

**Christ Presbyterian Church  
Edina, Minnesota  
June 25, 2017  
John & Laura Crosby  
Wired for Creation | Acts 17:24-27**

Laura

Almost 20 years ago now, I had a young friend who was a Christian rocker. He had his own band, he was very cool. And he told me a story about a time when he was in Ireland at the Cliffs of Moher. How many of you have seen the Cliffs of Moher? Some of you? Well, he described the beauty of the Cliffs of Moher, and he was just overwhelmed. He saw the green of the grass, the blue sky, the waves below just crashing against the shore from these cliffs that cut down, and he was just overwhelmed with God's goodness. He was not a guy prone to singing hymns, but he was so moved that he stood back and he couldn't help himself; he started singing the same words that we sang this morning. *O Lord my God, When I in awesome wonder, consider all the worlds Thy Hands have made; I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder, Thy power throughout the universe displayed. Then sings my soul, My Savior God, to Thee, How great Thou art, How great Thou art.* So he is telling this moving story about how he was overwhelmed at God's beauty and majesty and goodness, and all I could do was laugh. Because, I too, have been to the Cliffs of Moher, and although this is what he saw (beautiful scenery), this is what I saw (fog). Uh-huh, nothing. Fog, fog and more fog. Our family crept in our little mini vehicle up over this tiny path and down the other side, and I went into a shop and I said, "Did we just pass the Cliffs of Moher?" The woman said, "Yes, it's beautiful. Would you like a postcard to see what you missed?" I'm like, "No, but thanks anyway." Well, for some of us, whether we can actually see the Cliffs of Moher or it's just fog, we connect with God, we sense His presence, we learn more about God by being in creation. But for others of us, it just feels like fog and we're like, whatever, right? It takes all different types, which is why we've been in this series.

John

So this series is built around the idea that God has wired us in different ways—to be connected to Him. To be connected frankly, to each other. We started off talking about the intellectual path and then worshipping God in worship services, and then last week Carrie talked about how we can connect to God through service. Next week, Melissa will finish the series talking about how some of us most powerfully connect with God through our relationships. Today we are talking about nature. I have to say that nature is not my natural pathway; creation is not my natural pathway. John Calvin, the great theologian, says that intellectuals often ignore that nature and creation is God's fifth Gospel. In other words, creation is a way that God speaks about Himself. So that's why it's important for us to figure out why this series is significant for us. If nature is God's fifth Gospel, it is supposed to teach us how to get close to God. The Scriptures say, draw near to God and God will draw near to you. If you seek God, you'll find Him. But

for what purpose do you seek God? The Apostle Paul gave a hint once. He said it's like looking in a mirror. This is what he said:

And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. [2 Corinthians 3:18]

So the idea is that when we connect with Him, we see Him. When we see Him, we become like Him, regardless of which path we use.

### Laura

Like John said, creation is not his natural spiritual pathway, but it is mine, so he invited me to join him in speaking this morning, and I would like to start by just making the case for creation being Jesus' spiritual pathway also. Let's just have a look and see that we have the Sermon on the Mount outside, right? We've got the calming of the storm, we've got the catching of the fish in the Sea of Galilee, and we've got the lilies of the field for Pete's sake! Jesus was an outdoor guy, so I'm thinking creation must have been a spiritual pathway. Some of you, I know, are saying no. Probably Jesus was a contemplative because the Bible says that He went out early in the morning by Himself to pray while it was still dark. But I would say, "Where did He go?" The mountainside, right? Obviously, I'm just kidding. We all have different spiritual pathways, and it's great for us to step into each of them. I loved the image that Carrie used last week. She talked about stretching our spiritual muscles, and about having new muscle memory. Just because creation is my spiritual pathway doesn't mean that it's not important for me also to pursue the intellectual pathway, and obviously read the Bible, and to pursue the worship pathway and worship God. Just like with our spiritual gifts...just because I don't have the gift of mercy doesn't mean I'm not called to be merciful. We are all called to stretch in different ways. When I started thinking about the spiritual pathway of creation, I came across a passage in Acts that we are going to look at today.

### John

Now, we're talking about the book of the Acts of the Apostles, and right in the middle is the story of the early church. We find the apostle Paul, who clearly is an intellectual in his understanding of God, addressing the people of Athens. Now Athens, at that time, is filled with educators and philosophers—people who gather all the time to hear the latest idea. This group doesn't believe in any one thing, they believe in all things. They like to think and argue, and they didn't deal well with absolutes. As Paul enters the city, he sees this plethora of different ideas in the different temples that they had made. One altar in particular catches his eye and he starts his speech to the Athenians this way. He says, "I couldn't help noticing that you have an altar dedicated to an unknown God," and this altar serves as the hook that the apostle Paul uses to introduce his God—the Living God—the Maker—the Creator of Heaven and Earth, and that's where we pick up the story, in Acts 17.

<sup>24-29</sup> “So the God that made the earth and everything in it, this Master of sky and land, doesn’t live in custom-made shrines, doesn’t need the human race to run errands for him, as if God couldn’t care for himself. God makes the creatures, the creatures don’t make God. Starting right from the scratch, he made the entire race and made the earth hospitable with plenty of time and space for life so we could seek after God, and not just grope around in the dark, but actually find God. God doesn’t play hide and seek with us. God is not remote, he is near. We live and move in God. We cannot get away from Him.” [Acts 17:24-29]

Paul contends that this is the real God. The Maker God. He can’t be squeezed into an image or confined to a temple, or a religion. He doesn’t need assistance from human beings. And then Paul goes on to show that not only is God the big God who transcends, who makes and transcends everything, this God is also personal, intimate, and close. Remember, in verse 27 it says, “He is not remote, He is near. In Him, we live and move, and have our being. We cannot get away from our God.”

### Laura

So Paul is talking about these two big words, that God is both transcendent, above all and before all things, but He is also imminent. He is close and He is in all things, and He is in us through his Holy Spirit. Transcendent and imminent. I love the way that our friend, Mark Batterson says this. “If you can’t remember those big words, you can remember this. God is bigger than big, closer than close, and gooder than good.” God is bigger than big, closer than close, and gooder than good.

### John

Or transcendent and imminent.

### Laura

That’s right, for you intellectuals. William Barry adds this. He says, “Whether we are aware of it or not, at every moment of our existence, we are encountering God, Father and Son, and Holy Spirit, who is trying to catch our attention, trying to draw us into a reciprocal, conscious relationship.” So whether our spiritual pathway is creation or worship, or intellectual, or whatever, don’t you feel like we can become oblivious to God? We can go through life kind of like on autopilot...like even if your spiritual pathway is worship, maybe you find yourself singing the words, but you’re really not thinking about them. You are thinking about your kid’s soccer game later in the day, or your to-do list or whatever. Or, maybe your pathway is intellectual and you are sitting and you are reading God’s word, but you’re really not thinking about it. You are more about checking it off your to-do list. The same is true with creation. We need to pay attention, to be present to God, to notice Him. So, I’d like to share three benefits that I see when we come into connection with God through creation.

**The first one is that when we encounter God in His creation, one of the benefits is greater humility.** Remember, in the Acts passage that John read it says, “He makes the creatures, the creatures don’t make Him.” Creation puts us in our proper place. I love this verse from Isaiah 40, “Lift up your eyes on high and see who has created these stars. The one who leads forth their host by number, He calls them all by name. Because of the greatness of His might, and the strength of His power, not one of them is missing.” Amazing. He calls them all by name. Wow.

I love this story about Teddy Roosevelt. He had a guest over for dinner one night and this guest was an intellectual. They had a wonderful, stimulating conversation and debate around the table and then Teddy invited his guests out onto the lawn, and together they were silent. They gazed up at the heavens. After a few minutes of silence, Teddy said, “Now that we are sufficiently small we can go to bed.” Now that we are sufficiently small we can go to bed. Creation right-sizes us. We may experience greater humility. **The second benefit really ties into that. As we are humbled before God, we are able to rest.** How many of you truly observe a Sabbath, a day of rest? Do you have a whole day where you rest from all the to-dos and the stuff of life, and the noise, and you truly rest? We are such doers, aren’t we? My family will tell you, I’m glued to my to-do list. I love my to-do list, I love checking things off my to-do list. I love doing things and then adding them to my to-do list, just to check them off!

John

Literally. She will do something and go and write it down, and check it off. And a lot of you are the same.

Laura

You do it too; you know it! But the problem is, when we are so tied to our to-do lists, we get lulled into thinking that our identity is in what we do for God, instead of our identity just being in that we are the beloved children of God. The thing is, getting out in creation reminds us that the sun is going to rise, and the sun is going to set, with or without my help. I’m not God, and the world is going to keep spinning, even if I’m unplugged. God has the God thing covered, and He doesn’t need me, so we can relax, we can rest, we can Sabbath. Creation is that reminder that God will keep the world spinning without us.

**The third benefit I see is that connecting with God in creation prompts us to worship.** It has the benefit of resulting in worship. In Romans, Paul says that no one has any excuse not to worship God because He has revealed himself in creation. He says,

For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse. [Romans 1:20]

It's like God has put post-it notes all over the world, all over the creation. Post-it notes that say: *Remember, I'm with you and I'm worthy of worship. Remember, I'm here, I created this and I'm worthy of worship.* And yet, there are some cautions for those of us with the spiritual pathway.

### John

Sometimes it's easier for people for whom this is not their primary pathway to see that, so as I look at those of you who feel like you come alive to God in creation, frankly I rejoice with you and sometimes I envy you. I tried nature once. But I love its power. Here is one of the cautions I'd offer. People who love the God of creation can often confuse the creation with the Creator. We can fall in love with the creation and it becomes our God. There is a big difference there. The Psalmist says,

<sup>1</sup> The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.

<sup>2</sup> Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge.

[Psalm 19:1-2]

But that means that God is using creation to talk about Himself, and not that God is somehow the creation itself. And the way we know that is because God comes into His creation in flesh. Jesus comes into this world and He says, "I have come so that you might know life to the fullest. That you might have life in all its fullness." And what we learned from that part of the story is that we can only get the fullness of life, the restoration of life, the renewal of life through a Savior, not just a creation, but a Savior. So, some of us who are so in love with creation—and I would be a proudly green Christian, and a member of the Audubon Society—love that, but I don't want to confuse that with the God who made creation.

The second caution I would have for those of you who are creation-oriented comes from John Ortberg. John says that people on the creation pathway need to guard against using creation as an escape to get away from people. We forget that human beings are part of creation too. But when people disappoint us, or people hurt us, we are tempted to run away into the woods. Folks in our day are often likely to say, I don't need church. I can worship God on my own in nature. I think you can have spiritual experiences but, of course, we need to learn to see beauty wherever God creates beauty. And according to God, people are the most valued creation of all. So the next time you hear somebody say they are spiritual, but not religious, be glad with them that they have meaning in their life. But realize that creation doesn't address the brokenness inside of us or between us. That takes a Savior. That means that when we use the pathway of creation we should rejoice, but we should also take action.

### Laura

Whether we are old or young, whether we are single or married, or have families, God desires to reveal Himself to us. So, I would like to suggest several action steps and obviously they involve getting out in nature, but are a little more specific.

**The first one is the idea of taking a present walk.** In other words, take your headphones off. We talked about how important it is to pay attention, to be present to God. I was walking very early the other morning and I realized I had my ear buds in—I was listening to a podcast; I was thinking about what I was going to do the rest of the day. There was a lot of noise and I wasn't present to God at all. I looked up at the trees and the sky...it was just beautiful. I took my ear buds out, and really tried to be present to God, and I felt like He reminded me of the verse that says, "Cast all your anxieties on Him, because He cares for you." Just like He cares for the robin I saw with his mouth full of little twigs that was making a nest. My first suggestion would be take a walk truly present to God. Take your ear buds out. Take your headphones off.

### John

Can I just jump in? This was not in the script but it just struck me. I was in a foreign country this week and what struck me was how often children of all cultures are locked into this screen...how often mothers of all ages are locked into this screen because it is their connection to a larger world. Many of us get a little twitchy when we are unable to get online easily. That's part of what Laura is talking about.

### Laura

So first, take a walk present to God. **Second, take a praise walk.** I have done this alone. We actually have done this, not walking, but as a family around our dinner table. If you have kids, this is a great one. Take a walk around your neighborhood and take turns going through the alphabet, spotting things to praise God for. You might thank God for the air that we breathe, or for the beauty of a flower, whatever. If you are a family, take turns with all the letters and see if you can make it through the whole alphabet. **The third thing is take a listening walk.** When I go out, when I take a walk, I almost always ask, "Lord, what do You have to show me about Yourself and about myself?" Now, this is no big deal; it's no mystical thing. It's just so that I'm focused, so that I'm not on autopilot. It helps me to pay attention to God. "Lord, what do you have to teach me about Yourself and myself?" Now, rarely is there an immediate answer, but usually it's more like a photograph developing in a water tray. It comes bit by bit, and sometimes I am encouraged or convicted, or whatever, but I really like the verse in Jeremiah 33:3 that is a promise to me in this. It says, "Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know." Sometimes it's immediate, but sometimes it's just a bunch of little reminders.

A couple of months ago I was walking along the ocean and praying this prayer, "Lord, what do You have to teach me about Yourself and myself today?" I was noticing the waves crashing up against the shore, and the power of these waves—the power of God in nature—and I felt like what God whispered to me was, *you can let the waves wreck you or refine you.* You can let the waves wreck you or refine you. The waves are going to come. You know, hard stuff is going to come. Are you going to fight it or are you going to let God refine you? It was just a little thing. So, just three suggestions for action steps, but what I want to do now—that I pray will be a blessing and a place of

connection for you—is to lead you through a little time of spiritual reflection together. I'm going to ask you to just relax. If you are like me, if you look down your hands might be clenched. I'm going to suggest that you open your hands and just relax. Pay attention to your breathing. Breathe in deep. Breathe out, and know that God is closer than your breath. And in a minute, we're going to pull up some images of nature on the screens, and I'm going to read one line of Scripture that I pray God will use to speak to you, and I'm going to read it repeatedly. I'm going to leave some words out each time, and leave some time of silence after each time. I would just encourage you to be present to God.

Be still and know that I am God. Be still and know that I am. Be still and know that I, not you. Be still and know. Be still. Be. Amen.

*The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.*