

Design your own Creation Devotional

Wonder and Thanks for God's Creation: Embodied Meditations for Genesis 1-2:4

A resource for:

Individuals
Families
Church Groups

In celebration of

Earth Day
Lent
Thanksgiving
Advent
or any other occasion
for creation-care focus

Written by members of

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Introduction

Plymouth Congregational UCC, a local Seattle church, decided that they wanted to design a booklet that would help to evoke a sense of “wonder and thanks for God’s Creation” as they prepared for Thanksgiving. The church chose to arrange the booklet around the creation account in Genesis 1-2:4. For each day of the week prior to Thanksgiving, individuals and families used the booklet’s meditations, readings, prayers, and simple activities selected for each “day of creation” as found in the Genesis verses. Each day ended with a “growing prayer” (one that builds each day), and the week ended with the crescendo of a communal creation-care, worship service.

We invite you to design a similar devotional booklet (for Thanksgiving, Earth Day, Lent, or any other occasion for creation-care focus in your church) for individuals, families, and/or church groups. To assist you, we are providing material from which you might chose and, possibly, supplement with material you create or draw from other sources. **The use and reproduction of these materials is limited to individuals and groups associated with church congregations and may not be sold for a profit.**

Instructions

Under each “day of creation” you will find a theme (in bold letters) along with related meditations, readings, prayers, and simple activities. Please feel free to “cut and paste” these for your own use. We encourage you also to write your own introduction, based on the event or theme around which the booklet is to be used.

We hope that you will find that this collection helps you and others to better explore the nature of human relationships with God and God’s entire family of creation. May this exploration lead to deeper awe and thanks for creation – a foundation for caring for creation – and awe and thanks for the Creator.

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Day One: Light, Dark, and the Wind from God

Today's Reading

Genesis 1, verses 1-5

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

Prayer

Creator God:

You breathe powerfully yet tenderly over the waters of creation.

May we, with all creation, learn to give You thanks for Your breath of life. Amen.

Meditation Options

(1) Activity for young children to adults.

Light a candle and turn out all of the lights in the room after you have read, out loud, the Bible reading and the prayer. In silence, close your eyes and then try to imagine what the universe felt like when it was formless, void, and completely dark. When you are ready, open your eyes slowly and notice the light from the candle come in through your eye lashes then into your entire field of vision. Talk/think about how the first light in the universe may or may not be like this candle. What was the universe like without a sun, moon, stars, or even an earth?

(2) Activity for young children to adults.

Please draw a picture of what the world would look like if it were asleep. Make sure that you include the places, animals, people, and things that you most like. Tell your family/group how you could wake up your beautiful world in order for it to feel happy when it woke. How do you like to be awakened in the morning? How did God awaken the world and the entire universe?

(3) Reading for older children to adults.

Imagine that you are sound asleep, like a baby before he/she is born. Not even a crack of light enters your eyes. You sleep in a safe place, and the darkness in your sleep is like a warm, comforting blanket. You begin to dream, and it's such a good dream that you consider how nice it would be to stay dreaming forever. But, something deep inside of you realizes that if you don't awake, your fluid dreams will never become solid and real. Just when you realize this, someone who cares for you dearly comes and stands at your side. You begin to feel this person's loving presence and his/her comforting breathing – this presence and breathing gently awaken you. So, slowly you begin to let light enter your eyes. Now, you begin your day with the realization that you are dearly loved and that your waking is precious to the one who loves you.

Now, in your calm, meditational state, imagine that there is no sun, no moon, no stars, and no Earth. The entire universe is in a state of deep darkness, as if in a sleep -- a deep, deep sleep like that of an unborn baby. In this dreaming state, the God comes to lovingly rouse the sleeping Creation. God casts a life-filled, all-embracing wind over the universe. This wind, or "breath," begins to awaken the universe to the experience of lightness and darkness, to the endless rhythms of activity and rest.

The awakening of the universe, of the entire Creation, is precious to the God of love. God loves us and all of Creation, and is pleased that we are all real and awake. Let us rejoice in the gift that we share with all of Creation: the gift of life with Creator and the gift of rest in the presence of our Creator when we are tired.

Growing Prayer

(One person:)

Dear God,

As the winds continue to caress the waters of creation,

Expressing thanks to You,

So we thank You for Your continued presence throughout the entire family of creation.

(Everyone:)

And God saw that creation was good! Amen.

Suggested readings for the week

Adults: Dream of the Earth, by Fr. Thomas Berry, Sierra Club Books.

Children: Old Turtle, by Douglas Wood, Pfiefer-Hamilton Publishers, a Caldecott Award-winning book.

Day Two: Water and Air

Today's Reading

Genesis 1, verses 6-8

And God said, "Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters."
So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

Prayer

From Psalm 104

Bless the Lord, O my soul.

O Lord my God, you are very great. ...

You stretch out the heavens like a tent,

you set the beams of your chambers on the waters, you make the clouds your chariot,

you ride on the wings of the wind, you make the winds your messengers . . .

You make springs gush forth in the valleys; they flow between the hills,

giving drink to every wild animal; the wild asses quench their thirst. By the streams the birds of the air have their habitation; they sing among the branches. Amen.

Meditation Options

(1) Activity for young children to adults.

Please read the reading and prayer for today. Bring a bowl of water (any size; or if outside, please find a place located near a body of water) to a central area in your gathering place. Find a sitting place that is comfortable for you. Take time to sit in silence, several minutes if possible. During this silence, take deep, slow breaths so that it feels like air is filling your entire body. Listen to the sound of your own breathing, and that of people around you. During this time, use the bowl of water as a place to focus your attention. Please think about today's reading. After your time of silence, go around from person to person and talk about things like the following:

- How do you know that air exists?
- Where do you come in contact with water on a daily basis?
- Are there other times when you just stop and listen to yourself and others breathe?
- What sorts of things do we use the water for at church? Why?
- What would you like to do with this bowl of water? (Suggestions: gently sprinkle it on each other, feed it to a pet or to a plant, use it for tea or cooking, leave it where it is as a reminder of your time of silence.)

(2) Reading for school-aged children to adults.

When you take a bath, do you realize that there is just about the same amount of water in the bath tub as there is in your body? Your body is made up mostly of water. The water in your body is similar to the water that you just saw in the bowl, and it's also like the water inside other living creatures (animals and plants), the rain, the water in the lakes and seas, the water that stays in the sky inside of clouds, and the water that God separated in the story today. God created us and the entire world using water and continues to sustain us through the water that we share with everyone and everything. God also created us, and sustains us, through the "wind" or "breath" that we read about yesterday – which are like the air that we breathe. So, in addition to water, everything that lives also shares air. The birds in the sky, entire forests, all humans and animals, the ground the we walk on, and even water itself! It is so amazing that we get to share air and water with all creatures and the entire earth. Do you

think that we share air and water with God?

(3) Further thoughts for older children and adults.

Sallie McFague writes:

“All living creatures, not just human ones, depend upon breath. Breath also knits together the life of animals and plants, for they are linked by the exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide in each breath inhaled and exhaled.” (Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993, p. 143.)

Consider how might our lungs be like trees in a forest. According to Sallie McFague, how might our own bodies be linked to forest vegetation throughout the world?

Growing Prayer

(One person:)

Dear God,

As the winds continue to caress the waters of creation,

And the waves of the sea crash loudly,

All expressing thanks to You,

So we thank You for Your continued presence throughout the entire family of creation.

(Everyone:)

And God saw that creation was good! Amen

Day Three: Land and Plants

Today's Reading

Genesis 1: verses 9-13

And God said, "Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. Then God said, "Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it." And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

Prayer

Dear God,

From the smallest seed to the largest mountain, You are the Creator of everything that is. Help us to see You, others, and ourselves more clearly through Your creation, and teach us to love what we see. Amen.

Meditation Options

(1) Activity for young children to adults.

Please read the Bible reading and the prayer out loud. Then gather together outside (if possible) around a tree in your yard, at your church, in a local park, etc. -- a tree that you find to be special. (If this is not possible, please have every member of your family/group bring a leaf, twig, or seed to the gathering area today. Adapt the following reading to focus on these plant parts.) Share a brief time of silence as you observe the tree. Remember to use all your senses of observation -- feel the trunk of the tree, look for insects that may be living on the bark, smell some leaves, feel the roots and earth under your feet, listen to the sound of leaves and branches, etc. Tell your family members what you've observed about the tree. You may want to draw or write about the tree later. If you would like, you may stay outside while you read any of the following.

(2) Reading for children to adults.

A reading from Hosea, chapter 14, verses 5b-7

"...[God] shall strike root like the forests of Lebanon.

His shoots shall spread out; his beauty shall be like the olive tree,
and his fragrance like that of Lebanon.

[God's people] shall again live beneath his shadow, they shall flourish as a garden . . ."

Like the tree that you are observing, and the trees of Lebanon, all trees have as much life underground as they do above the ground. Their deep rootedness in the earth allows them to stand above the Earth and produce fruits, shade, much beauty, and homes for many animals. Further, it is very difficult for most mountains, big and small, to exist without the help of the roots of many, many trees and plants, which keep rocks and soil in place. When we ask ourselves how can God be like a Lebanon cedar or an olive tree, part of our answer must consider the parts of God that we can't see. In your opinion, how might God be like a tree? How is God like a tree in the Hosea writing? How might God even be like a rock? (If you have time, look at Psalm 28:1 for clues to this latter question.) Why is it that nature helps us to describe God?

(3) Reading for older children and adults.

From Julian of Norwich, *Showings*, tr. and intro. by Edmund Colledge and James Walsh, *Classics of Western Spirituality*, London: SPCK, 1979; reprinted in Andrew Linzey and Tom Regan, eds., *Love the Animals: Meditations and Prayers*, New York: Crossroad, 1988, p. 10.

"And in this [God] showed me something small, no bigger than a hazel-nut, lying in the palm of my hand, and

I perceived that it was as round as any ball. I looked at this and thought: What can this be? And I was given this general answer: It is everything which is made. I was amazed that it could last, for I thought that it was so little that it could suddenly fall into nothing. And I was answered in my understanding: It lasts and always will, because God loves it; and thus everything has being through the love of God. In this little thing I saw three properties. The first is that God made it, the second is that he loves it, the third is that God preserves it. But what is that to me? It is that God is the Creator and the lover and the protector.”

(4) Reading for older children to adults.

Reprinted from *The Heart of Understanding: Commentaries on the Prajnaparamita Sutra* (1988) by Thich Nhat Hanh with permission of Parallax Press, Berkeley, California.

“If you are a poet, you will see clearly that there is a cloud floating in this sheet of paper. Without a cloud, there will be no rain; without rain, the trees cannot grow; and without trees, we cannot make paper. If we look even more deeply, we can see the sunshine, the logger who cut the tree, the wheat that became his bread, and the logger’s father and mother. Without all of these things, this sheet of paper cannot exist. In fact, we cannot point to one thing that is not here – time, space, the earth, the rain, the minerals in the soil, the sunshine, the cloud, the river, the heat, the mind. Everything co-exists with this sheet of paper. So we can say that the cloud and the paper ‘inter-are.’ We cannot just be by ourselves alone; we have to inter-be with every other thing.”

Can you see the cloud floating in this sheet of paper? Can you see the living wheat plant in a piece of bread?

Growing Prayer

(One person:)

Dear God,
 As the winds continue to caress the waters of creation,
 As the waves of the sea crash loudly,
 And the hills and trees stand strong together,
 All expressing thanks to You,
 So we thank You for Your continued presence throughout the entire family of creation.

(Everyone:)

And God saw that creation was good! Amen.

Day Four: The Solar System

Today's Reading

Genesis 1, verses 14-19

And God said, "Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth." And it was so. God made the two great lights – the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night – and the stars. God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

Prayer

Dear God,

Throughout this swirling galaxy, and beyond, we marvel at Your glory spinning through the lights of the heavens. Inside of our own beings, we marvel at the "stars" You place therein. Amen.

Another excellent prayer for this day, from Gregory Petrov, may be found in *Earth Prayers from Around the World*, by Elizabeth Roberts and Elias Amidon, eds., New York: HarperCollins, 1991, pp. 232-3.

Meditation Options

(1) Activities and reading for children to adults.

- Go somewhere tonight where you can see the sunset. Take some time to quietly watch the sun set. Talk about the colors you can see, the change in temperature after it sets, where it "goes" once it sets, where it will rise (in relation to your house) tomorrow, etc. How old do you think the sun might be? (Scientists think it's about 5 billion years old!) What sorts of things make up the sun? (Older children and adults, please see reading #2 in this section.) When you get home, try to draw a picture of, or write a story/song/poem about, the sunset.
- Go outside tonight (or watch from your window in a dark room) and look for the moon and stars. Is the moon becoming full or is it approaching the "new," invisible phase? If it's a clear night, try to locate some familiar constellations like Orion's Belt or the Big and Little Dipper. Do you like to know the stars by name? If so, why? What sorts of things make up the moon and stars? How are the stars like the sun? (Again, older children and adults, please see reading #2 in this section.)
- In your setting of choice, please read this reading:
Many years ago, about eight hundred actually, St. Francis of Assisi lived in Italy. St. Francis had an amazing gift from God: he was able to see and feel God's love and care coming through just about everything in nature – including birds, rivers, and other human beings. Because of this gift, he came to love all parts of Creation as if they were members of his own family. We still have one of his special prayers, "the Canticle [Song] to Brother Sun." Here is a part of this prayer:
"Be praised my Lord with all your creatures, but especially with Brother Sun because you show us light and day through him and he is lovely, glowing with great shine from you my Lord . . ."

Here is something that a little girl, living in a big city, said recently – her words remind me of St. Francis' thanks to God for Brother Sun. She says:

"At night, sometimes, when I am feeling real low, I'll climb up the stairs to our roof [she lived in a triple-decker building with a flat roof], and I'll look at the sky, and I'll say, hello there, you moon and all you babies – stars!" (Sallie McFague, *Super, Natural Christians: How we should love nature*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997, p. 23.)

This little girl feels thankful for her comforting “friends” – the moon and the star babies. How can it be that something as big as the sun or moon, or as abundant as the stars, is like a friend or a member of our family? Maybe part of an answer comes when we respect and appreciate something so much that it feels like a part of our family, a part of God’s family. What do you think? Is there something in nature that you think of as a friend or a member of your family?

(2) Reading for older children to adults.

If we allow ourselves to listen to other people and their insights, we can have our own insight and imagination sparked in life-giving ways. Scientists, for example, think that all of the energy and matter that is presently with us on the Earth, has always been with us. This is to say (at least according to the first law of thermodynamics) that matter and energy is neither created nor destroyed, it just changes forms. If, as scientists also believe, stars were born from very first atoms (hydrogen, helium, and later carbon and others), then all of these atoms – the energy and matter that was present from the beginning of the universe – is still here with us today! These primordial bits of 15-billion-year-old stars are with us today in countless forms: in other stars and planets, and in the Earth’s rocks, trees, insects, oceans, birds, and even within our own bodies! We are blessed with such an amazing connection to the past, to the future, and to all other members of creation!

Growing Prayer

(One person:)

Dear God,
 As the winds continue to caress the waters of creation,
 As the waves of the sea crash loudly,
 As the hills and trees stand strong together,
 And the sun, moon, and stars shine brightly,
 All expressing thanks to You,
 So we thank You for Your continued presence throughout the entire family of creation.

(Everyone:)

And God saw that creation was good! Amen.

Day Five: Abundant, Living Creatures (Part I)

Today's Reading

Genesis 1, verses 20-23

And God said, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky." So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good. God blessed them saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

Prayer

From the Wisdom of Solomon 11:24-12:1

Dear God,

"you love all things that exist, and detest none of the things that you have made, for you would not have made anything if you had hated it.

How would anything have endured if you had not willed it?

Or how would anything not called forth by you have been preserved?

You spare all things, for they are yours, O Lord, you who love the living.

For your immortal spirit is in all things." Amen.

Meditation Options

(1) Activity and reading for children to adults.

(Please bring paper and crayons or any other creative medium with which you may feel creative. In your gathering place – after reading the Genesis reading and the prayer – please read the following:)

From Psalm 104: 24-26

"O Lord, how manifold are your works!

In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.

Yonder is the sea, great and wide, creeping things innumerable are there, living things both small and great.

There go the ships, and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it."

Throughout the centuries, people have often wondered what a "Leviathan" might be. Some think that it's a huge sea monster, others think that it's maybe a whale or a hippopotamus. The Genesis reading for today tells how God created this Leviathan as well as all the other living creatures in the sea and in the air. The reading from Psalms tells us that God made these creatures, big and small, "to sport" in their environments (the water and the sky). What does "to sport" sound like to you? (Please take a minute to think/talk about this question.) To me it sounds like God wants these creatures to just have as much fun as they possibly can. This makes sense to me because if God loves all of creation, I would think that God would want all of creation to have a great time living in relationship, like friends and brothers and sisters, with other creatures who were having a great time.

Please take some time to draw a picture of what you think a "Leviathan" might look like if she or he were playing in the water. Please also draw other creature friends who live in relationship with your Leviathan. When you're done, please show your creation to others in your family.

(2) Reading for older children to adults.

From Fyodor Mikhail Dostoevsky, in *The Brothers Karamazov*, David Magarshack, tr., vol. i, Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books, 1969; reprinted in Andrew Linzey and Tom Regan, eds., *Love the Animals: Meditations and Prayers*, New York: Crossroad, 1988, p.12

“Love all of God’s creation, the whole of it and every grain of sand. Love every leaf, every ray of God’s light! Love the animals, love the plants, love everything. If you love everything, you will perceive the divine mystery in things. And once you have perceived it, you will begin to comprehend it ceaselessly, more and more every day. And you will at last come to love the whole world with an abiding, universal love. Love the animals: God has given them the rudiments of thought and untroubled joy. Do not, therefore, trouble them, do not torture them, do not deprive them of their joy, do not go against God’s intent.”

Growing Prayer

(One person:)

Dear God,

As the winds continue to caress the waters of creation,

As the waves of the sea crash loudly,

As the hills and trees stand strong together,

As the sun, moon, and stars shine brightly,

And fish and birds play in the water and the air,

All expressing thanks to You,

So we thank You for Your continued presence throughout the entire family of creation.

(Everyone:)

And God saw that creation was good! Amen.

Day Six: Abundant, Living Creatures (Part II)

Today's Reading

Genesis 1, verses 24-31

And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind." And it was so. God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good. Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over every living thing that moves upon the earth." God said, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. God saw it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Prayer

Dear God,

May we know Your presence in creation so well
and come to love this presence so much
and care for this presence so deeply

that we will want to know and love and care for everything that lives, moves, and has being in You. Amen.

(Another excellent prayer for this day, from Gary Snyder, may be found for this day in *Earth Prayers from Around the World*, by Elizabeth Roberts and Elias Amidon, eds., New York: HarperCollins, 1991, p. 266)

Meditation Options

(1) Activity and reading for families and groups with children.

(Set up chairs, blankets, and/or boxes, or just sit on the floor, so that it feels like you're in a boat. Then, please read:)

This isn't any ordinary boat; this one is huge!! Huge enough to carry you and two of every kind of crawling and flying creature that you can imagine. Yes, you've guessed right, we're building an ark. In Noah's time, the world was a very scary place because humans had hurt other parts of God's beautiful creation so much. Sometimes, it can feel like we're living back in Noah's days because humans do so many things to hurt God's creation. But today, we have a special time to practice "dominion" in a way that cares for and loves the other members of God's created family. For Noah and his family, the word "dominion" meant that they used all of the energy in their bodies to make sure that God's family of creation would be safe. Noah helped to round up all the animals, and a special midrash (a Hebrew story that explains a part of the Bible) tells us that Noah's wife, Naamah, worked very hard to lovingly gather all the plant species on the earth. These wise people remembered that God also wants animals and plants to "be fruitful and multiply," and we can be wise in remembering this too. So! Here we go – into our ark! Choose one of your favorite animal or plant "brothers and sisters" and pretend that you are this part of creation. For example, you can make the sound of an animal friend, flap your arms like a bird, or pretend that you are growing like a beautiful rose. One by one, guess who your fellow creatures are and tell each other what you like about the part of creation you've chosen. When you're done mooing, flapping, growing, and explaining please read this verse from Genesis 9:12-15, in which God talks about a promise of a special relation-

ship, a “covenant,” with animals, plants, humans ... all creation!

God said, “This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you for all future generations: I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. . . . and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh.”

All creation is in the “same boat” – a boat that’s as big as the entire world. God has made a promise (a covenant) to care for all members of the family of creation – may we learn to care as God cares.

(2) Meditative prayer for older children to adults.

From St. Basil the Great in Jon Wynne-Tyson, ed., *The Extended Circle: A Dictionary of Human Thought*, Sussex, UK: Centaur Press, 1985; reprinted in Andrew Linzey and Tom Regan, eds., *Love the Animals: Meditations and Prayers*, New York: Crossroad, 1989, p. 34

“O God, enlarge within us the sense of fellowship with all living things, our brothers the animals to whom thou gavest the earth as their home in common with us.

We remember with shame that in the past we have exercised the high dominion of man with ruthless cruelty so that the voice of the earth, which should have gone up to thee in song, has been a groan of travail.

May we realize that they live not for us alone but for themselves and for thee, and that they love the sweetness of life.”

(3) Reading for school-aged children to adults.

In today’s reading, we come across the word “dominion” – a word that may sound very heavy-handed, and maybe even like permission to do harm to all of the Creator’s beautiful and awesome work. In actuality, this is not the case. In Hebrew, the word “to have dominion,” *radah*, is a special word that we only find in connection to kings. In the Hebrew Bible, God is often compared to a king – a king who exercises dominion by blessing people and all creation with mercy and compassion, not ruthlessness. Other human kings, in the Hebrew Bible, are seen as good when they mirror God’s mercy and compassion, and especially when they protect the weakest in the land. Kings are sharply criticized (especially by the prophets) when they oppress others (humans, the land, etc.) and stop acting in ways that mirror the nature of God.

In Gen. 1:26-28, God gives all humans the role of “dominion” within creation. With this special role, we too are to mirror God in giving untiring compassion and mercy to all of God’s creation, especially those parts of creation that are most in need of care.

(4) Reading for older children to adults.

From Calvin DeWitt, *Earth-Wise: A Biblical Response to Environmental Issues*, Grand Rapids, MI: CRC Publications, 1994, p. 44

“...while we are expected to enjoy creation, and while we are expected to partake of creation’s fruit, we may not destroy the fruitfulness upon which creation’s fullness depends. We must, with Noah, save the species whose interactions with each other, and with land and water, form the fabric of the biosphere.”

Growing Prayer

(One person:)

Dear God,

As the winds continue to caress the waters of creation,

As the waves of the sea crash loudly,

As the hills and trees stand strong together,

As the sun, moon, and stars shine brightly,

As fish and birds play in the water and the air,

And the deer drink from living waters,

All expressing thanks to You,

So we thank You for Your continued presence throughout the entire family of creation.

(Everyone:)

Day Seven: Rest and Thankfulness

Today's Reading

Genesis 2, verses 1-3

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation. These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

Prayer

Dear God,

Thank you for the Sabbath rest that you give to us and to Your entire family of creation. Amen.

Meditation Options

(1) Activities and reading for families and groups with children.

Please read today's reading and prayer in your gathering place. For children, please bring the pictures that you drew on the "First Day." Then please read the following:

Do you remember the beautiful picture that you drew of the sleeping world on the first gathering day? Even if you didn't draw a picture, please take a moment to think about what the Earth might look like if it were asleep and peaceful. For the last week, we've done a lot of things together and made special time in our days to think and pray about all of the amazing things that God, and the entire creation, continues to do. But now, it's rest time – the seventh or "Sabbath" day. Not only did God think that it was a great idea to take a rest on the Sabbath day, God tells us and the entire creation to take a rest on the Sabbath. Why does God tell us to take a rest? (Take a minute or two to talk/think about this.) If we look at our pictures of the sleeping world, we can remember that it was this same sleeping world that God awoke to be a new and beautiful creation – more beautiful than our wildest dreams! We need rest as a time to stop and think about the beautiful things that God has already done, to have time to be thankful to God and our family of creation, and to dream about the beautiful things that God will do in the future. May you have time to rest today so that you can feel deep thankfulness in your heart and dream about what God may do, with your help, in this beautiful world.

(2) Reading for older children to adults.

Please read this selection from Exodus 23: 10-12:

"For six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield; but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, so that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave the wild animals may eat. ...Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall rest, so that your ox and your donkey may have relief, and your houseborn slave and the resident alien may be refreshed."

This reading is part of the covenant-forming instructions between God and the people of Israel. A covenant is a mutually agreed-upon relationship based on love and respect. In this portion of the covenant, God (through Moses) tells the people of Israel that rest is essential to a healthy relationship -- a relationship between God and humans, and God and all of creation, especially the "poor" and overworked in the family of creation. Therefore, the "poor of your people," the animals, and even the land itself are allowed to partake in grace-filled, reconciling rest.

(3) Reading for adults.

From Erasm Kohak, *The Embers and the Stars: a philosophical inquiry into the moral sense of nature*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984, pp. 29-30

"The night comes softly, beyond the powerline and the blacktop, where the long-abandoned wagon road fades

amid the new growth. It does not crowd the lingering day. There is a time of passage as the bright light of the summer day, cool green and intensely blue, slowly yields to the deep, virgin darkness. Quietly, the darkness grows in the forest, seeping into the clearing and penetrating the soul, all-healing, all-reconciling, renewing the world for a new day. Were there no darkness to restore the soul, humans would quickly burn out their finite store of dreams. Unresting, unreconciled, they would grow brittle and break easily, like an oak flag dried through the seasons. When electric glare takes away the all-reconciling night, the hours added to the day are a dubious gain. A mile beyond the powerline, the night still comes to restore the soul, deep virgin darkness between the embers of dying fire and the star-scattered vastness of the sky.”

Growing Prayer

(One person:)

As Your loving, renewing rest covers all of creation,
We thank You for Your continued presence throughout the entire family of creation.

(Everyone:)

And God saw that creation was good! Amen.