

“Creation as Neighbor”

Look up at the stars.

Step into a garden at dawn.

Hear the first hymn of Scripture¹ —

light breaking over dark,

waters separating,

green things reaching up to meet the sun.

Genesis tells it like poetry:

God speaks — and there is.

Sky, soil, sea, seed.

Birds fill the air, whales breach the water.

Then God pauses,

¹ Gen 1 is highly patterned, liturgical-poetic narrative with the repeated refrain “God saw that it was good.” The emphasis is on *wonder* and goodness at creation’s dawn. Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11: A Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 93–112.

looks around,

and smiles: “Good. Good. Good.”

The first act of faith is not confession but wonder.

Not guilt but gratitude.²

Before we say “Lord, have mercy,”

we say, “Wow.”

The first sermon of Scripture.

Genesis says God spoke light, sky, trees, fish,

and birds into being—

and then paused, looked around, and called it “good.”

² Brueggemann frames Gen 1 theologically as gift and blessing, not as abstract cosmology. The first act of faith is gratitude and praise, not guilt. Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis, Interpretation* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 24–33.

Then, the text says,

God bent down — hands in the dirt —

and shaped us.

God tends the earth,

and then gave it to us...

“To till and to keep.”³

To keep. Stewards. Trustees.⁴

We do not own this world any more than a gardener

owns the rain.

Psalm 24 says it plainly:

³ Ellen Davis offers the classic lexical and agrarian reading of Gen 2:15 (‘*abad* “serve/till,” *šāmar* “keep/guard”). Ellen F. Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 29–44, 81–98.

⁴ Middleton argues that *imago Dei* entails royal stewardship exercised in God’s likeness. Humans are trustees who “tend and keep,” not owners who exploit. J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2005), 45–78.

“The earth is the Lord’s, and all that is in it.”⁵

We are tenants in God’s house,
guests in God’s living room.

Trusteeship is the vocation of being human.

A trustee is one who tends what belongs to another —
keeping watch so that the trust flourishes.⁶

God asks us to tend creation, to care for creation
as if future generations’ lives depend on it.
Because they do.

But look around.

⁵ Psalm 24:1 (NRSV or NRSVue). See also Walter Brueggemann and William H. Bellinger Jr., *Psalms*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 126–28.

⁶ Thomas Friedman put it this way: “stewardship is what parents do for their kids: think about the long term, so they can have a better future.” Thomas L. Friedman, “The Power of Green,” *New York Times*, April 15, 2007.

Isaiah saw it too:

“The earth dries up and withers...

it lies polluted under its inhabitants.⁷

They have broken the everlasting covenant.”⁸

We know the story⁹:

plastic islands in the ocean,

species disappearing,

storms stronger every year.

Our pride, sloth, and greed

⁷ For “the earth dries up...lies polluted...they have broken the covenant” Isaiah 24:4–6 (NRSV or NRSVue). See also Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah*, Old Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 174–79.

⁸ Weinfeld shows how covenant obligations and consequences shape prophetic critique. Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 320–41.

⁹ As Wendell Berry puts it: “Beware the justice of nature.” Wendell Berry, “A Warning to Our Descendants,” in *The Long-Legged House* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2012), 97–99.

strip the hillsides, poison the streams,

and scorch the sky.

Global warming is not just a headline; it is a parable.

Paul said,

“Creation groans as in labor.”¹⁰

And if we are honest, we hear the groaning —

in the soil depleted,

in the rivers poisoned,

in the air thick with heat.

Neighbor is not just the one next door.

Neighbor is the watershed,

¹⁰ For exegesis of Rom 8:18–25 (“creation groans”) see Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2nd ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2018), 513–24.

the bee,

the air we breathe.¹¹

To love neighbor as self means

loving this good earth —

because its thriving is our thriving.¹²

Some blame the Bible for this mess.¹³

They point to the words in Genesis:

“subdue the earth,” “have dominion.”

But dominion is not domination.¹⁴

¹¹ Bauckham develops the “community of creation” theme: humans are members within God’s household. Richard Bauckham, *The Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010), 1–22, 66–83.

¹² For a theological account of creaturely “membership” and extending neighbor-love to land and creatures see Norman Wirzba, *From Nature to Creation: A Christian Vision for Understanding and Loving Our World*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019), 87–110.

¹³ Scripture has been used to justify the exploitation of nature. Lynn White has charged the Bible and Christianity for the ecological crisis. See Lynn White, “On the Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis,” *The Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature and the Environment* (ed. R. Gottlieb), pp. 184–193.

¹⁴ See John H. Walton, *Genesis*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 127–35. Walton places “subdue/have dominion” in its ancient Near Eastern context, showing dominion as life-generating order in imitation of God, not domination.

God is the model of dominion —

gentle, life-giving,

calling forth flourishing.

Genesis 2 may say it better:

God placed us in the garden

“to dress and keep it.”

Even Leviticus —

yes, the book we love to skip —

says every seventh year the land must rest.¹⁵

Sabbath for the soil.¹⁶

Care for the future.

¹⁵ Christopher J. H. Wright treats Lev 25 (Sabbath for the land/Jubilee) as covenantal economics. Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004), 180–92.

¹⁶ See Wright “Sabbath for the soil” and long-term trust responsibility. Christopher J. H. Wright, “Sabbath for the Land,” in *God’s People in God’s Land: Family, Land, and Property in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 189–210.

Holy Scripture, the Bible, is a green book,
a holy book, the good book
that calls us back to balance.¹⁷

But we will not save
`what we do not savor.¹⁸

Jesus said, “Consider the lilies.”
That is not just a call to stop worrying —
it is an invitation to look.

“Glory be to God for dappled things,”

¹⁷ On prophetic critique as testimony see Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 417–38.

¹⁸ Allison reads “Consider the lilies” as more than anxiety-relief; it’s a moral pedagogy of attention. Dale C. Allison Jr., *The Sermon on the Mount: Inspiring the Moral Imagination* (New York: Crossroad, 1999), 112 (“Consider the lilies,” Matt 6:28–30—contemplation of creation as moral/spiritual pedagogy.)

wrote Gerard Manley Hopkins.¹⁹

“i thank You God for most this amazing day,”

sang e.e. cummings.²⁰

Let creation minister to you.

Let it renew you.

Let the garden be your teacher.

And then — act.

Not in panic, but in faith.²¹

This is not a 100-yard dash; it is a marathon.

Plant something.

¹⁹ Gerard Manley Hopkins, “Pied Beauty,” in *Poems and Prose*, ed. W. H. Gardner (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1953), 26–27.

²⁰ E. E. Cummings, “i thank You God for most this amazing day,” in *Complete Poems, 1904–1962* (New York: Liveright, 1991), 663.

²¹ For practical virtues and practices (delight, restraint, repair) for creation care see Steven Bouma-Prediger, *For the Beauty of the Earth: A Christian Vision for Creation Care*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 129–58.

Repair something.

Join with others to change systems that exploit the earth.²²

You may have to be a moral minority for a while.

Paul said, “Be not conformed to this world,

but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”

Transformed minds,

green minds,

will lead to transformed habits,

green habits,

and finally transformed hearts.²³

And do not despair.

²² Bauckham develops the “community of creation” theme: humans are members within God’s household. This supports your neighbor-language for watersheds, bees, and air. Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 130–39. (*Rev 21–22: new creation, river and tree for the healing of the nations; cosmic, not merely individual, redemption.*)

²³ On Rom 12:2: transformed minds produce transformed practices see James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, Word Biblical Commentary 38B (Dallas: Word, 1988), 706–10.

Jesus said, “Fear not, little flock.”²⁴

It is your Father’s good pleasure
to give you the kingdom.”

And,
this is a kingdom-of-God issue.

John had a revelation and he saw a day
when the earth itself is renewed.

The kingdom of God is not just about human souls;
it is about the redemption of all creation.

In the end, this earth will be renewed and restored.

²⁴ On Luke 12:22–34, esp. “Fear not, little flock” see Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 496–99. Note ecological discipleship proceeds from kingdom trust, not panic.

So we pray, as Christ taught us to pray--“Thy kingdom come”

And, until then,

we bless the Lord

with every act of care,

and the earth blesses us

with the Lord’s care

and know the earth —

our neighbor —

will bless the Lord forever more.