this verse. What further connections can you make between loving your neighbor and caring for creation?

### Day 9

You shall not see your neighbor’s donkey or ox fallen on the road and ignore it; you shall help to lift it up (Deut. 22:4).

We have already established that God, when he gave humans “dominion” over the earth, intended for this to be a type of contract. Humans would care for the earth, and they would receive from it in turn. Likewise, we have seen that Christ considered the “greatest” among his followers to be a “servant of all.”

If we ever doubt the ends to which Christian service and stewardship are meant to go, we can take refuge in the biblical text. Knowing that God calls us to a lifestyle of active care and stewardship, it should come as no surprise that being servants to fellow humans is not enough for God. As Pope Francis points out, this verse indicates we must serve our fellow creatures as well—just as they serve us. In this verse, service is exhorted towards fellow creatures—who work for humans—and in doing so other people are served too. Loving your neighbor and serving creation go hand-in-hand.

Today, reflect on the multitude of ways our actions affect creation and humanity. What is something you’ve done today that had an effect on creation and on other people? Was the effect positive?

### Day 10

You shall keep all my statutes...so that the land to which I bring you to settle in may not vomit you out.

The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants

(Lev. 20:22, 25:24).

Much of Christian theology can be structured around the ownership of God and the land. Here, before entering the promised land, God reminds his people of both their tenancy on the land and their obligation to it.



In *A Sand County Almanac*, Leopold Bloom argues for a “land ethic” that values soil, water, and wildlife for their intrinsic worth. Bloom argues that the biblical text creates a view of the land as a commodity to be exploited for human use. Timothy Burbery uses these verses as further evidence that humans have no right to exploit it—though they may use it. In Burbery’s view, God’s ownership of the land invalidates human possessions. Keeping his laws requires caring for the land for its own sake as well. Burbery also points out that God alludes to punishment, personifying himself in the land, if the laws aren’t kept.

Today, reflect on the difference between ownership and tenancy. Does viewing the land as God’s possession rather than your own motivate you to care for it differently? What would that look like?

### Day 11

We give you thanks, Lord God Almighty, who are and who were, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign...for rewarding your servants, the prophets, and saints who all fear your name, both small and great, and for destroying those who destroy the earth (Rev. 11:17-18).

The writers of the New Testament had the scriptures of the Hebrew Bible to refer to when they wrote. As such, scriptures like those in Revelation sometimes tend to reflect prophecies and ideas seen in the Hebrew Bible. Yesterday’s verse hinted at punishment for those who didn’t keep the law, and that punishment was expulsion from the land itself. This verse elaborates on that idea, implying that those who destroy the earth will themselves be destroyed.

Of course, the author of revelation isn't referring to modern day pollution. Biblical scholar Bruce Metzger argues that this "destruction of the earth" is a by-product of the spiritual sins of, for the author of Revelation, the Roman empire. Rooted in Christian theology is the notion that living an unrighteous life has reciprocal effects not just on the self, or on others, but on the earth itself. This scripture posits that God's creation is both spiritually valuable and interconnected with all of our actions.

Today, reflect on the interconnectedness of creation. In what ways could disrupting life in one part of creation disrupt it all? What spiritual or moral failings could lead to "destroying the earth"?

### Day 12

And the Lord said, "What have you done? Listen; your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground! And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand (Gen. 4:10-11).

When God first makes humankind, the connection between the created human and the rest of creation is obvious. The Hebrew word for the human God makes is *adam*, and he is created from *adamah*, meaning the soils of the earth (Gen. 2:7). From the beginning, human life is not only interconnected with the earth—it is composed entirely from it. Religious studies scholar Yigal Deutscher points out that God's entire motive for creation stems from a lack of humans to cultivate and keep the earth (Gen 2:5).

Humans were meant to live in harmony with creation. To cultivate, to keep, and to serve the earth and one another. Cain's sin in these verses contradict God's design for righteous living. They introduce discord into harmony. The curse on Cain is not solely issued by God; it is "from the ground." Cain's actions cause the land to which he, as a human is connected, to rebuke him as well.

Today, reflect on our responsibilities towards one another. Is there anything you've done recently that might have violated God's intended harmony between people or planet? How can you make amends?

### Day 13

You shall not murder. Neither shall you steal (Deut. 5:17,19).

Regardless of your level of familiarity with scripture, almost anyone is able to recognize quotes from the ten commandments right away. The familiar prohibitions, too often, lull us away from contemplating these verses and their implications for the modern day. Life has changed dramatically since these commandments first were written into text, but the morality they espouse is the same.

When thinking of the global community we live in, Pope Francis ponders what "you shall not murder" means for the contemporary day. Living in a highly developed nation, consuming more than necessary, wasting large amounts of resources—on some level all of us are guilty of this. Americans engage in all of these actions at a rate that ensures future generations, especially among the world's poor, will not have enough to survive. If we fail to use resources at a sustainable rate or to maintain the health of our natural environment, how can future generations say we adhered to these verses?

Today, reflect on these verses. Do our lifestyles, consuming more than we need, wasting products we buy, depending on depleting resources, constitute stealing from others? If the earth is mankind's collective heritage and God's own possession, how should we treat its limited resources?

#### Day 14

Earlier devotions have stressed the idea that earth and its wild inhabitants should be thought of as spiritual resources. Nature should be seen as a space into which we enter to have spiritual peace. Modern poets, like Wendell Berry, urge us to consider the world this way, and so too did Jesus in Matthew 6:

<p>Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? 27 And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? 28 And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, 29 yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these.</p>	<p>When despair for the world grows in me and I wake in the night at the least sound in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be, I go and lie down where the wood drake rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds. I come into the peace of wild things who do not tax their lives with forethought of grief. I come into the presence of still water. And I feel above me the day-blind stars waiting with their light. For a time I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.</p>
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Today, reflect on worry. When is worry productive? When is it not? What spaces do you go to that allow you to feel at peace?

#### Day 15

Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten in God's sight (Luke 11:6).

Jesus's teaching from yesterday and the verse considered today both stress the same message; none of God's creatures are forgotten to God. Rather, God provides for them. He clothes the lilies of the field, feeds the birds of the air, and remembers each sparrow sold for any paltry sum. These verses reveal God's intimate love for his exceedingly good creation and his continued care of it.

Knowing these aspects of God's love should help us all make more informed choices about our lives and our morality. God, when making humans, made them in his image. When he placed them in stewardship over the land, he intended them to care and guard the goodness of his creation. As God's love towards all creation is paternal—as a creator to the created—so should our love be fraternal. Applying this lesson to our daily lives should lead us towards more responsible and loving choices for all.

Today, reflect on the kind of familial love espoused by God towards his creation. If we are to model this love, what how should we treat others? Specifically, what changes about our behavior when we look at creation as a fellow being, a “thou”, rather than an object, an “it.”

### Day 16

When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. You shall not strip your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the alien: I am the Lord your God (Lev. 19:9-10).

Much of modern culture is built around creating desires and offering products that, supposedly, fulfill these desires. To stay profitable, clothing outlets continually resupply their stock to suggest to consumers that they're behind on fashion trends. And it works, the average American discards 81 pounds of clothing per year.

While the technology and pace of modern life may suggest that the latest products are the result of ever-advancing innovation, they are really facades. They are designed to create a desire for more, to continually ramp up the pace at which we consume our resources. This desire is a form of greed, to have all that we can take with no regard for others. Ecological scholar Robin van Tine relates this greed to these verses, noting how a biblical use of the land is sustainable use. It is use in moderation, consuming some but also leaving enough for others to survive.

Today, reflect on your desires for material things. Do you already own some of the things you desire? If you had everything you ever wanted, would there be enough left for others? How could you change your habits so that you leave some “for the poor and alien”?

#### Day 17

After these things God tested Abraham. He said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am” (Gen 22:1).

The opening lines of the Abraham and Issac story provide a good example of a servant-oriented mindset. Situated within the Abraham story, this moment represents the ultimate threat that God's

covenant will be broken. Nevertheless, as immediately as God calls to Abraham, Abraham says “Here I am.”

This phrase is repeated throughout the narrative of Abraham and Issac. As God’s demands escalate Abraham nevertheless immediately responds to them. By demonstrating his obedience, Abraham models the servanthood Christians are called to.

Daily life is filled with temptations for us to depart from our intended role of servanthood—to fulfill our own desires. On phones that we carry on our persons constantly, we can order almost anything we want. But, in the pursuit of this fulfillment, we prioritize our own wants and not the needs of the creation we’re called to care for. Our desires consume more than their fair share. In that pursuit, we aren’t proper servants.

Today, reflect on challenges you face as you are called to serve others and creation. What are those challenges? What makes them difficult to meet?

#### Day 18

Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom (Luke 12:32).

Again referring to the kingdom of God, Jesus frames the relationship of righteousness that this kingdom entails as a gift. Reiterating a theme found often in Luke, Jesus also tells his followers “do not be afraid,” to have peace as a result of this gift. From this verse alone, it becomes apparent that entering

into a righteous relationship of obedience and servanthood produces not only pleasure to God but also peace among humans.

Laura Yordy, reflecting on the connection between the kingdom of God and ecology, writes about the peace that comes with this relationship. To Yordy, the kingdom of God is a gift that not only pleases God when it is spread, but it delivers peace to humans so long as it is communicated to others. The crux of this message, then, becomes not only practicing righteousness but encouraging others to live by this ethic as well. Doing so should bring us “good pleasure.”

Today, reflect on how you can communicate the nature of the kingdom of God to others. What are we called to do as servants, who and what must we care for? Who can you tell this to so that their understanding of the kingdom of God is expanded?

### Day 19

He said therefore, “What is the kingdom of God like? And to what should I compare it? It is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in the garden, it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches” (Luke 13:18-19).

Thomas Merton, writing on the unity that God intends for his creation, reflects on a fallacy ever-present among humans: the idea that becoming yourself means fulfilling only your desires. To many, actualizing their identity means, as Merton writes, “cutting themselves off from other people and building a barrier of contrast between themselves and other[s].”



Merton argues that the true purpose of each individual is to unite with others in loving service. We find who we are not by fulfilling our selfish desires but by serving others. In these verses, Jesus offers a similar portrait of the kingdom of heaven. To Jesus, this righteous relationship entails not only the needs and nature of an individual, the single “mustard seed,” but it involves cultivating this seed so that it supports others—catering to the “birds of the air.” This is an image of creation uniting in service to creation, something we are all called to do.

Today, reflect on how you define yourself. What are some things that you believe are essential to who you are? Are any of these identity features built in opposition to others?

#### Day 20

Do you not say, “Four months more, then comes the harvest? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting (John 4:35).

In all of the gospels, Jesus occasionally chides his disciples for their lack of understanding. In doing so, he always shifts their attention away from simple or material concerns and onto more important, spiritual matters. In this passage, the disciples attempt to cater to Jesus by insisting that he eat. Jesus claims that he has “better food” than the disciples, which the disciples can’t understand, so they bring him more food.

In his response, Jesus directs their attention away from their material concern about his meal. He tells them simply to “look around you,” specifically at the fields “ripe for harvesting.” Jesus refers his disciples to the beauty and fruitfulness of creation as a remedy for their lack of understanding. When

his disciples become stuck, fixing their attention on the material, Jesus refers them back to nature.

Perhaps in its beauty they can find peace, or in its relationship with humans they can be reminded of their call to obedience and stewardship.

Today, reflect on the things that command your attention the most on a daily basis. What are they? Do they bring you peace?

### Day 21

In both the Bible and in modern poetry can be found the idea that contemplating nature will reveal higher truths about existence. Compare, for instance, Job's response to the question "Can you find out the deep things of God?" and a portion of Mary Oliver's poem "Catbird":

<p>But ask the animals, and they will teach you;  the birds of the air, and they will tell you;  8 ask the plants of the earth,[a] and they will teach you;  and the fish of the sea will declare to you.  9 Who among all these does not know  that the hand of the Lord has done this?  10 In his hand is the life of every living thing  and the breath of every human being.</p>	<p>When he is not singing, he is listening.  Neither have I ever seen him with his eyes closed.  Though he may be looking at nothing more than a cloud  it brings to his mind several dozen new remarks.  From one branch to another, or across the path,  he dazzles with flight.  Since I see him every morning, I have rewarded myself  the pleasure of thinking that he knows me.  Yet never once has he answered my nod.  He seems, in fact, to find in me a kind of humor,  I am so vast, uncertain and strange.  I am the one who comes and goes,  and who knows why.  Will I ever understand him?</p>
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Today, reflect on your understanding of God, of yourself, of the world around you. What is something you know about each of these things? What is something that you don't?

### Day 22

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies (Rom. 8:22-23).

When Paul was writing to the Romans, he spoke of humans and creation alike groaning in pain. For Paul, these pains were specifically “birth pains.” In his thinking, Christ’s death had ushered in a new age whereby justification through faith could occur as the world transitioned from one eschatological stage to the next.

While we stand 2,000 years removed from Paul and the “birth pains” of the age he refers to, we can still obtain insight from these verses. Paul, like the God in the Hebrew Bible, personifies creation. He treats it as he treats humans, explaining that both are in spiritual pain as they await Christ’s return and their full salvation.

To Paul also, human and creation were intimately linked. Both their physical and spiritual dimensions were intertwined and affected one another. Paul’s thinking reveals an often-ignored cornerstone of Christian faith: our spiritual obligation to creation.

Today, as Paul did millenia ago, reflect on the circumstances of the present day. How is creation in danger, and what ought we do to care for it as we are commanded?

### Day 23

We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's (Rom. 14:7-8).

Romans is Paul's most expansive letter on theology. Writing to a church that he has never been to personally, that he hasn't established himself, Paul takes care to deliberately explain all of his thinking. He does so in order to ensure that he and the new church in Rome are on the same page.

A primary object of Paul's theology is the Christian's relationship with the Jewish law. Much of Romans is concerned with clarifying the nature of this relationship. In an age when salvation through Christ's grace alone is possible, what should the actions of Christians look like?

In this verse, Paul reminds Christians of something mentioned in the Hebrew Bible—the tenancy of their lives in creation. Paul points out that in every action we undertake, from the range of living to dying, we are the Lord's possession. As such, we should act in ways befitting his will, and be good stewards of God's property.

Today, reflect on how you would view yourself differently if you saw your body as God's possession rather than your own. What would change about how you view yourself, others, and your actions?

### Day 24

Do you know when the mountain goats give birth? Do you observe the calving of the deer? (Job 39:1).

Contemporary culture wants us to put ourselves first. It wants us to think of expressing ourselves as fulfilling our own desires, doing what we want—and often purchasing material items to satisfy these goals. This mentality is rooted around the assumption that our individual desires are the most important, our wants and needs the most deserving of being met.

Biblical scholar John Collins points out that Job's pattern of thinking is similar throughout the book of Job. Job presumes that God's primary concern should be taking care of Job and his family. In this verse, God reminds Job that there are far more important things for God to be preoccupied with.

God's imagination and concern extends to areas where human thoughts often fail to reach; they extend over all of creation. This verse reminds Job of how God's love applies to all creatures, and it reminds him that our individual concerns often fall short of importance in the grand scheme of things.

Today, reflect on some concerns you have about your life. Which of these concerns are about yourself, how many are about others, and how many are about creation? Which seem the most justified?

### Day 25

If you besiege a town for a long time, making war against it in order to take it, you must not destroy its trees by wielding an ax against them. Although you may take food from them, you must not cut them down. Are trees in the field human beings that they should come under siege from you? (Deut 20:19).

In the list of laws prescribed in Deuteronomy, there are several commandments that seem strange to our privileged understanding. We are long removed from the sieges, and the fear of starvation that

would accompany them. In order to force their enemies into surrender, ancient armies—like the Assyrians—would attempt to cut off a city’s food supply, such as by cutting down fruit trees. This practice was particularly effective. Fruit trees require many years to mature and produce food, cutting them down would hurt a people for years.

This practice is forbidden in Hebrew law. The rhetorical question flies in the face of our expectations; the trees are valuable beyond us specifically because they are not humans. This law reminds us of the interconnectedness and intrinsic value of God’s creation. Creation doesn’t deserve to suffer to fulfill our needs. When it does, everyone suffers. In this case, the Hebrews would be sinning and their enemies would suffer hunger for years.

Today, reflect on some needs we have in the modern day. How does creation suffer to sustain these needs? What can you do to alleviate this?

### Day 26

The righteous know the needs of their animals, but the mercy of the wicked is cruel (Prov. 12:10). A common dichotomy found throughout Proverbs is the division of the righteous and the wicked. Proverbs, as a whole, is concerned with teaching ways of righteousness by teaching wise behavior. What is wise is often righteous, and it often involves good, practical judgement. Conversely, what is foolish is often wicked.

John Collins claims that, in Proverbs, the wise are those who take a long view of things. For the agrarian Hebrew people, taking the long view of things meant developing sustainable practices, practices that would conserve natural resources for the future in times of scarcity. This led to a view among the Hebrew people that all of humanity depends on nature; it is in their best interest to preserve the balance between humans reaping from and caring for the land. This logic applied to biblical Hebrews, and it must be applied to the current day—where we use resources at an unsustainable rate. This endangers both our and creation's future.

Today, reflect on what you can do to change your consuming habits in order to make them more sustainable.

### Day 27

But his master replied, “You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt. 25:26,30).

The writings of the Hebrew Bible more commonly stress the need for harmony between humans and the land. These writings are rooted in a culture that depended on this relationship to survive and viewed the world as stable. The writings of the New Testament, while also written in the agrarian world, are written with the conviction that the world is passing away.

This has been problematic for some ecologically minded Christians, who aren't sure how to reconcile the image of a loving God who cares for creation with the physical destruction inflicted on creation in books like Revelation.

Philosopher Ilse Ahn turns his attention towards this problem, proposing that the New Testament offers a “eschatology of settled accounts,” as seen in this parable. Ahn proposes that, in Revelation as in this parable, the righteous are rewarded in proportion to their proper behavior and the wicked punished in accordance with their behavior. Ahn claims this logic can justify caring for creation, as the earth itself is never fully destroyed—only transformed in accordance with our just deeds—in Revelation. To Ahn, Christian thought doesn't rule out the need to care for the world.

Today, reflect on how your view of caring for creation could change based on how you ultimately conceive of creation ending. Even if it is apocalyptic, does this justify ignoring our duties to be good stewards?

### Day 28

Writers in both the Hebrew Bible and the modern day have found, in creation, a sense of likeness. For the author of Psalm 148, this commonality between creation is inspired in him by the common fatherhood of all creation in God. For essayist Edward Abbey in *Desert Solitaire*, it comes from something else:

Let them praise the name of the Lord, for he commanded and they were created.	How can I descend to such anthropomorphism? Easily—but is it, in this case, entirely false?
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<p>6 He established them forever and ever; he fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed.[a]</p> <p>7 Praise the Lord from the earth, you sea monsters and all deeps, 8 fire and hail, snow and frost, stormy wind fulfilling his command!</p> <p>9 Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars! 10 Wild animals and all cattle, creeping things and flying birds!</p> <p>11 Kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all rulers of the earth! 12 Young men and women alike, old and young together!</p> <p>13 Let them praise the name of the Lord, for his name alone is exalted; his glory is above earth and heaven.</p>	<p>Perhaps not. I am not attributing human motives to my snake and bird acquaintances. I recognize that when and where they serve purposes of mine they do so for beautifully selfish reasons of their own. Which is exactly the way it should be. I suggest, however, that it's a foolish, simple-minded rationalism which denies any form of emotion to all animals but man and his dog...It seems to me possible, even probable, that many of the nonhuman undomesticated animals experience emotions unknown to us. What do coyotes mean when they yodel at the moon? What are the dolphins trying so patiently to tell us? Precisely what did those two enraptured gopher snakes have in mind when they came gliding toward my eyes over the naked sandstone?...All men are brothers, we like to say, half-wishing sometimes in secret it were not true. But perhaps it is true...We are obliged, therefore, to spread the news, painful and bitter though it may be for some to hear, that all living things on earth are kindred.</p>
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Today, reflect on the ways in which we have common ground with the rest of creation. What are some of these ways?

### Day 29

For in [Christ] all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him (Col.

1:16).

The essential question Paul struggled with as he wrote to his churches was essentially: “How have things changed?” Paul, and other New Testament writers, wrote with the conviction that the world

was ending. They believed they were living in a new era. Modern scholars still occasionally struggle with a similar question about the relationship between man and creation: did it change or stay the same?

Paul's own theology might provide the answer to this question. Though Paul firmly believed that Christ's return was imminent, he notes in these verses that creation was made "through and for Christ." Paul stresses that creation is part of Christ himself and implies that its purpose is to glorify Christ. As seen with Merton, nature expresses God's glory simply by being itself. Destroying or not allowing nature to do so prevents Christ from receiving the glory that, Paul believes, he's owed. Paul, who stresses our need to stay sanctified in order to glorify Christ, would want us to ensure the rest of creation does the same.

Today, reflect on how fulfilling our duties as servants of one another and stewards of the land fulfills the commandment "love thy neighbor." Even if the world was ending, would our obligations to one another be lifted?

### Day 30

For in [Christ] the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross  
(Col. 1:19-20).

The controversy at the heart of Paul's letter to the Colossians is a debate over whether or not Christians have access to the "fullness of God" already and through Christ. By seeing how Paul responds, how he

argues his side of the debate, we can infer that his opponents urged asceticism—but Paul, in verses like these, stresses that Christ’s death alone provided access to the “fullness of God.”

Paul also writes that, through Christ’s death and resurrection, this fullness of God was reconciled “to all things.” To Paul, all of creatio shares in the liberation that Christ’s death provides. Pope Francis writes that “The very flowers of the field and the birds which [Christ’s] human eyes contemplated and admired are now imbued with his radiant presence.” If Christ’s death equally liberated humans and creation, and if Christ called on us to serve one another—what kind of arrogance would it be to refuse to serve creation as well?

Today, reflect back on the past 30 days. How has your understanding of our relationship with creation changed?

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