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The Curriculum of Creation

In Living Color, Part 1

Selected Scripture

Discussion Guide

Main Idea:

If we took the time to really see, hear, taste, smell, and touch our surroundings, we would stand in complete awe of the Creator. Creation reveals to us who God is. Creation is vast, intricate, complex, and alive. All of it is under the sovereignty of God. When we see creation for what it is, it should cause us to run to God. We shouldn't fall back in worry, fear, or doubt. We should move forward with boldness, confidence, and trust in the One who created us and cares for us. We are small compared to the universe, but we are loved. Scripture tells us that God created all things. He cares for the animals with specific instincts that help them survive, yet he cares for us even more than that. We are created in His image—image bearers of God. Creation shows us His handiwork, and it is on display for all to see.

Discussion Points:

Psalm 19 tells us that creation declares the work of God's hands.

- What are some ways that you see the handiwork of God in creation?
- How does/should that change the way you live each day?
- What does creation show us about the character of God?

Of all of God's creation, we are the ones created in His image.

- What does "created in His image mean"? (Genesis 1:26)
- How do you use the benefits given to you (eternal spirit, conscience, communication, redemption) as an imager bearer to glorify God?
- What areas of your life are holding you back from fully reflecting the image of God?

Discussion Guide Cont.

As humans created in the image of God, we are valued above the animals, the birds, the trees, etc. (Matthew 6:26).

- When meditating on that Scripture in Matthew, what comfort does that bring to you? Do you really believe that you are valued?
- The God of all creation loves us and values us. So why do we fear, worry, and doubt?
- Look up and read some passages that talk about who we are in Christ and what it means to be valued and loved by Him.

Creation points to the reality of God. It should cause us to stand in amazement of God and leaves no one without excuse. The One who created all things holds us in His hands.

- Our security is in God. He keeps things (that we don't even think about) moving along, and we trust Him to do that. If we trust Him to keep the earth orbiting around the sun, what prevents us from trusting Him in our everyday situations?
- How can you use creation to share the Gospel with an unbeliever?
- How can you use creation to praise God?

Gospel Connection:

Creation shows us who God is. It gives our human minds a small glimpse of how magnificent He really is. You start with creation when sharing the Gospel. Genesis tells us how the world was created, but it also tells us how man, created in the image of God, fell and became separated from God. If man weren't separated from God, there would be no need for a Savior. But we are fallen and on a path to eternity apart from God, and we do need a Savior. Thankfully, God provided a way for us to live eternally with Him. Creation should cause us to praise God, and it should humble us, that the God of the universe would love us enough to send His Son to die for us.

Practical Implications:

Think: How does creation stir your heart to praise God? To live for the Lord? To share the Gospel?

Pray: Ask God to remind you of who He is—the God who created all things. Ask Him to help you remember that in every situation in your life. Ask Him to give you a desire to share that good news with others.

Do: Be thankful that God created you in His image. Be thankful for all that He has done for you (including keeping the stars and planets in place). Share the truth of creation this week and how it shows us the vastness of the love of God.

The Curriculum of Creation

In Living Color, Part 1

Selected Scripture

Leonardo da Vinci became famous for his paintings, including *The Last Supper* and *Mona Lisa*. He spent his life trained in the art of curiosity. He once wrote that the average human “looks without seeing, listens without hearing, touches without feeling, eats without tasting, inhales without awareness of odor or fragrance, and talks without thinking.” Da Vinci called the five senses the ministers of the soul and he spent his life developing creative observation.

He would immerse himself in the study of architecture, science, music, mathematics, engineering, geology, botany, anatomy, history and, of course, painting. He called the five senses the ministers of the soul. Da Vinci never went anywhere without his notebooks, into which he recorded ideas and observations . . . his journals contain his most ingenious ideas—a helicopter-like contraption he called an orinthopter, an underwater diving suit, a robotic soldier.

He was always observing . . . imagining . . . inventing.

By the way, seven thousand pages of da Vinci's journals have been preserved since his death in 1519. A few years ago another creative person by the name of Bill Gates was able to purchase eighteen pages from that collection – just 18 pages – for \$30 million dollars.ⁱ

If the average human being was encouraged by Da Vinci to not just look but see; not just listen but hear; not just eat but taste; not just breathe but take in the fragrance . . . how much more should we as Christians do the same . . . as we train ourselves and our senses to ultimately give praise and glory to our Creator God.

James Montgomery Boice, in his commentary on this Psalm, wrote perceptively that God has revealed Himself in two Books – he called them; a big book, and a little book.

The big book he called the universe – all of creation that surrounds us.

We call this general revelation. General – in that it is available and discernible to the senses. It captivates us to not just look, but see and marvel at the evidences of our amazing Creator and His incredible creation.

The Book you hold in your lap, called the Bible, is what we refer to as special revelation. It is the revealed word from God which fills in the blanks.

In other words: Creation reveals what God did. The Bible reveals why God did it.

Creation displays the power of God. The Bible describes the person and purposes of God.

Let me suggest that it's time for you to take your Bibles and your binoculars – -and go for a hike . . . it's time to do more than look around, but see; -it's time to sit out on the back deck and not just stare into space, but take note of something specific God has created; -it's time to travel – even if by way of a book – and begin exploring something in God's creation.

Phillip Keller, the author of the *Shepherds Look* at the 23rd Psalm wrote a lesser known book entitled *Still Waters* which was nothing more than notes from his journal about nature and animals and creation he happened to explore. I read it this past summer and in the book he writes that we happen to be surrounded by the pageantry of God's creative plan . . . He's the Divine Composer . . . let's start listening to the music with whatever senses we have at our disposal by seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, and tasting.ⁱⁱ

I agree . . . this is the perfect time for us to take a closer look at this divine production of God, displayed to us in living color. And let me spend our session today setting the stage and answering the question why?

In other words, why pause for the next few months and focus on God's creative handiwork?
First of all,

1. Creation is the undeniable announcement of the reality of God.

In Psalm 19:1 David writes, the heavens are telling the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands!

Eugene Petersen paraphrases it this way – God's glory is on tour in the skies, God-craft is on exhibit across the horizon. Madame Day holds classes every morning and Professor Night lectures every evening.ⁱⁱⁱ

And when you look around, what do you see? Job 26 tells us that the moon and the stars and clouds and the earth which hangs upon nothing along with the boundaries of light and darkness . . . Job says – these are simply the fringes of His ways.

The Puritans used to say that God has actually left large footprints throughout the universe. You're observing the footprints . . . the fringes of God's garment . . . you're catching sight, as it were, of the signature of God's hand.

Like Picasso, who used to roll his thumb in the paint and then roll it on the canvass as his signature, God's signature has been rolled all over the portrait of creation.

And it's true – God is the conductor in this divinely created production. And He's given you and me front row seats . . . if we'll not just look, but see; not just hear but listen; not just smell but savor . . . take note of and marvel in, the creative handiwork of God.

With that in mind – let me give you another lesson to consider; secondly

2. The study of creation provides a curriculum for wise living

Solomon records in *Proverbs 6, Go to the ant, you sluggard, consider its ways* (in other words, study the way they work) *and be wise. (Proverbs 6:6-8)*

Imagine, studying the organization and determination and work ethic of ants can by application make you wiser in your own life.

David writes in Psalm 111 But great are the works of the Lord; they are studied . . .

That Hebrew verb *to study* means to research – to give careful diligent study – and the works the Psalmist refers to in this Psalm include both the work of creation and the work of redemption.^{iv}

They are studied . . . now notice . . . by all who delight in them. Splendid and majestic is His work . . . He has made His wonders to be remembered.

Sounds like it's okay to delight in the creation of God – and those who do, tend to study them. *He has made His wonders to be remembered . . .* so find ways to remember them!

Which means you paint a picture of something in nature . . . or you take a photograph of that animal or flower or sunset . . . you keep journals of what you observe when you hike through the woods . . . who knows, maybe someone will buy a few pages for 30 million dollars – and you can donate most of it to your church.

Spurgeon wrote of Psalm 111, "God's works are worthy of our research . . . those who do not look below the surface miss the best part of what He would teach us; His works are intended to yield to us instruction and pleasure wonderfully blended together."^v

Maybe for you it isn't chasing birds, it's going to the outer banks to fish or sail.

Again, the Psalmist would encourage you to not just go sit there – but look . . . think . . . connect what you *see* to what God has *said*.

Here's a theme verse for you – if you've ever wondered if God would approve of your visits to the ocean or sailing or fishing on a boat – the Psalmist writes, *Those who go down to the sea in ships, who do business on great waters; they have seen the works of the Lord and His wonders in the deep . . . who is wise? . . . the upright see it and are glad . . . let him give*

heed to these things, and consider the faithfulness of the Lord. (Psalm 107)

In other words you ought to leave that boat or that seaside trip or that hike in the mountains or visit to some waterfall and come away saying, “God is so faithful or what?! He is so dependable . . . in every detail . . . you can’t imagine what I saw today of what He created.”

There’s a third lesson to learn in this divine curriculum;

3. The immensity of the universe exposes the chasm between God’s mind and ours

Isaiah put it this way as he contemplated the immensity of the world: *Who (but God) has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, and marked off the heavens by the span* (= 7 inches – in other words, the universe beyond is only 7 inches to God); *who calculated the dust of the earth by the measure* (in other words, if you have dust in your house – and I’m sure you don’t because you’re special – but can you imagine knowing how much dust there is at any given time on the planet?) Isaiah goes on [*Who weighed the mountains in a balance and the hills in a pair of scales? Who has directed, the Spirit of the Lord, or as His counselor has informed Him? (Isaiah 40:12-13)*]

The immensity of creation highlights the eternal capacity of God’s mind against the finite capacity of ours.

Isaac Newton was the 18th century founder of classical theoretical physics – I don’t know about you, but I didn’t take any theoretical physics classes in school – that’s when I took an extra study hall. Isaac Newton, this amazing intellect and Christian, by the way, wrote,

The arrangement and harmony of the universe could only have come from the plan of an omniscient and omnipotent Being.

–Isaac Newton

In other words, the more I study creation, the greater God becomes. But even though we’re puny compared to God, here’s another

important lesson to learn from God’s narrative of creation – fourth;

4. Creation confirms the surpassing value of human beings to all other creatures

In other words, you happen to be worth *more* than an animal or a tree or a rock or a river. Your value isn’t equal to animals, it is greater than animals.

In fact the Bible never refers to you as a more sophisticated animal. No, years of evolutionary propaganda drilled that one into you.

And, according to the propaganda, you’ve got no more right to planet earth than a pine tree . . . you’ve got no more right to live than an ant.

Unless of course the evolutionist’s home is invaded by ants, then suddenly he’s superior and all the ants must die.

In Genesis 1 the Triune God announces at the dawn of creation history, *Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth (Genesis 1:26).*

Why? You happen to be an image bearer of God. That is:

-the human being has an eternal spirit which will never pass away;

-the human being has the abilities of conscience and a moral compass so that you choose right from wrong;

-the human being has the ability to communicate and worship and honor God, the Creator;

-even the redemption of the human being from sin was worth – was worth! – the death of God’s own Son.

The Holy Spirit describes your value through the Psalmist who writes; *You (God) made him (mankind) a little lower than God; You crown him with glory and majesty* (in other words, mankind is the apex – the magnum opus of all of God’s creation – now notice); *You make him*

to rule over the works of Your hands; 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 (Psalm 8:5-8)

But does that mean we're more valuable than every other creatures? I mean, who are we to say we're more important than the birds and the trees? What did David know anyway – he was running around in the ancient world with a slingshot . . . living in a cave for years.

We've developed in our understanding, you know, as one evolutionist said, we know that we're just another fruit-eating primate. Who are we to say that we have more value?

Well actually, we didn't say that – God the Son said that – recorded in Matthew 6 *Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? (Matthew 6:26)*

Jesus said that. Your value when compared to animals is not just a little more, a teensie little bit more – but much more (that's an expression that communicates you are much-more-than-you-can-measure superior to them). There's actually nothing quite as graphic in illustrating the superiority of the human race than life itself; let me explain – the Bible informs us that God considers murdering another human being as a violation of His moral law; yet His word informs us that we can kill animals and eat them and it isn't murder; in fact, animals can be on the menu.

Now, have you noticed – if a human being kills another human being and eats them, we usually lock that person up for a very long time. But eating a hamburger or a salmon fillet is not only permissible, it is encouraged by God. How do we know that?

Listen to God giving direction to Noah, following the Global Flood: God said; *The fear and dread of you will fall on all the beasts of the earth, and on all the birds in the sky, on every creature that moves along the ground, and on all the fish in the sea; they are given into your hands. Everything that lives and*

moves about will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants (that is, things to eat like lettuce and vegetables), God says, *I now give you everything (Genesis 9:2) – that is, all the above.*

So barbecue is as approved by God as salad . . . and I praise God for that. Today for lunch I will apply and savor the truth of God's word.

Let me move on: Here's another lesson in living color;

5. The universe leads us to surprise at God's attention toward us

David writes in Psalm 8, *When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have appointed; what is man that You take thought of him, and the son of man that You care for him? (Psalm 8:3-4)*

People who are involved with great things don't usually have time for little things; people involved with famous and important people usually don't have time for the unimportant people – except to hand out their autograph.

And David is amazed – and rightly so – “Why would a Creator God, having created something so vast as the universe, care about little insignificant me?!”

Which is the despair created by evolution, by the way, and without any reassuring answer. The evolutionist looks at the immensity of the universe and just gets lost in his own insignificance and despair.

Carl Sagan, the popular television host who taught a generation that the cosmos was all there was and all there ever would be, wrote sometime before he died what is, in fact, the logical conclusion of ruling out God. He wrote, “Our planet is a lonely speck in the great enveloping cosmic dark. [We are alone] in our obscurity, in all this vastness . . .”^{vi}

He also once said that whatever you see around you is simply an example of what hydrogen atoms can do, given 15 billion years of evolution. That's all we are . . . so what purpose could there be for your life and mine?

One evolutionist wrote that we are like booster rockets designed to send the genetic payload into the next level of orbit and then we drop off into the sea. Nice.

How vastly different from God's purposes that we glorify Him with our lives now and then throughout eternity as His redeemed, glorified, immortalized host of Heaven we live with Him and serve Him and worship Him forever.

There's another lesson we can learn from the world of creatures on planet earth;

6. Animals provide us with a divine antitoxin for crippling anxiety:

Jesus is recorded in Matthew's Gospel saying, Do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on – and then the Lord gives this illustration – look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them (Matthew 6:25-27).

Now that doesn't mean that the birds just lay around and God the Father feeds them. What this means is that God has created within them the instinctive capacity to find whatever necessary to live.

And He created them that way because He cares about them, and since He cares about *them*, how much more will He care for *you* – who are so much more valuable to Him!

Listen, my wife and I have arrived at that point in life where our kids are gone and so are all the animals they used to own. We have no more dogs in the house, or in the back yard. It's a glorious thing.

There was a time when we had dogs and litters of dogs – dozens of puppies, dogs everywhere. They actually made a movie about our family – called the 101 Dalmatians. That's not true.

But listen, out of all the dogs we owned, not one of them – as far as I could tell – ever had devotions in the morning . . . they never once bowed their heads first before diving into their

Alpo to thank God for their food, or their owner who was merciful and gracious and kind.

Your dog can be special to you and be loved by you and you'll enjoy his company and his personality and his antics and his instincts, and you should enjoy him like you enjoy any other creature on the planet that you want to get to know and take care of.

But in the meantime, your dog has never worried if he's buried enough bones in the back yard for his declining years. He's not worried about something happening to you? If you have a cat – they're definitely not worried about their future; they're going to inherit everything you own . . . they're just waiting for you to die.

Animals aren't pacing out there in your back yard over the weather report or the doctor's report or the Wall street journal report . . . what about us?

You see, no animal was ever created in the image of God; no bird or turtle or cow is going to be a joint heir with Christ in the coming kingdom; you are!

And between here and there, God has promised to care of you, so far above and beyond His own care of the creatures of earth, because of your eternal value . . . so you can trust Him as He guides you all the way, to the Father's House.

Number 7:

7. Exploring the natural world provides healing for a broken spirit

The Psalmist writes in *Psalm 143 For the enemy has persecuted my soul; he has crushed my life to the ground; he has made me dwell in dark places . . . therefore my spirit is overwhelmed within me* (have you ever felt like that . . . this week, right?)

Here's the solution from the Psalmist – *I remember the days of old* (a reference to creation); *I meditate on all Your doings; I muse on the work of Your hands.*

The word for *muse* is the same word for meditate found in Joshua 1:8 where Joshua meditates on the word of God day and night.

David is telling us that musing or contemplating or ruminating on the creative and redemptive works of God restores his spirit.

Now don't misunderstand; the Psalmist isn't making nature and scripture of equal value, but he's certainly letting us know that the handiwork of God has incredible value to the human spirit and shouldn't be ignored.

Isn't it interesting that Job demanded answers from God for the incredible suffering he endured – and when God finally showed up, instead of giving Job answers, God took Job on a tour of the universe and the animal kingdom.

Earlier, Job had already hinted at the solution when he chided his counselors in chapter 12 by saying, *Ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds in the sky, and they will tell you . . . in His hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind (Job 12:7-10)*

And that's exactly what God did . . . and when the tour was over, Job regained the proper perspective. "I don't need any answers . . . I've seen your Creative splendor and majesty and wisdom and power . . . and that's enough of an answer for me."

Along that same line – here's another lesson to learn:

8. The order of the universe provides an antidote for insecurity.

I came across this article some time ago about our security in our Creator God. It goes like this: You may feel as if you are sitting still right now, but it's an illusion of miraculous proportions. Planet Earth is spinning around its axis at a speed of 1,000 miles per hour. Every 24 hours, planet Earth does a perfect 360. But as we spin on our axis at 1,000 miles an hour, we're also hurtling through space in Earth's orbit at the average speed of 67,000 miles per hour. That's 87 times faster than the speed of sound.

You might have come in here today thinking that you're not going to get much done today – but you will actually travel 1.5 million miles through space!

When was the last time you thanked God for keeping the earth rotating just so? You've probably never once prayed, "Lord, I wasn't sure we'd make the full rotation today, but You did it again"!

Here's the antidote to our sense of insecurity . . . if you can trust God without even thinking about it, to keep the earth and the galaxy and the universe in perfect arrangement according to His will – if you can trust God for something that big – you can trust Him for something so small; like keeping your own life on course, according to His plan and His design.^{vii}

Therein lies your security! The songwriter put it this way:

This is my Father's world,
And to my listening ears
All nature sings, and round me rings
The music of the spheres.
This is my Father's world:
I rest me in the thought
Of rocks and trees, of skies and seas--
His hand these wonders wrought.^{viii}

There's a ninth lesson to observe from creation – it is a warning:

9. Creation will serve as the evidence in the courtroom of God's eternal judgment of unbelievers.

Paul writes in Romans chapter 1, *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them (how?) For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew [about] God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools (Romans 1:18-22)*

When all of the unbelieving mankind of all of human history stands before God at the Great White Throne judgment, which ends human history as we know it – they will be without excuse –

-not because they heard the gospel of *Christ* and rejected it;
-not because they heard the gospel of *conscience* and denied it;
-but because they did hear and see and taste and smell and feel the gospel of *creation* – and they suppressed it; they came up with speculations that denied it; they refused to see the obvious and thank a clearly evident Creator for it.

And they will be, Paul writes, *without excuse*.

Creation will serve as the final and undeniable evidence of the unbeliever's ungrateful heart that chose to suppress the obvious truth of a Creator – and the jury will deliver an eternal verdict of guilt and judgment.

My friend, if you have not yet trusted in Christ as your Creator God and eternal Savior, there is still time . . . there is still today.

We sang earlier today – you sang it – but did you really mean it?

I sing the mighty power of God
That set my spirit free
He bore the wrath that I deserved
And died at Calvary
I sing the death that gives me life
That crushed the Serpent's head
I live in resurrection power
That raised Christ from the dead

Let me tell you what creation was intended by God to do – and this is my final lesson for today:

10. Creation leads us to continual amazement and joyful praise of our

Creator God

Nicolaus Copernicus wrote in the 16th century, “Who could live in close contact with the most consummate order and wisdom and not adore the Architect of all these things?”

–Nicolaus
Copernicus

I sing the mighty power of God
That made the mountains rise
That spread the flowing seas abroad
And built the lofty skies
I sing the wisdom that ordained
The sun to rule the day
The moon shines full at His command
And all the stars obey

I sing the goodness of the Lord
That filled the earth with food
He formed the creatures with His word
And then pronounced them good
Lord how Thy wonders are displayed
Where'er I turn my eye
If I survey the ground I tread
Or gaze upon the sky

There's not a plant or flower below
But makes Thy glories known
And clouds arise and tempests blow
By order from Thy throne
While all that borrows life from Thee
Is ever in Thy care
And everywhere that man can be
Thou God art present there.

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i Adapted from Mark Batterson, *A Trip Around the Sun* (Baker Books, 2015), pages 143

ii Adapted from Phillip Keller, *Still Waters* (Revell, 1980), p. 133

iii The Message

iv Allen P. Ross, *A Commentary on The Psalms: Volume 3* (Kregel, 2016), p. 366

v Charles Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David, Volume 3* (Zondervan, 1977), p. 2

vi John MacArthur, *The Battle for the Beginning* (W Publishing, 2001), p. 14

vii Adapted from Mark Batterson, *The Grave Robber* (Baker Books, 2014), page 19

viii Sing Joyfully, 1989