



Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

Focus Article:

📖 God's Measure of Creation
(*Moral Landscape of Creation*, pp. 24-29)

What do you think?

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God's Measure of Creation

After hearing God speak from the whirlwind, Job realizes that God delights in a wild creation that exceeds the vision and interest of humans. Understanding our place in the creation requires that we see it in terms of God's intention and scale. Reducing it to the scale of human significance invariably results in pain to ourselves and in death to creatures around us.

Prayer

Scripture Reading: Job 38:4-11,25-27,39-41; 39:9-12; 40:15-19; 41:1-8

Responsive Reading†

The LORD spoke to Job out of the storm:

**“Who darkens my counsel by words without knowledge?
Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him?
Let him who accuses God answer him!”**

Job replied to the LORD:

“Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.”

Scripture Reading: Job 42:10-17

Reflection

In the speeches from the whirlwind (Job 38-41), God delights in wild things: barren areas “where no one lives,” lions, ravens, wild oxen, and monstrous creatures like Behemoth and Leviathan. The world is filled with species and places beyond human domination. “Whereas Job sees in wildness the marks of fragility and impoverishment, perhaps even cruelty and capriciousness,” Wirzba notes, “God sees dignity and strength.”

Why does Job need this dramatic encounter with God?

We might say that Job is living an ancient version of the American Dream: he is morally virtuous, spiritually pious, and blessed with family, wealth, and the respect of his peers (1:1-5). He assumes that God has ordered the world so that people who work hard are guaranteed a prosperous life. Yet this assumption is put to the test when God allows Satan to inflict terrible suffering on Job by taking away his family, wealth, and health. His peers tell him that God is punishing him for his sins; Job protests that he is innocent and his suffering indicates a cruel creator and a meaningless creation. In despair, feeling totally abandoned by God and hounded by his peers, Job seeks an honest measure of creation and his place in it before the Creator.

At just this moment, God speaks from the whirlwind. “Job learns about the inadequacy of [his] self-serving, human-centered views,” says Wirzba. “Whereas Job was inclined to view the creation through the prisms of his own success (the world is a just place) or his own misery (the world is an unjust place), God forces Job to take a wider and more honest view of the universe.” Beauty, justice, and usefulness in the created order far exceed what Job, in his arrogance and human-centered thinking, was prepared to accept. Creation is far more than he can compre-



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hend, imagine, or control since it is framed to the divine rather than a human scale. This vision works a powerful change in Job, causing him to repent his former haughty ways. Stephen Mitchell translates Job 42:6, “Therefore I will be quiet, comforted that I am dust.” Job despises his ways, not himself, for he knows that God created him with the same care as the rest of creation. He learns that his complaint was misinformed.

Job mirrors in his own life the Creator newly revealed to him. When God restores his fortunes, Job deals with these gifts in a new way. We learn the names of his three daughters and that they are beautiful (an indication of his welcoming the goodness of blessing). More importantly, Job gives them shares in the inheritance. He welcomes the world on its own good terms rather than in terms of the conventional understanding that relegated daughters to a subordinate role. Job’s newfound compassion and delight in creation are grounded in God’s own compassion and delight. Job embraces the creation with the selfless care and joy that marks God’s own involvement with the world.

Study Questions

1. What similar features recur through the list of creatures and landscapes that God mentions in the speeches from the whirlwind? What interesting differences among them do you notice? Have you experienced creatures or landscapes that have a similar effect on you as these exercised on Job?
2. How do some “self-serving, human-centered” attitudes prevent people today from studying attentively our landscape and its creatures and plants, or from making the sacrifices required to care properly for them?
3. “There are probably not many ethics courses in colleges or seminaries that spend the first three days in silence—one day in the forest, one day at the shore of the sea, and one night in a field gazing at the stars,” observes Carol Newsom in “The Book of Job,” *The New Interpreter’s Bible* (Abingdon, 1996). “Yet something like this is what God requires of Job as the starting point for a new moral understanding.” Could a contemporary person learn something valuable and be changed by Job’s course of study?
4. As we increasingly move into cities and are removed from the wildness that God also loves, what attitudes may we be tempted to adopt toward the landscape and its creatures?

Departing Hymn: “I Sing the Mighty Power of God”

† Adapted from Job 38:1-2; 40:2; 42:3b,5-6. Scripture taken from the *Holy Bible, New International Version*®. NIV®. Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

God's Measure of Creation

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Responsive Reading	Responsive Reading
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Reflection (all sections)	Reflection (all sections)
Question 1	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To understand what God's speeches from the whirlwind convey in the story of Job.
2. To reflect on the moral changes that should occur in us when we study God's creation.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 6-7 and ask members to read the Bible passages in the guide. Distribute copies of *Moral Landscape of Creation (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article before the group meeting. Locate the familiar hymn "I Sing the Mighty Power of God" in your hymnbook, or print copies of this public domain text from the Web site www.cyberhymnal.org.

Begin with a story

Wendell Berry tells about having a pond dug on a steep hillside that he wanted to be able to pasture. "The pond appeared to be a success. Before the bulldozer quit work, water had already begun to seep in. Soon there was enough to support a few head of stock. To heal the exposed ground, I fertilized it and sowed it with grass and clover. We had an extremely wet fall and winter, with the usual freezing and thawing. The ground grew heavy with water, and soft. The earthwork slumped; a large slice of the woods floor on the upper side slipped down into the pond. The trouble was the familiar one: too much power, too little knowledge. The fault was mine. I was careful to get expert advice. But this only exemplifies what I already knew. No expert knows everything about every place, not even everything about any place." (Wendell Berry, *What are People For?* [North Point Press, 1990]: 5.)

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Voice a request that members will hear God speak to them, as he did to Job, from the whirlwind.

Scripture Reading

Ask two members to read, in alternating fashion from a modern translation, the six selections from God's speeches from the storm: Job 38:4-11, 25-27, 39-41; 39:9-12; 40:15-19; and 41:1-8.

Responsive Reading

The leader begins, and the group reads the lines in bold print.

Scripture Reading

Ask a member to read Job 42:10-17 from a modern translation.

Reflection

Members might not be familiar with these amazing final chapters of the book of Job, or they might not have compared them to other passages of biblical creation theology. Let the scripture readings 'sink in' and give members a chance to ask hard questions about each section of the readings.

Other interpretations of Job have made the epilogue (Job 42:7-17) appear to be 'false' to the drama of the central chapters of the book. These interpretations emphasize only Job's restoration and vindication against the views of his three peers. They imply that Job was virtuous and theologically correct after all, so God blesses him and everything returns to the way it was in the beginning (1:1-5). Nothing about Job has changed, and he repents only because for a while he doubted God and his own (Job's) sense of justice.

By contrast, the interpretation offered here suggests that Job is profoundly changed from his former ways by his encounter with God; his old attitudes are challenged. He repents from his former ways and attitudes, his remorse being shown by his breaking with his culture and giving attention and grateful reception to his new daughters.

Study Questions

1. These are large-scale creatures, obvious to the eye; most are powerful, carnivorous, beyond human taming, of no obvious 'use' to human beings, and potential threats to us. God cares for and enjoys them. Some differences might be where they live (air, water, land), that some are relatively familiar while Behemoth and Leviathan seem to be 'larger than life' monsters. Perhaps members will describe creatures they have studied, seen in zoo captivity, or encountered in the wild places; they might mention smaller creatures, even microscopic ones.
2. For a discussion starter, mention some of the seven risks of environmental degradation faced by the earth and its natural systems that are listed on p. 17 of *Moral Landscape of Creation*. Members may mention an excessive desire for profit, control, or entertainment; or may notice that the world can be damaged by hasty or inattentive pursuit of good ends such as inexpensive transportation, productivity, and environmental problem solving.
3. People might still develop traits of attentiveness, gratitude, and humility. The key words in Newsom's comment are "in silence," for a person must approach these landscapes with some measure of prayerful attentiveness. By contrast, the "Survivor" programs on CBS television demonstrate that people who approach wild areas with other motives, such as proving their own skills or competing for prestige and money, may return from the experience with less attentiveness, gratitude, and humility.
4. We might be tempted to think we should and can easily understand, manipulate, and domesticate the landscape and its creatures. We may think of them as 'ours' for the taking. We may think that our desires determine what is valuable about them, that our economic accounting systems should measure their value only in terms of their beauty and usefulness to us.

Departing Hymn

Distribute copies of the hymn "I Sing the Mighty Power of God." If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison, or silently and meditatively as a closing prayer.