

# Apologia Talks

## Stewardship of Creation

By Nick Shults

### Introduction

Surrounded by noisy highways, crowded strip malls, and sprawling suburbs, our country has become more and more disconnected from the natural world around us. More and more of our time is spent inside and less and less of our time is spent outside. The health effects of this general trend have been well documented,<sup>1</sup> but it is also possible, I believe, that this disconnect from the natural world also has lasting negative *spiritual* effects, too. This disconnect is not just about our lack of enjoyment for the forests, rivers, mountains and beaches that make up the landscape of our country. It is also about a profound disconnect from our *Creator*. And in turn, becoming disconnected from our Creator has caused us to lose sight of God's commission for humanity to be stewards (caretakers) of the created world.

I believe that a renewed sense of wonder and awe for the world in which we live will help us to see once again the incredible story of which we are a part. The Christian life is not one that is disconnected from nature and the world around us. No, we were created to be *in* the world and we were created to care *for* it. God, too, is not unconcerned with the created world. God's redemptive mission in Jesus shows us that. Jesus didn't come to save only our souls from eternal damnation. Jesus came to redeem and restore *all of creation!* God cares about the created world and, as we wait for God to bring redemption and restoration on the Last Day, God calls His people, the Christian church, to care about it (and care *for* it, too).

### Scripture Connect

"Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

And 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 heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on 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 heavens 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. And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day."<sup>2</sup>

"O Lord, our Lord,  
how majestic is your name in all the earth!  
You have set your glory above the heavens.  
Out of the mouth of babies and infants,  
you have established strength because of your foes,  
to still the enemy and the avenger.  
When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,  
the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,  
what is man that you are mindful of him,  
and the son of man that you care for him?  
Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings  
and crowned him with glory and honor.  
You have given him dominion over the works of your hands;

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Louv's 2008 book *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children From Nature Deficit Disorder* (Algonquin Books) chronicles the psychological and physical necessity of exposure to nature. He links the rise in obesity, attention disorders, and depression to a lack of exposure to nature not only in this country but around the world.

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 1:26-31

you have put all things under his feet,  
all sheep and oxen,  
and also the beasts of the field,  
the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea,  
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.  
O Lord, our Lord,  
how majestic is your name in all the earth!"<sup>3</sup>

"Praise the Lord!  
Praise the Lord from the heavens;  
praise him in the heights!  
Praise him, all his angels;  
praise him, all his hosts!  
Praise him, sun and moon,  
praise him, all you shining stars!  
Praise him, you highest heavens,  
and you waters above the heavens!  
Let them praise the name of the Lord!  
For he commanded and they were created.  
And he established them forever and ever;  
he gave a decree, and it shall not pass away.  
Praise the Lord from the earth,  
you great sea creatures and all deeps,  
fire and hail, snow and mist,  
stormy wind fulfilling his word!  
Mountains and all hills,  
fruit trees and all cedars!  
Beasts and all livestock,  
creeping things and flying birds!  
Kings of the earth and all peoples,  
princes and all rulers of the earth!  
Young men and maidens together,  
old men and children!  
Let them praise the name of the Lord,  
for his name alone is exalted;  
his majesty is above earth and heaven.  
He has raised up a horn for his people,  
praise for all his saints,  
for the people of Israel who are near to him.  
Praise the Lord!"<sup>4</sup>

### **Doctrinal Connect**

"I believe that God has created me together with all that exists. God has given me and still preserves my body and soul: eyes, ears, and all limbs and senses; reason and all mental faculties. In addition, God daily and abundantly provides shoes and clothing, food and drink, house and farm, spouse and children, fields, livestock, and all property - along with all the necessities and nourishment for this body and life."<sup>5</sup>

"I hold and believe that I am God's creature, that is, that he has given me and constantly sustains my body, soul, and life...Besides, he makes all creation help provide the benefits and necessities of life - sun, moon, and stars in the heavens; day and night, air, fire, water, the earth and all that it yields and brings forth; birds, fish, animals, grain, and all sorts of produce."<sup>6</sup> (432, *The Large Catechism*)

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<sup>3</sup> Psalm 8

<sup>4</sup> Psalm 148

<sup>5</sup> Martin Luther, *The Small Catechism*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 354.

<sup>6</sup> Martin Luther, *The Large Catechism*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 432.

“But by God’s mercy we can begin to recognize His wonderful works and wonders also in the flowers when we ponder his might and His goodness. Therefore we laud, magnify, and thank Him. In his creatures we recognize the power of His Word. By His Word everything came into being. This power is evident even in a peach stone. No matter how hard its shell, in due season it is forced open by a very soft kernel inside it.”<sup>7</sup>

### **Application**

In the above explanation of the first article of the Apostles’ Creed in the Large Catechism, Luther shows us that God has provided for us in so many ways. All that we need to sustain us God has created! By caring for this planet God has placed us on, we show our love and gratitude to God, but we also love and serve our neighbor.

So what do we *do*? There are so many ways we can begin to care for God’s amazing creation. Before we do, though, we know a couple things. First, we know that no matter how hard we try, we are not going to perfectly restore this broken world. That’s God’s job and He’s going to do it someday...the day when Jesus returns as He promised to do. Second, we can’t do *everything*. But let’s start with the basics.

### **1) Go Outside!**

Seriously. Go outside! Go for a walk in your neighborhood or a hike in the woods with your friends or family. What did you smell? What did you hear? What did you see that you never noticed before?

### **2) Play in the Dirt.**

If you’re like me, you buy most of your food at the grocery store. But what would happen if you started growing some of your own food? Start with something simple like a small herb garden. Grow some basil, chives, cilantro or something else you and your family like to cook with. From there try planting some lettuce, tomatoes, or even some cucumbers. Pretty soon you’ll have all the fixin’s you need for a salad!!

Perhaps your church even has some extra space to build a raised garden bed or two. With your youth group and some knowledgeable gardeners in your congregation plant a variety of vegetables that you can donate to your local food bank at harvest time.

Want to take your garden at home or at church a step further? Compost your fruit and vegetable scraps along with leaves, grass clippings and other yard waste. Add the compost to your garden for even healthier soil!

### **3) Join Your Community!**

Join in on your community’s park or river cleanups and beautification efforts. This is a great way to make new friends where you live and make your city’s green spaces more enjoyable for all.

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<sup>7</sup> Martin Luther, *Table Talk*, WA 1, 1160, quoted in, Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther’s World of Thought*. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1965), 184.