



Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

Focus Article:

📖 Teaching Children
the Story of Creation
(*Moral Landscape of
Creation*, pp. 60-65)

Suggested Articles:

📖 Our Two Gardens
(*Moral Landscape of
Creation*, pp. 72-74)

📖 The Glory Robe of God
(*Moral Landscape of
Creation*, pp. 75-81)

What do you think?

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for your personal or group
study? Please send your
suggestions to:

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Christian Reflection

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Teaching Children the Story of Creation

Children should not merely appreciate the majestic drama of creation, but understand *their role* in this story “that gives us breath and life.” Do we encourage them to be good stewards of the earth, or stifle their curiosity about the physical world by signaling that it doesn’t belong at church?

Prayer

Scripture Reading: Mark 9:33-37; 10:13-16; 1 Corinthians 13:11

Responsive Reading[†]

O God, we thank you for this universe, our great home; for its vastness and its riches, and for the manifoldness of the life which teems upon it and of which we are a part.

We praise you for the arching sky and the blessed winds, for the driving clouds and the constellations on high.

We praise you for the salt sea and the running water, for the everlasting hills, for the trees, and for the grass under our feet.

We thank you for our senses by which we can see the splendor of the morning and hear the jubilant songs of love, and smell the breath of the springtime.

[Unison] Grant us, we pray you, a heart wide open to all this joy and beauty, and save our souls from being so steeped in care or so darkened by passion that we pass heedless and unseeing when even the thornbush by the wayside is aflame with the glory of God. Amen.

Reflection

Jesus teaches his disciples to remain humble and trusting as children (Mark 9:33-37, Matthew 18:1-5, Luke 9:46-48). Later Jesus rebukes them when they prevent children from coming to him in trust: “Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it” (Mark 10:15). Mark and Matthew, in pairing this latter event with Jesus’ teaching on divorce, suggest that true disciples will care for women and children, who are among the least powerful people in society (Mark 10:1-16, Matthew 19:1-15). Luke’s gospel places the children’s trusting behavior into greater relief by contrasting it to a Pharisee’s self-righteousness and rich ruler’s independence (Luke 18:9-30).

Jesus does not idealize childhood, of course. Neither does the Apostle Paul, who warns us not to linger uncritically in “childish ways.” Some childhood demeanors we need to outgrow, while others, such as humility and trust, we should continue to nourish into adulthood. We care wisely and truly for children when we help them to know this difference.

Curiosity about the physical world is another childhood trait that we should nourish. “Among the many holy tasks of Christians is to foster, nurture, and develop children’s God-given sense of curiosity in such a way that it will still be there when they are adults,” writes Scott Hoezee. “For this whole world



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belongs to God—we should want to know more about it.” Are we nourishing this inquisitiveness at church, or stifling it with opaque windows, lessons, and songs that ignore or diminish curiosity about the natural world? “It’s easy to grow up,” he observes, “thinking that there’s little connection between a Thursday afternoon field trip when you tramp through a wetland and a Sunday morning in church.”

Andrea Moore invites children to bring into church their curiosity about the physical world. Without it, how will they learn to investigate, love, and care for the world in its details? So that they may “live well in the place given to them for well-keeping by the Creator,” she offers guidance to help children understand:

- ▶ *God’s relationship with creation.* Children can avoid pantheism and human arrogance, and learn to worship God as creator.
- ▶ *God’s relationship with his people.* Children can see themselves to be co-workers with God in caring for the creation.
- ▶ *The child’s relationship to creation.* Through joyful encounters with the natural world, children can become a new generation of Christians who grow spiritually through tending responsibly to the earth and its needs.

Study Questions

1. What interests, stories, or activities could you share with children in your congregation in order to encourage their curiosity about the physical world and teach them good habits of environmental stewardship? (For ideas, look at the resources in *Our Two Gardens* on pp. 72-74 of *Moral Landscape of Creation*.)
2. What activities could your study group share in order to nourish your members’ curiosity about the physical world?
3. In light of Scott Hoezee’s comments on pp. 78-79 of *Moral Landscape of Creation*, examine your congregation’s worship and church architecture. How could your church community become a more “creation friendly” place?

Departing Hymn: “Morning Has Broken”

† Based on a prayer by Walter Rauschenbusch, cited in *The Communion of Saints: Prayers of the Famous*, ed., Horton Davies (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1990).

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Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Responsive Reading	Responsive Reading
Study Bible passages	Reflection (all sections)
Question 2	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To recognize curiosity about the physical world as a childlike demeanor that we should nourish into adulthood.
2. To inventory whether our church communities are “creation-friendly” places.
3. To focus upon what we want children to learn from the stories of creation.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 12-13 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 and the suggested articles before the group meeting. Ask some members to look at the books and Web sites mentioned in “Our Two Gardens” (pp. 72-74 of *Moral Landscape of Creation*) and report on them to the group. Locate the hymn “Morning Has Broken” in your hymnbook, or select an alternate hymn.

Begin with a story

Share the story that Andrea Moore tells about her son restoring the sand to the ocean (on p. 60 of *Moral Landscape of Creation*). The story highlights the joyful wonder that children can experience when they encounter majestic places. An alternative is to tell a story from your own experience as a child, or as an adult with a child, of curiosity about the physical world.

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently, and then voice common concerns of the group.

Scripture Reading

Ask three members to read Mark 9:33-37, 10:13-16, and 1 Corinthians 13:11 from a modern translation.

Reflection

The two readings from the Gospel of Mark have parallels in Matthew and Luke. Familiarize yourself with the contexts in each gospel of this story about the children coming to Jesus (Mark 10:1-16; Matthew 19:1-15; Luke 18:9-30). You might ask a member to scan these contexts before the meeting and summarize them for the group.

While Paul is not speaking directly about children, his comment about “childish ways” reminds us that the biblical writers do not sentimentalize childhood. They recognize that we need to outgrow many childhood ways, while others should be nourished into adulthood. You might ask members to list some childhood ways they admire. Do they include on their list curiosity about the physical world?

The quotation from Hoezee introduces the need to inventory whether our church communities are “creation-friendly” places. Touch lightly on this theme and return to it when you discuss question three.

Andrea Moore outlines three goals we should have when we teach children the story of creation: teaching (1) God's relationship with creation, (2) God's relationship with his people, and (3) the child's relationship to creation. Notice that she is *building* good stewardship habits upon natural childhood curiosity and does not assume that children, if left to themselves, simply will develop into good stewards. Expand on each of these goals and illustrate them with the activities that Moore mentions on pp. 62-65 of *Moral Landscape of Creation*.

Study Questions

1. Members may enjoy hobbies like hiking, bird-watching, wild-flower study, nature photography, nature drawing, or camping which they can share with children in the church community. Perhaps they would share personal stories or read books (like those mentioned in "Our Two Gardens" on pp. 72-74 of *Moral Landscape of Creation*) with children. They may have a project, like starting a church garden, recycling, or cleaning up a church property, that can involve children in some way, such as creating project posters, making announcements in worship, or supplying some child-power for the project.
2. Members may share hobbies with one another, too. For instance, the associate teacher of our Sunday School class for many years was also a high school biology teacher. Each spring the class met at a nature preserve for a Saturday walk, and our teacher helped us to identify the wild flowers, trees, and animal tracks that we saw. Sharing personal experiences, nature books and movies, or creation prayers and hymns are other ways for group members to take part in one another's lives and grow spiritually. Perhaps the group should share a creation-care project.
3. Discuss a brief checklist like this: worship (hymns, prayers, scripture readings, sermon topics and illustrations, and testimonies), architecture (new buildings, retrofits, landscaping, gardens indoor or out, play areas, murals or paintings), educational programs (children, youth, adults), outreach (indoor gardens for home-bound members, community recycling, and cleanup) and ministry (information gathering, lobbying, recycling and reusing, energy conservation, and home and church energy inventories). Do not lose sight of the trees for the forest! Choose one or two items to focus your discussion and action.

Departing Hymn.

Distribute hymnbooks with the children's hymn, "Morning Has Broken." If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison, or silently and meditatively as a closing prayer.