

July 18, 2021
Let there be ... Wisdom, Wonder, and Worship
Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-35

If I were to ask you to direct me to a text in the Bible about God and His creation, you would probably direct me to read Genesis 1-2. That is A creation story. There are MANY passages in the Bible that celebrate God and His creation. My favourites include Job 38-41, Psalms 19, 24, 104, and 148, Colossians 1:15-20, and Proverbs 8 (and many others).

Proverbs 8 is a playful, delightful description of God creating our world, new, and full of hope. As God creates the world, centre stage is a young lady, Wisdom, who dances and weaves around the emerging components of creation, responding to their coming into being with joy. The Hebrew translated as "*rejoicing*" (8:30) can also be translated "*playing*": Wisdom is like a spritely girl playing in God's new world, endowing God's creation with childlike delight.

As we think about the natural world we're part of, it's good to remember that

1. We, ourselves and the natural world, are ALL God's good creation. People and nature are created by God, for God, to worship God. He delights in us all. And we all belong to Him. Sometimes we divide the world into "spiritual" things (like God and church) and "unspiritual things" (like the "world out there"). What Proverbs 8 – and the other passages – teaches us is that EVERYTHING is spiritual. It is all created by God, loved by God, and will be redeemed by God (see Romans 8:18-25).
2. God's creation and His wisdom are good, bountiful, beautiful, and delightful. God could have made a black-and-white world, with all humans more-or-less identical, with one species of cow, one generic vegetable, and one fruit. Instead, we have this technicolour cornucopia of richness, diversity, and beauty that is – to be honest – fun.
3. God's wisdom is part of who we are and woven into God's world. For humans, we may understand this in terms of our consciences, innate sense of right/wrong, and longing for God. When we investigate the natural world, we are also learning about God and His wisdom. As we live in community with the rest of God's creation, we need wisdom to answer practical questions, like "*How do we live most wisely and well in God's world?*" "*How do we avoid pitfalls?*" "*How do we life ethically?*"

(A Bit of) My Story

I have always loved nature. When I was young, we would spend summers camping in the Rocky Mountains. Dad loved to take photographs, especially of wildflowers. His style of picture-taking was not the quick "point and click" variety. For every photo, he would set up a tripod, get out a light meter, and take dozens of photos with multiple combinations of lenses, f-stops, and apertures. My brother and I had lots of time to explore. Explore we did.

I came to love the mountains, meadows, forests, creeks, birds, flowers, rocks, and even lichen. I came to love the smell of spruce forests. I was fascinated by the night sky in the mountains, which, away from the city lights in Vancouver, was so rich and vivid.

I loved the wonders of nature. But I also was an academic person. I read and studied about science. For the most part, I kept my appreciation of nature at a clinical, scientific level. I found physics, biology, and especially geography helpful ways to understand my world. But I found that scientific explanations alone were not enough. As a budding scientist, I could explain Takkakaw Falls scientifically, but I could not explain why I found them beautiful, why they inspired wonder and awe in me, why I found myself drawn to them.

Science was fantastic, but it was not enough. I needed more. I had deep questions about how we, as human beings, were relating to nature, justice for people who were suffering, my place in the cosmos, and how I wanted and needed to live intentionally, ethically, and purposefully – I would now say – wisely. Science couldn't answer those kinds of questions.

When I began reading the Bible, I found a lens through which I could see the world in a new, richer, more meaning-filled way. As I read Scripture for the first time, everything came into focus for me. I found faith in God to be the perfect starting point for my search for deeper understandings of the value of nature, of wise stewardship of nature, of care for the world and people, of an ethical framework, and of meaning and purpose.

My faith and love for science have always complemented one another brilliantly. Historically, most western scientists were strong Christians who saw their scientific studies as a natural component of their faith in God. Many scientists today are Christians, as well. The Christians in the sciences I know have no difficulty seeing their research as consistent with their Christian faith, enhances their faith, and moves them to awe, wonder, and worship.

I see life this way: my faith in Jesus encompasses everything in my life. In a Venn Diagram, it occupies all available space. Everything I am, all I do, and how I live is grounded in my faith in Jesus. Within that all-encompassing circle is everything else. My family. Friends. Church. Hobbies. R&R. Science – like all those other things – is one of the activities that happens within the circle of my faith, but I see it through the lens of faith. I love learning more and more about (what I now see as) God's good world. Science is a gift that helps me worship God more richly as I pause in awe and wonder. But I don't expect more of it than it can deliver. It's one way of knowing. Other approaches are necessary, too.

One fascinating person I have met in this conversation is [David Wilkinson](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XwUrJFxFfa0) (PhDs in both astrophysics (star formation) and theology), principal of St. John's College, Durham University, UK: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XwUrJFxFfa0>

A Bit of Perspective

The words "**science**"/"**scientist**" are recent inventions. They were coined around 1830 from the Latin verb "*scio*" – "I know." Science deals with the hard world of facts. Scientists methodically weigh, measure, describe things as they are, and how they work. Of course, we need to understand the world scientifically. The more we learn how the world works, we can find cures for cancer, protect human lives, and much more. Science is a wonderful pursuit for Christians. Thank God for this kind of knowledge.

Before the 1830s, people who studied astronomy, rocks, plants, or animals were known as "**natural philosophers.**" The word "philosopher" comes from two Greek words: "*philia*" and "*sophia*" – "love" and "wisdom." What happens to our understanding of ourselves and our world when we begin with "*I love wisdom about nature*" rather than "*scio*" – "*I know facts about nature*"? Scholars did describe the world in ways like modern science. But they recognized other forms of truth, too. When you wanted to know how to live wisely, you had to go use other sources – biographies, histories, proverbs, parables (like the Bible). People read the Bible as God's truth about the BIG questions of life: meaning, purpose, ethics, and values. The Bible is NOT about how the world works, but how we work in the world.

The Bible is bigger than science; it teaches us about God and His wisdom for how we ought to live. We need **wisdom**; we need to know how to LIVE well in God's world. Pursuing this wisdom is a passionate activity; we **love** God's creation and His wisdom because we love the God who created it. We live in God's world with love, awe, wonder, delight, and purpose.

Seeing the World through the lens of faith ...

When we look at the physical and natural world around us through the lens of Christian faith and the Bible, how does the world come into focus? How do we live differently?

1. Proverbs 8 (and other passages) tells us everything is created by God. There aren't "natural things" and "supernatural things." Everything that is part of God's cosmos is God-designed and God-loved. This is ALL our Father's world. His creation is not all about humans (although God loves us very much). God loves and provides for ALL His creation, birds, animals, sea creatures, and much, much more (see Psalm 104).

Proverbs 8 tells us this is GOD's world; it is His amazing art gallery. This is not OUR world to do with as we please. God gave Adam a calling, "*to tend and care for*" His creation (Genesis 2:15). When I think about how I live in the world, then, I choose to live in a way that treats God's creation with the respect, care, and wonder it deserves. As human created in the image of God, a fundamental part of who we are is wise tend-ers, caretakers, and stewards of God's creation. Biblical wisdom leads us to a Christian environmental ethic that cares for God's creation wisely and well.

2. God created everything in an orderly way. As we study His creation, we expect order, rationality, and the ability to describe things with tools like mathematics. God is not a god of the gaps; He is the Author of design and order as well as wonder and mystery.

As I explored the world and learned more and more about God's creation, I came to see how brilliantly designed it all is, how finely tuned to support life it is, and how beautiful it is. I came to see my most rational response was to believe in an intelligent Creator. Historically, many scientists were committed Christians who – to quote astronomer Johannes Kepler's (1571-1630) – saw themselves as "*thinking God's thoughts after Him.*" Today, many leading scientists are Christians who see their work as exploring God's creation and leading them to deeper worship of God as Creator.

Quantum physicist, John Polkinghorne, says, "*The search for understanding, which is so natural to a scientist is, in the end, the search for God.*" The more science I learn, the more I learn about how amazing our God truly is, the more I worship Him.

3. We see the character of God in his creation. When I watch a George Lucas movie, I get to know George Lucas. When I study Monet's paintings, I have a window into Monet's soul. When I study God's creation, I learn something about God, the Creator.

When we lived in Edmonton, I taught at North American Baptist College. I regularly taught two courses, back-to-back: Physical Geography (earthquake/volcanos/river/glaciers/climate/weather) and systematic theology (doctrines of the Trinity/Jesus/salvation/the church/end times). Some students, who were in both courses, found the combination surprising. I assured them both courses were theology courses because we were learning about God in both, just in different ways. Francis Bacon (1561-1626) said God has given us two books, one is the Book of God's Word (the Bible), the other is the Book of God's Works (nature). We can learn about God from both. Both are very different and completely complementary. Both lead us to praise God.

If we love God, it's only natural we love His creation as well. Why wouldn't we love the masterpieces designed, painted, sculpted by our loving heavenly Father? Science – exploring and learning about God's amazing creation – is a fantastic Christian calling. We can affirm Christians who love science; they are engaged in a spiritual act of worship (Romans 12:2).

More than that, the Bible invites us to be natural philosophers – people who LOVE to learn about God and His creation – so we become wise. As we get to know God better – through His Word and His world – we learn how to love, tend, and care for ALL His creation – people AND His world. We learn wisdom to live ethically. This is our vocation (Genesis 2:15).

This summer spend time with God. Yes, read His Word. Yes, pray. But also, spend time in His amazing creation. The more we spend time with God in ALL these ways, the more we become more and more like Jesus. We live more wisely. We live purposefully. We live well. We make a difference in the lives of people. And in His God's incredible creation.

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First Baptist Church
1614 – 5th Avenue South, Lethbridge, AB T1J 0W3
(403) 327-2082
bruce@firstb.net