



Threads of hope

7 DEVOTIONALS THAT WILL HELP YOU GET CLOSER
TO THE WORK CREATED BY THE LORD



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Published thanks to IFES (International Fellowship of Evangelical Students), which, together with the John Templeton Foundation, created the Logos and Cosmos Initiative (ILC) in Latin America and Francophone Africa.

This is a resource resulting from the Level 2 project in Costa Rica called "Healing the Earth of the Creator's Garden," led by catalyst Mónica Cortés Cortés.

Their support and financial resources have made it possible for this book to reach you.

Devotionals by Brayan Chaves Varela, Elieth Gómez Serrano, Allison Centeno Chaves, Mónica Cortés Cortés, Luis Carlos Saborío Vásquez, Valeria Duarte Fernández, Rubén Tomás Langston Smith, and Yuliana Miranda Villegas.

Illustrations by Ana Lucía Martínez Muñoz.

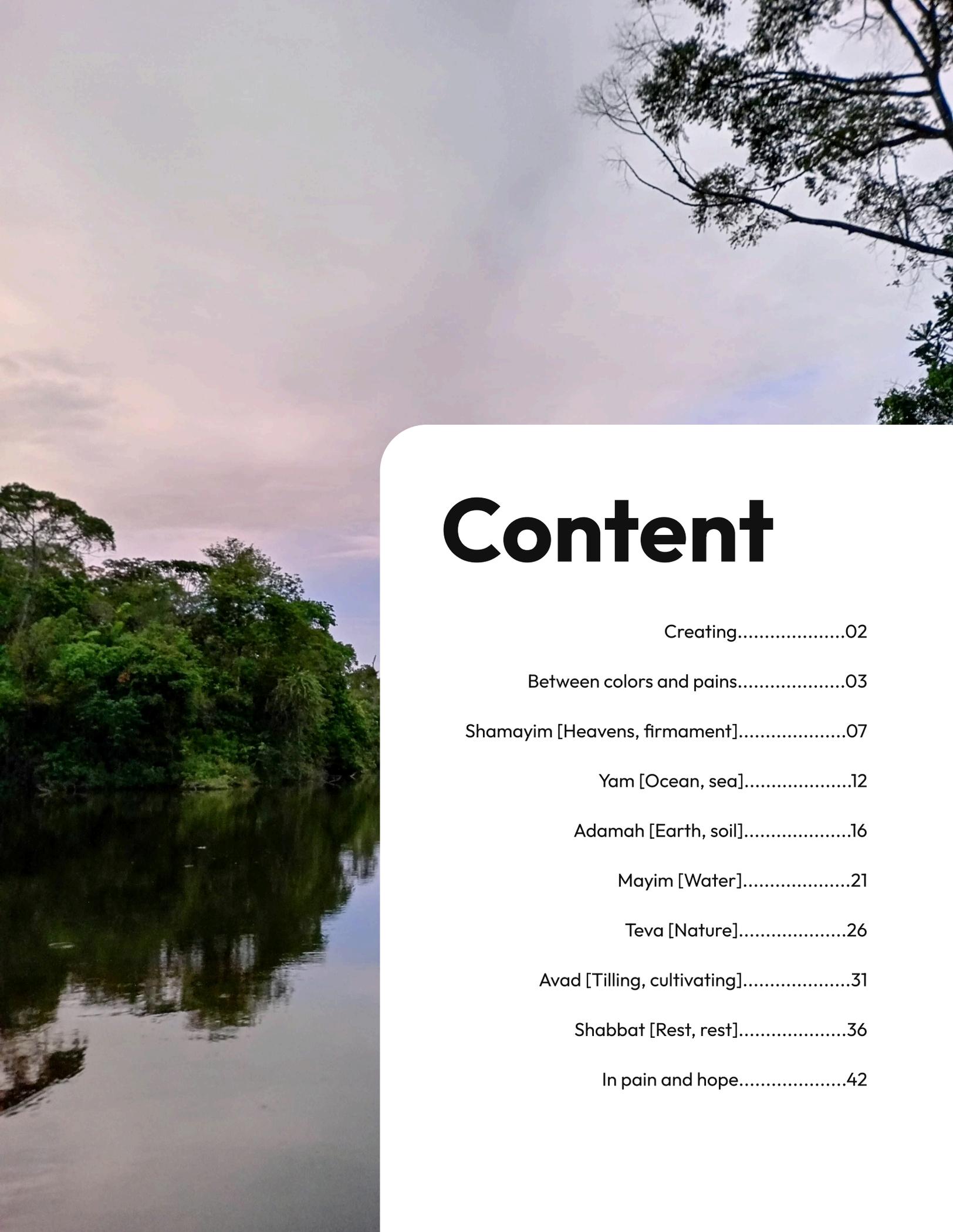
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English translator: Elizabeth Monteiro Prieto



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The Lord brought me forth as the first of his works, before his deeds of old;

I was formed long ago, at the very beginning, when the world came to be.

When there were no watery depths, I was given birth, when there were no springs overflowing with water; before the mountains were settled in place, before the hills, I was given birth, before he made the world or its fields or any of the dust of the earth.

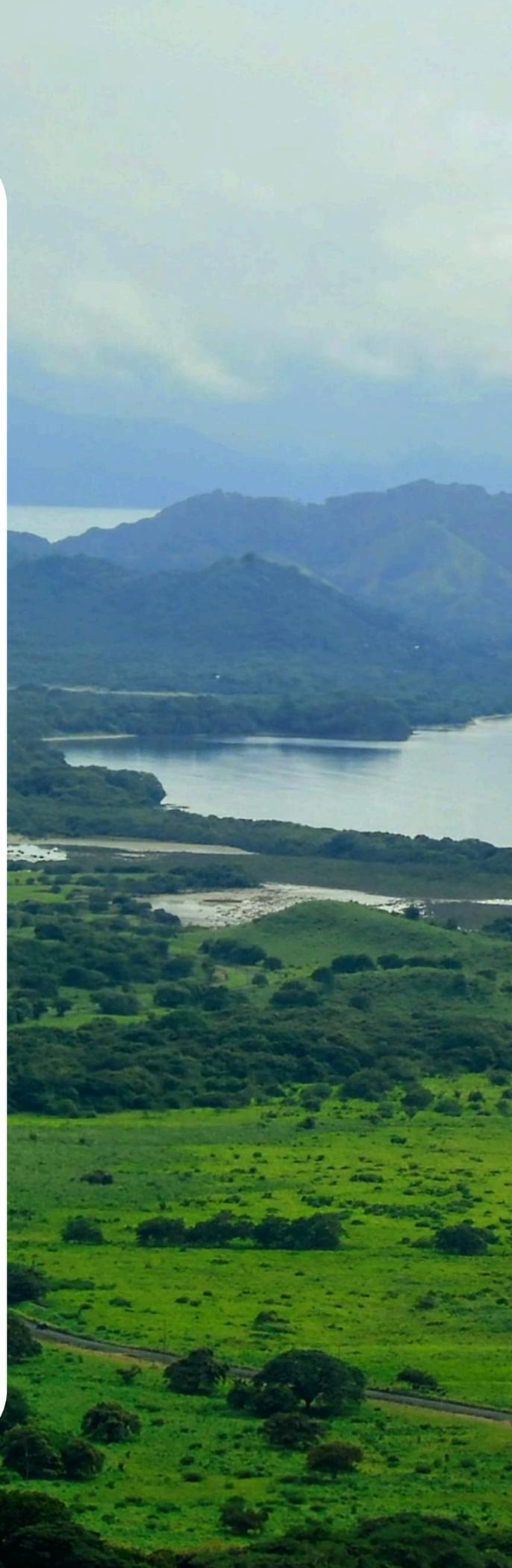
I was there when he set the heavens in place, when he marked out the horizon on the face of the deep, when he established the clouds above and fixed securely the fountains of the deep, when he gave the sea its boundary so the waters would not overstep his command, and when he marked out the foundations of the earth.

Then I was constantly at his side.

I was filled with delight day after day, rejoicing always in his presence, rejoicing in his whole world and delighting in humankind.

I, wisdom, dwell together with prudence; I possess knowledge and discretion.

Proverbs 8: 22-31 (NIV)



Creating

We are now embarking on a journey using this tool, comprising seven devotionals, which will enable you to approach the Lord's created work from a unique perspective. We invite you to delve into relevant topics in creation care. Yes, that same creation imagined and designed by the One who imagined and created us. We will journey through seven elements created by God in Genesis that are attributed to the natural and cultural world.

Professionals, Christians, and members of ECU (United Christian Students), the student movement in Costa Rica, have been responsible, from their respective areas of expertise, for putting pen to paper in the following pages and for creating a guide that reminds us that our voice counts, and our knowledge is shared. Hope for a healthier environment must be fostered by us Christians. Jesus came not only to reconcile our relationship with Him, but with all of creation. In creation, God considered that everything He created was good, and He rejoiced in it.

Today, we live in a fragmented world where our vision is often focused on our own well-being, and we overlook every element that the Lord has left us to see, enjoy, care for, and live through these resources.

In THREADS OF HOPE, we want to start embroidering a new reality built by all of us, to leave oceans, skies, soils, rivers, ecosystem, production fields, and time for resting in better conditions than what we observe in our neighborhoods and communities. Through this guide, we invite you to reflect on these seven topics and provide you with actionable steps you can take. We invite you to meet with your friends to discuss each topic and create action activities together. This is a resource for you. We hope it can bring you closer to a more comprehensive mission of the kingdom of God.

We thank the Lord for the lives of those who created each devotional and were involved in the design of this resource.

We are also grateful to IFES (International Fellowship of Evangelical Students), which, together with the John Templeton Foundation, created the Logos and Cosmos Initiative (LCI) in Latin America and French-speaking Africa.

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Between colors and pains

There is Doña Lupe, sitting in her rocking chair near the old-fashioned window that allows her to see a flowering yellow tree in the neighbor's yard, while the shining rays of sunset make it glow with such incredible beauty. Next to her, a cup of coffee, the gray cat, and a box with different-colored threads. Her eyes squint as her lenses allow her to focus clearly on what she is doing. She's embroidering and embroidering, inserting the needle and following the pattern drawn on the white fabric. She changes her thread colors as often as necessary. Lupita, as they called her as a child, still has an incredible imagination. In her embroidery, she interweaves thoughts, ideas, lessons learned, and life.

Her art seems to tell a fascinating story.

Bright colorful butterflies fly over the turbulent

sea, unknowingly illuminating a space of darkness. They come and go. Or at least that's what Lupe's delicate stitches seem to show. A multicolored butterfly makes the sun smile, which shines a radiant light that plunges into the heart of those who observe such a laborious embroidery. Now it is palpable; you can see the sky and sea with hues similar to those of a larimar stone. Colors ranging from white to light blue and deep blue highlight purity and bring peace to a troubled heart.

In the distance, amid calm waves, we find something that contrasts. How beautiful! A color not previously captured. It seems to have emerged from the depths. However, it has been there for years or even centuries. Brown, black, reddish, orange, beige, chocolate brown... it brings forth an explosion, barely visible, that includes what is needed to create life.

From the highest point, moss-colored vines descend, clinging to the branches of imposing mountain almond trees, which in turn reveal, among their bark, minute algae, lichens, bacteria, and fungi visible only under a microscope. And Lupe embroidered it with volume, as if it were three-dimensional; she sewed a plant cell. There is life!

Some fruit falls from above, and when it decomposes, it feeds the soil and the microorganisms that celebrate the delicacy. In the midst of its surrounding conditions, a delicate seedling emerges, looking up at the tree it will inevitably become.

The panorama takes you through a fantastic story.

Something coming out of the larimar stone's waters! It is a whale swimming with its calf near a large sea turtle. There is life in the ocean, too! In the sky, a magnificent frigate bird flies with its peculiar red heart-shaped crop, trying to conquer the female. It flies and flies until it approaches an island. From above, it observes a crab walking backwards, a clam hiding in the sand, a spider spinning its delicate silk, tapirs walking with their young, and insects jumping from one place to another, among many other animals that now coexist in the dense forests.

In the distance, it approaches something transparent yet audible, cutting through the dark skies and bright lights.

-It's raining," Lupe tells me as she sips her coffee, "if you look closely, it is watering the seeds in the soil and feeding the mountains that

delicately recognize where to direct the infiltrated and superficial water so that it reaches the rivers that, in the form of veins, embrace and run through the land, heading, without turning back, towards the breath-taking ocean."

Smiling, I observe Lupe, and I see all her experience and dedication in the fabric that falls from her legs, as if it were a linen dress. The sunset has taken over the orange-hued sky of a cold November evening, and the tree with its yellow trimmings has now become a black silhouette that resembles arms outstretched to the sky in an act of reverence.

I look back at the embroidery and see that clay figures are beginning to emerge from the dust. They have feet, hands, hearts, reason, and conscience. They walk up to, name, and lovingly care for the animals. They cultivate the land to feed themselves and take care of every meter used. There they are, in healthy coexistence with the created environment, as if they were observing a driver who indicates the rhythm and intensity of their movements: when to be quiet, when to work, when to embrace, when to talk, and, of course, when to rest.

But her stitches don't end there. Lupe continues to work on her needle. So far, there is calm and joy in that colorful fabric. No one knows who Lupe is making it for. Perhaps her imagination is just running wild, or these are memories of stories she heard as a child.

Her strokes don't stop, but she sighs deeply.

-What's next? -I ask Lupe with immense joy.

-What's coming next is painful- she replies despondently. -Every trace I will make from now on signifies what man has done through the ages.

I did not immediately understand what Lupe was trying to communicate. My mind was

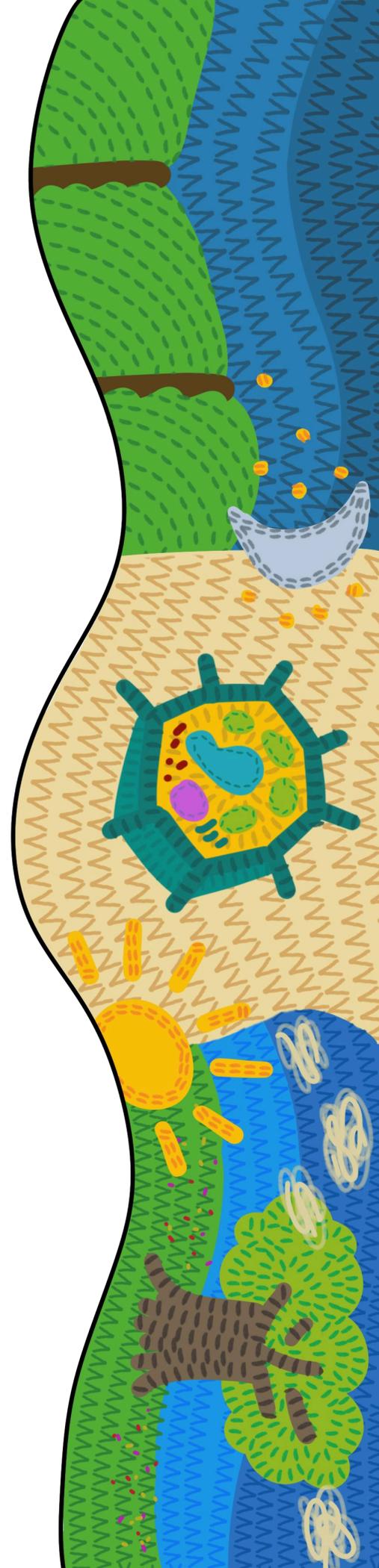
trying to connect her answer with the vibrant embroidery full of colors, textures, and life that I had observed for almost an hour. Then, I stopped looking at her face with a doubtful expression and looked down at the pattern she had drawn on the white cloth. It was then that a deep pain arose within me, bringing tears to my eyes. Now, everything was clearer.

There were soils where no plants emerged, and even if they had, they would not have allowed any movement due to the soil's hardness, which prevented the worms from digging in. Even if they had managed to dig in, they would have had no food to survive. My sight moved a few centimeters to the right, and I observed traces on the canvas that showed a fire spreading until it reached a dry forest, unique in its ecosystem. At the other end, I could see trees falling like folioscopes. And so, the fauna was diminishing, while those who were still alive ran in search of refuge, finding on their way arduous expanses of crops and, if they were lucky, tributaries of water where plastics and chemicals flowed into the sea.

I turned my gaze away from those drawings, still waiting to be embroidered; I could no longer bear to look at them. My heart couldn't handle the lump that had formed in my throat. It seemed that the driver was no longer steering that story, or the clay figures had abandoned that journey.

And that is how Lupe expressed some of her thoughts, ideas, lessons, and experiences through her art. It reflects part of what we've done today and what we've become.

Mónica L. Cortés, November 2024



*Should I keep closing my eyes, Lord, to talk to
you?*

*I've walked, I've sailed, I've sat down
My hearing and sight have been sensitive so that
I could feel you
I found you, Abba*

*As the sun went down with my burdens, you
made yourself present in the twilight sky
In the depths of the ocean, you surrounded me
with exuberant colors, lifting my spirit
In the handful of earth there was life, there was
hope, there was thoughtful design
I found you, Abba*

*In the sound of the water gushing out of the
spring that gives life, joy, and peace
In the imposing trees that home thousands of
organisms, you made music with your branches
bringing tranquility to the dejected heart
When the miracle of germination occurred and I
watched the seed grow
into healthy food on the table*

*The day I shed my routine and took a deep
breath, you brought rest to my body, soul, and
spirit*

I found you, Abba

*And now, I pray with my eyes open, because I
see, hear, and feel you in every detail that you
created*

I found you, Abba

Mónica L. Cortés, February 2025

Shamayim

[CIELOS, FIRMAMENTO]

And God said, "Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water." So God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it. And it was so. God called the vault "sky." And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day.

Genesis 1:6-8 (NVI)

God's Canvas

By Brayan Chaves Varela and Elieth Gómez Serrano
Natural resource management | Environmental health



Introduction

The air we breathe and the sky we admire are part of God's masterpiece, a living canvas that reminds us of His power and love. I grew up in Limón, Sixaola, surrounded by trees, mountains, and the coast. The blue sky, the clouds dancing in the wind, and the clean breeze were all part of my daily life. However, when I left my home, I discovered that this beauty is not always apparent. In many parts of our country and the world, the air is polluted, which affects our health and tarnishes the heavenly canvas that God has given us.

In Central America, air pollution is a significant issue that poses a threat to both human health and the environment. Countries such as Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador face dangerous levels of PM2.5 (parts per million) particles, exceeding the limits recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO). Cities like Guatemala City, Tegucigalpa, and Mixco reflect this troubling reality, and even Costa Rica, known for its environmental commitment, is not immune to the challenge. In the Greater Metropolitan Area, traffic, industrial emissions, and waste burning worsen air quality issues. In rural areas

such as Sixaola, agricultural practices like crop burning contribute to the degradation of the sky. This problem transcends borders: the WHO warns that more than 99% of the world's population breathes polluted air, which profoundly impacts both health and environmental balance.

The theme of this devotional, "God's Canvas," invites us to contemplate the sky not only as part of the landscape but also as a call to worship the Creator and commit ourselves to caring for the air, that essential element connecting the earth with the heavens. The Bible declares:

*"The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands."
Psalm 19:1 (NIV)*

In caring for His creation, we express gratitude and reverence for the marvelous divine design, testifying to His greatness and preserving His perfect work.

How are we caring for this gift? What actions can we take to maintain God's perfect work and testify to His glory?

Invitation

Have we paused to consider how our daily actions affect the air we breathe? Every vehicle we drive, every piece of waste we burn, and every forest we destroy pleads for the care we have overlooked. As Christians, we are called to be stewards of creation, including the air that sustains life.

Before we dive into practical activities, I invite you to contemplate "God's Canvas." Take a moment to go outdoors and observe the sky: the clouds, the wind brushing your face, the stars, the moon, or any details you discover when you look up. May this experience draw you closer to God and remind you of His greatness. Engage all your senses in this reflection. If possible, lie down on the grass or stand barefoot on the ground while gazing up at the sky. Close your eyes to listen to the wind, feel how the air caresses your skin, and savor the freshness of the breeze. Inhale deeply, allowing the air to fill your body with oxygen, and exhale slowly as you reflect on the gift of creation. May this moment of stillness and connection prepare you to worship the Creator and renew your commitment as His steward.

Comment on this with someone or write: How did you feel about this activity? What emotions or thoughts came to mind as you looked at the sky or felt the breeze on your face?

Biblical text: Jeremiah 29:4-7

Context

Jeremiah is considered one of Israel's main prophets. Due to the rich messianic content of his work and his messages of hope regarding the restoration of Israel and Judah, he is also associated with the concept of the Messiah. Jeremiah exercised his ministry during the final stages of a prolonged period of spiritual, moral, and political decline in the kingdom of Judah.

In the verses preceding this passage, we read that it is a letter addressed to the people exiled to Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar. Israel has faced God's judgment by allowing the Babylonians to conquer them and take some of the people captive; however, even in these circumstances, God speaks to His people through the prophet, showing that He has not abandoned them despite their disobedience.

Let's reflect on what the Bible teaches us about caring for God's creation and our active involvement, keeping in mind that when we talk about the

heavens, we often include the surrounding air as well. First, let us meditate on God's greatness and our privilege of being His stewards here on earth.

Thus says the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel, to all whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: "Build houses and dwell in them; plant gardens and eat their fruit."
Jeremiah 29:4-5 (NIV)

In these first two verses, we can see that the words in Jeremiah's letter come from God; it is not Jeremiah who seeks to encourage the people in their difficulties, but rather God, showing us that He has not forgotten the people of Israel.

Another important aspect is the instructions to live in the city they relocate to, build houses, and plant vegetable gardens; that is, to settle down and not seek to return. God is showing them that they can develop their lives where they are and that they should now be part of Babylonian daily life, not as slaves, but as citizens.

"Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper."
Jeremiah 29:6-7 (NIV)

One aspect of the text is the call to marry and have children and grandchildren. This reveals the level of involvement that God expects the Israelites to have in Babylon. Building a family requires a sense of belonging to that place as their home.

Let's focus on verse 7, where God provides further insight into His attitude toward the city of Babylon. They must ensure the city's welfare; what would ensuring that welfare involve?

Besides seeking welfare, what else should the people of Israel do in relation to Babylon, according to verse 7?

God expects the Israelites to engage with Babylon's reality as though it were their people and home, all while maintaining their identity as God's people; they must seek the city's welfare. This means that the city should thrive not just politically or economically, but as mentioned in the previous verses, they are also invited to plant gardens and enjoy their fruit, creating according to the practices they understood involved God's care for His

(1) Acosta, M., Padilla, R. y Velloso, R. (2019). Comentario bíblico contemporáneo. Editorial Certeza Argentina. pp. 1960.

creation. The well-being of the city air is also part of this wellness.

The Israelites' lifestyle in the city would align with the guidance from God through His Law once they arrived in the Promised Land. They may not have fully developed it because they were under the authority of the Babylonians. However, they need to remember that their lifestyle should focus on the welfare of the city, not just the buildings, but also the people. In this sense, they were to strive for the well-being of the Babylonians, as this would also ensure their own well-being. Thus, there is an interdependence in God's creation.

Although this passage does not detail actions in favor of creation, the lifestyle that God expects from His people, as outlined in the books of the Law, reveals God's concern for the responsible use of resources and a sense of duty to others, particularly the community.

When considering the quality of life in our cities, particularly the quality of the air, we should reflect on how we use resources and ensure their well-being. Polluted air and skies obscured by the filth we produce should prompt us to reflect and take action regarding our care for God's creation and the well-being of our cities and communities.

Reflection

Based on this text, let's reflect on the following questions:

1. How can we actively participate in caring for our city and its air?
2. Are our means of production consistent with caring for the welfare of the city, town, or region where we live?
3. The waste we generate pollutes the air around us, so how can we be responsible with our waste management?
4. Why do you think Christians today are so passive on this issue of caring for creation, God's canvas, and the air as part of our responsibility on Earth?
5. What daily actions in your life directly impact God's canvas?
6. How can we honor God by caring for creation, and specifically, the sky or air around us?

Practical actions

Individual:

- Choose to walk, bike, or take public transportation whenever possible. Regularly inspect and maintain your car to lower emissions.
- Avoid using products that affect air quality, such as aerosol sprays. Research the sources of the products you choose.

At home:

- Consider sustainable alternatives for waste disposal, like recycling and composting, to save energy at home.

In the community:

- Organize tree-planting days with friends in your community or near rivers.
- Organize prayer walks to reflect on creation and intercede for local and global environmental issues.



Final reflection

The sky, with its beauty, constantly reminds us of our Creator's greatness and glory. In every cloud, star, and whisper of the wind, we can see his divine imprint and his infinite love. However, as stewards of His creation, we must remember that "God's canvas" is not only a gift to admire but also a responsibility that we have received with love and reverence.

Caring for the air is a practical form of worship, a reflection of our gratitude and obedience to the One who entrusted us with His work. Our actions, however small they may seem, have the power to testify to our faith, showing the world that we follow the God who sustains life.

May this devotional inspire us to contemplate the skies more profoundly and to commit to the care of this divine gift. Let us always remember the words of Psalm 19:1 (NIV):

"The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands."

May our lives also tell of his glory, through our words, decisions, and actions, being faithful to our calling as his stewards.

Let us pray that God will guide us on this path of responsibility and gratitude, and that our lives will reflect his love and care for all creation.

Prayer

Lord, thank you for the skies that tell us of your glory and the air we breathe. Forgive us for our carelessness and for not valuing the blessing of clean air. May our lifestyle reflect our love for you, for what you have created, and for our neighbor, and may we actively and consciously get involved in the search for the well-being of our city. Amen!



Yam

[OCEAN, SEA]



And God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear." And it was so. God called the dry ground "land," and the gathered waters he called "seas." And God saw that it was good.
[...]

And God said, Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky." So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living thing with which the water teems and that moves about in it, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

Genesis 1:9-10, 20-21 (NIV)

The greatness of the ocean and the sovereignty of God

By Allison Centeno Chaves - Marine Biologist



Introduction

The ocean is vast, mysterious, and essential to life on Earth. It covers about 70% of the planet's surface, regulates the climate, produces more than 50% of the oxygen we breathe, and supports an impressive variety of biodiversity. In Costa Rica, 92% of our territory consists of sea, reminding us that our identity and well-being are deeply intertwined with this immense ecosystem. However, despite its vastness, we only know about 7% of its depths and the creatures that inhabit them.

The ocean, with its immense and mysterious nature, evokes feelings of awe, fear, and profound respect. Its expanse seems infinite, and its depths still hold secrets that humans are only beginning to discover. For some, the ocean represents freedom and adventure; for others, it is an unfathomable and unreachable abyss. Similarly, we often perceive God as distant, immense, and complex, difficult to understand

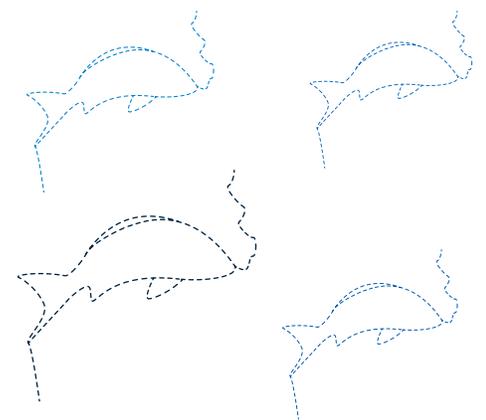
or reach. However, like the ocean, God is not a distant being but a living presence that sustains our existence and surrounds us at every moment.

As a marine biologist, I feel this connection when I dive into the water and witness the majesty of His creation. From coral reefs bursting with color and life to immense abyssal plains that appear otherworldly, the ocean showcases God's intentional design and incredible power. Its beauty is striking yet fragile, vulnerable to the impacts of pollution, climate change, and overexploitation. Just as God entrusted us with the Earth to manage it wisely, He also gave us the ocean to care for and protect.

The Bible mentions the ocean on multiple occasions, highlighting its power and role in creation. In the book of Genesis, God separated the waters and gave them a place in His perfect design. In the Book of Job, the ocean is

described as a majestic force, yet it is also limited by divine will. In the Psalms, the ocean serves as a testament to God's greatness and sovereignty over all creation.

Just as the ocean is essential to life on Earth, it also teaches us profound spiritual lessons. It reminds us of our smallness in comparison to God's greatness, the importance of humility, and the call to be good stewards of creation. Through this devotional, we will explore what God's Word teaches us about the ocean, its purpose in the world, and our responsibility to care for it with love and reverence.



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- (2) Fauville, G., Strang, C., Cannady, M. A., & Chen, Y. F. (2018). Development of the International Ocean Literacy Survey: measuring knowledge across the world. *Environmental Education Research*, 25(2), 238–263. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2018.1440381>
- (3) DeVries, T., Holzer, M., & Primeau, F. (2017). Recent increase in oceanic carbon uptake driven by weaker upper-ocean overturning. *Nature*, 542(7640), 215–218. <https://doi.org/10.1038/nature21068>
- (4) Cortés, J. (2019, enero 23). ¿Por qué debe Costa Rica proteger sus áreas marinas profundas? Schmidt Ocean Institute. <https://schmidtocean.org/cruise-log-post/por-que-debe-costa-rica-protoger-sus-areas-marinas-profundas/>

Invitation

Before we dive into reading, we invite you to engage in a brief connection activity:

- If you are in a group, share a significant experience related to the sea (a visit, a memory, a teaching).
- If you are alone, take a moment to write down what emotions the ocean stirs in you and how it connects you to God.

Biblical text: Job 38: 4-11

The following passages will help us reflect on the ocean from a biblical perspective:

• God establishes limits and order in creation

'And God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear." And it was so. God called the dry ground "land," and the gathered waters he called "seas." And God saw that it was good.' Genesis 1:9-10 (NIV)

• The ocean as part of God's praise

'You covered it with the watery depths as with a garment; the waters (...) You set a boundary they cannot cross; never again will they cover the earth.' Psalm 104:6-9 (NIV)

'Praise the Lord from the earth, you great sea creatures and all ocean depths.' Psalm 148:7 (NIV)

"See how he scatters his lightning about him, bathing the depths of the sea." Job 36:30 (NIV)

Context

The books of Genesis and Job, traditionally attributed to Moses, present a vision of God as the sovereign Creator. Genesis describes creation with an intentional order, while Job highlights God's greatness in setting limits to the sea and controlling its forces.

"Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? [...]. "Who shut up the sea behind doors when it burst forth from the womb, when I made the clouds its garment and wrapped it in thick darkness, when I fixed limits for it and set its doors and bars in place, when I said, 'This far you may come and no farther; here is where your proud waves halt'?" Job 38:4-11 (NIV)

In Job 38, we find a series of questions from God. What emotion or attitude do the rhetorical questions in the chapter seem to express? What symbolic images are used to describe the sea and its relationship to clouds and darkness? What elements does the Bible mention as part of the physical boundaries of the sea?

Reflection

1. Creation is described with order and within limits. How can we relate this to the balance in nature and our environmental responsibility?
2. God establishes boundaries for the sea, showing his authority. How can we apply this idea to moments of uncertainty in our lives?
3. In Job 38, the morning stars and the sons of God praise creation. How should we respond to the grandeur of nature?
4. The sea symbolizes human humility in the face of divine power. How does this invite us to respect creation and live humbly?
5. References to doors and locks containing the sea suggest divine control. How does this encourage us to trust God in the midst of chaos?

Practical actions

Our responsibility does not end with reflection; we must take concrete actions to care for the ocean:

Individual:

- Reflect on our relationship with creation and pray for wisdom in managing natural resources, promoting care for creation within your church.

At home

- Reduce the use of disposable plastics, recycle, and consume sustainable products.

In the community:

- Participate in beach cleanups or other local activities that promote the well-being of ecosystems, educate the public about environmental issues, and reduce the use of single-use products that harm marine ecosystems.

Final reflection

The ocean serves as a reminder of God's power and majesty. It demonstrates that, although we may not understand its beginning or end, God knows and governs it. Just as He sets limits to the sea, He also empowers us to make responsible decisions about how we interact with His creation. May this devotional inspire us to honor God not only with our words but also through our actions in caring for our planet.

Prayer

Lord, thank you for the beauty and immensity of the ocean, for reminding us of your greatness through the natural world. Help us to be good stewards of your creation, respecting the limits you have set, and acting responsibly to care for our planet. May we reflect your love and your order in every action. Amen!



Adamah

[EARTH, SOIL]

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 2 Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. Genesis 1:1-2 (NIV)

Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. Genesis 2:7 (NIV)

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. Genesis 2:15 (NIV)

Healing the soil of the Creator's garden

By Mónica Cortés Cortés - Forest Science Engineer/Ecological Agriculture



Introduction

Reflecting on my elementary school education, I remember my social studies classes, where the teacher taught that planet Earth is approximately 70% water and 30% land. I envisioned and focused on a vast, azure-blue mass of deep, serene water, which I believed covered the entire surface of the planet. Have you ever pictured the enormous amount of water that surrounds us? To me, it was fascinating. However, for most of my life, I have noticed the land more than the sea or rivers. This is because humans reside on the land mass known as land, and occasionally, we have the opportunity to fly or sail over water.

Currently, more than 75% of the planet's land (excluding Greenland and Antarctica) is used by humans. It is estimated that about 38% of this area is devoted to agriculture (25.3% for pasture-grassland and 12.7% for food crops). Many people are treading the earth today, and the most essential basic need—food—is primarily produced on the ground.

Additionally, it is estimated that 25% of the planet's dry land areas show high rates of degradation. What should we do now, considering the reality we live in?

The activities carried out in various practices that involve intervention in the soil can improve, maintain, or deteriorate it. In this sense, our purpose to improve it can be focused on the spaces where we can intervene individually, such as the land we have in our homes. Professionals involved in soil production are invited to visualize improvement practices in areas where food, forestry, or livestock products are produced. Society will continue to grow, and we must anticipate the state in which these areas will be left for future generations. It is time to adopt a social and comprehensive approach that will guide our actions as we care for the land, as a testament to our faith and love for God and the community.

It invites a commitment to the integral restoration that the gospel offers, in order to improve the conditions of people living today and those to come.

Invitation

- Search the Internet for characteristics and images of healthy and degraded soil. Once you have gathered this information, reflect:
- What is your first impression?
- What emotions does each image evoke within you?
- If you look around you (house, neighborhood, town, university...), what features do you see on the soil? Does it resemble any of the descriptions of healthy or degraded soil?

Biblical text:

Leviticus 25: 1-7

(5) UNCCD [Convención de las Naciones Unidas de lucha contra la Desertificación]. (2014). La tierra en cifras los medios de subsistencia en su punto de inflexión. Alemania. https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/documents/Land_in_%20numbers_SP.pdf

(6) FAO [Food and Agriculture Organization]. (2020). Uso de la tierra en la agricultura según las cifras. Roma. <https://www.fao.org/sustainability/news/detail/es/c/1279267/>

It is time to ask ourselves: Does the Bible have anything to tell us about caring for the land? Of course it does! The first verse of the Bible states:

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."
Genesis 1:1 (NIV)

This is repeated for the second time:

"This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, when the Lord God made the earth and the heavens."
Genesis 2:4 (NIV)

Wonderful! God's first creations were not human beings, flora, fauna, or oceans, but the heavens and the earth. The earth was one of the first images projected into the author of life's imagination. Not only that, but it was used to create the animals (Genesis 1:24-25) and man himself, who was made from the dust of the ground. The land had a garden that bore trees and fruit.

Then the Lord God formed a man[c] from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed.
Genesis 2:7-8 (NIV)

And man was instructed to perform in the Creator's garden:

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. Genesis 2:15 (NIV)

However, man's sin in the Garden of Eden affected the earth through his actions.

To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat from it,' 'Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."

Genesis 3:17-19 (NIV)

God aimed to fully restore the relationship between Himself, humanity, and creation through the instructions given to Moses. These included soil care, reminding us of the "cultivate and care" aspect of that production area. A God who takes thorough care of

everything created because everything was good in His eyes.

Context

Genesis is a book traditionally attributed to Moses, whose purpose is to provide guidance to both priests and laity regarding proper conduct in the presence of a Holy God. The people of Israel had departed from Egypt and were journeying to the Promised Land. They needed to learn how to relate to God before entering and settling in the Promised Land, as possessing it would carry the responsibility of being a light to the nations. The Jubilee year was celebrated after seven sabbatical years and served as a reminder that the land and its people belonged to God.

In Leviticus 25:1-7, we find guidance on how the people are to live in the presence of the covenant God in the Promised Land. The Lord requests that the land observe a year of rest in His honor. Look through the text to identify the repeated phrases.

The Lord said to Moses at Mount Sinai, "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'When you enter the land I am going to give you, [...] but in the seventh year the land is to have a year of sabbath rest, a sabbath to the Lord.'"
Leviticus 25:1-2 (NIV)

(7) Acosta, M., Padilla, R. y Velloso, R. (2019). Comentario bíblico contemporáneo. Editorial Certeza Argentina. pp. 1960.

The Lord has specific instructions for the Israelites to follow. What were the instructions given on land care?

for six years sow your fields, and for six years prune your vineyards and gather their crops. But in the seventh year the land is to have a year of sabbath rest, a sabbath to the Lord. Do not sow your fields or prune your vineyards. Do not reap what grows of itself or harvest the grapes of your untended vines. The land is to have a year of rest. Leviticus 25:3-5 (NIV)

Isn't it beautiful to read that the land's rest means honoring the Lord? Look at the last verses of the text. Is there anything else that God cares about following this instruction? What was the purpose of the land enjoying a year of rest? What did this imply for the day laborer, farmer, foreigner, and animals?

Whatever the land yields during the sabbath year will be food for you—for yourself, your male and female servants, and the hired worker and temporary resident who live among you, as well as for your livestock and the wild animals in your land. Whatever the land produces may be eaten. Leviticus 25:6-7 (NIV)

Reflection

1. Instructions are used when there is no custom in a community or among individuals. Given the instruction provided by the Lord in this text, what could it signify for them to leave the land to rest for a year? What would it entail for the land to experience a year of rest?
2. The rest of the land implied that people could not work it, which, in a way, also favored their rest. What was the Lord inviting them to do during this period? Do you see any connection between God's providence and the passage in Matthew 6:25-34?
3. The invitation to rely on God's providence affected not only the landowners but also provided much-needed rest for the servant, laborer, resident, and animals nearby. Do these verses invite you in any way? How do you interpret the connection between caring for the land and loving your neighbor?
4. Are there any actions you can take to care for the land? Is there a way to invite others to help care for the land?
5. If you are a production professional, how can you gradually implement a sabbatical year (not literally, but through agroecological strategies) in your company?



Practical actions

We invite you to take action to improve the current state of the soil.

Individual:

- Participate in communal or national struggles for the care of the land.
- Research on agroecological strategies (use of living cover, organic fertilizers, herbicide reduction, crop rotation, agroforestry systems, among others).

In your home, community, or church:

- Implement ground cover with creeping plants to prevent wind and water erosion.
- Plant various types of plants and trees in different sizes to enhance soil aeration, aid in its decompaction, improve water infiltration, and provide shade.
- Employ a variety of plant types, as this promotes greater dynamism in the flora and fauna (including macro and microorganisms).
- Reincorporate organic kitchen waste into the soil to replenish its nutrients.

Final reflection

Our actions in caring for creation highlight our relationship with God. Understanding that caring for the land honors God prompts us to question whether our individual and collective actions contribute to the Lord's restoration of everything and everyone. When we reflect on and internalize that the Earth and everything on it belongs to God, we may act to restore it. Jesus came to reconcile all things, on earth and in heaven, bringing peace through the blood He shed on the cross (Colossians 1:20).

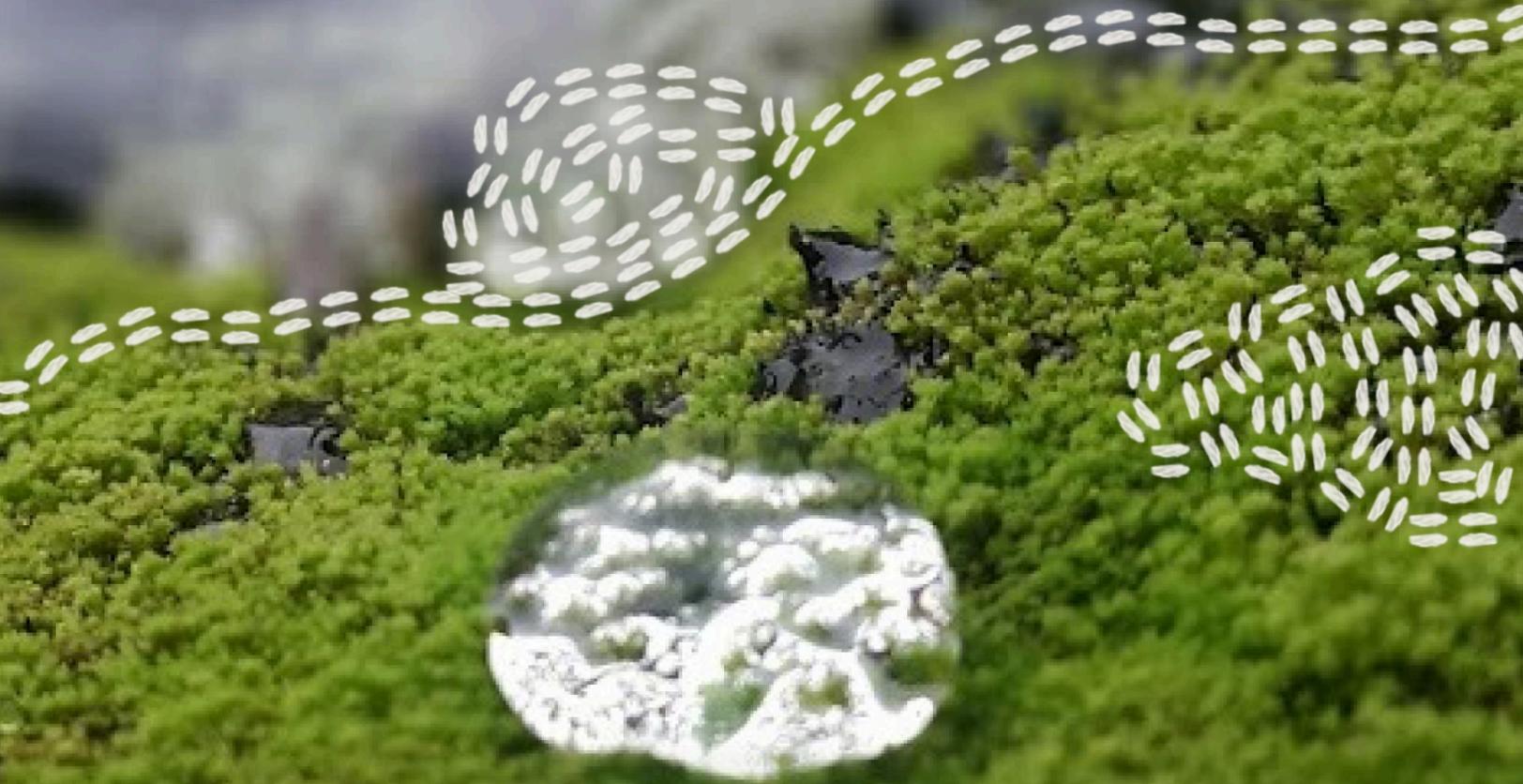
The invitation is still latent; it is time to stop, observe, and consider how to walk in social justice for those who are and will come, those who will need to continue producing (hopefully, from a good example and pattern that we implement today). I dream of visualizing that 30% of the planet's land consists of areas with healthy soil, well cared for, naturally fertilized, and where a diversity of flora and fauna thrives, invisible to the eye, but playing a marvelous role in the development of life.

Prayer

Lord, may we constantly remember in our thoughts the life that is in healthy soil. May our hearts and actions honor you in the care of the land. That same land that has the dust from which we were created, where the food that reaches our table is produced, and where the visible and invisible fauna and flora that are part of life inhabit. Give us a sensitive heart to fight against the pollution generated by agrochemicals, the burning that destroys flora and fauna, the movement of topsoil for tilling, and the resulting erosion and desertification. Teach us to be a voice that groans together with the Earth, to awaken the action of Christians. Amen!

Mayim

[WATER]



Now no shrub had yet appeared on the earth and no plant had yet sprung up, for the Lord God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no one to work the ground, but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground.
Genesis 2:5-6 (NIV)

The constant flow of his love

By Luis Carlos Saborío Vásquez - Hydrology Engineer



Introduction

Ever since I was a little boy, I've had a strange relationship with water. Whenever I headed to the river, I felt an overwhelming excitement about being there. However, upon arrival, I was terrified to enter the water because I worried I could get lost in the currents or that some animal, like an anaconda, might eat me (Anaconda 1, 2, and 3). I'd like to say that as I grew up my fear vanished, but to be honest, it never did. I still have concerns about going into the water; however, now that I'm older, my greatest fear is reaching the river and finding it empty.

Have you ever wondered how much water is available? It is estimated that 97.5% of the world's total water is saltwater, while only 2.5% is freshwater. This latter percentage is distributed with 68.7% in glaciers, 30.1% in groundwater, 0.8% in permafrost, and 0.4% in surface water and the atmosphere. Humans primarily utilize only 30.5% of this, which comes from groundwater, surface water, and the atmosphere. So, do you think there is enough water?

Luigino Bruni, in *Water and the Bible*, notes that for both ancient and modern humans, water is primordial because it is an integral part of the essence of creation itself. Water is the fundamental element of life, the first brick in the chain of living beings, and the environment in which creation unfolds. Life itself comes from and is sustained by water. This resource, which has accompanied us throughout history, has enabled us to open the way to new horizons, find sustenance in times of scarcity, and hold onto hope during droughts. It represents an unbridled force that carves its path wherever it flows. Water reminds me of God's faithfulness and mercy towards humanity and how His love embraces us and endures unconditionally from the beginning of the Genesis account.

Climate change, pollution in water bodies, increased demand from population growth, poor management, and extreme weather events leading to droughts are among the challenges facing water sources today.

After years of being part of our history in various phases, it seems that at this time we may no longer be able to grant future generations the right to find water in their river.

Invitation

Individually or in a group, you can use an app with sounds of rain, waves, or rivers and meditate with your eyes closed. Write: How did you feel before and after practicing the activity?

Find the nearest body of water (a river, lake, pond, or puddle) and observe the reflections in the sky or trees. If you have the opportunity, consider doing this at night to see the reflection of the moon and stars. Take a moment of silence and meditate on what you observe. Write down or share the emotions that arise.

On a foggy or muggy morning, step out into a field or mountain and take a deep breath. Savor the humidity in the air and its freshness. Reflect on how water is also present in the air.

(8) Villalobos Roberto. (2008). Cambio climático y recursos hídricos. *Revista de Ciencias Ambientales*, vol. 35, núm. 1, pp. 20-26 Universidad Nacional Heredia, Costa Rica. <https://www.redalyc.org/pdf/6650/665070695005.pdf>

(9) Bruni Luigi. (2021). El Agua y la Biblia. <https://www.luiginobruni.it/es/ec-bv/el-agua-y-la-biblia.html>

In a river, pool, or beach, float on the water with your eyes closed and allow your body to relax completely. Feel the water surrounding you and permit yourself to be enveloped by it.

Biblical text:

Psalm 104:3, 6-13

We will examine some biblical texts that include phrases or symbols of water within the word.

• From start to finish

The Bible begins with the waters of Genesis and concludes, in the final chapter of Revelation, with a river in the city. The power and love of God impart a new meaning to that which, in the beginning, was synonymous with disorder, abyss, and darkness.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.
Genesis 1:1-2 (NIV)

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.
Revelation 22:1-2 (NIV)

• Essence of life

The text of Genesis 2 teaches us how God assigns water a primary purpose in the development of creation.

This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, when the Lord God made the earth and the heavens. Now no shrub had yet appeared on the earth and no plant had yet sprung up, for the Lord God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no one to work the ground, but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground.
Genesis 2: 4-6 (NIV)

Context

The form in which Psalm 104 is written exemplifies Hebrew poetry. This type of literature emphasizes the use of similarities, vivid images, and richly descriptive language. In the psalm, water emerges as a recurring and significant theme, and the psalmist uses it as a potent poetic image to convey the wonderful, creative, and sustaining work of God. Throughout the psalm, we encounter water in various forms, moments, and scenarios, each revealing an aspect of God's character and His love for creation, sustained through the provision He delivers via water.

While reading the text, we invite you to identify the elements of nature mentioned by the psalmist and how he describes God's action regarding these elements. The psalmist, in verse 3, reveals to us the majesty and absolute sovereignty of the Lord, who rests upon the waters as a sign of His dominion and power over all creation.

And lays the beams of his upper chambers on their waters. He makes the clouds his chariot and rides on the wings of the wind [...] Psalm 104:3 (NIV).

(10) CR2. (2023) ¿Qué significa que el mundo haya entrado en ebullición global y cuáles son su implicancia? (El Mostrador) <https://www.cr2.cl/que-significa-que-el-mundo-haya-entrado-en-ebullicion-global-y-cuales-son-sus-implicancia-el-mostrador/>

(11) UNESCO. (2024). Las crisis del agua amenazan la paz mundial (informe). <https://www.unesco.org/es/articulos/las-crisis-del-agua-amenazan-la-paz-mundial-informe>

Verses 6 to 9 of the text describe how the waters, which initially represented chaos and disorder, were given limits and controlled by the power and sovereignty of God. This shows us that the Lord has the authority to establish order over chaos and that chaos is not above Him. Given this, what specific actions does God perform with the waters according to these verses, and what result is mentioned?

You covered it with the watery depths as with a garment; the waters stood above the mountains.

But at your rebuke the waters fled, at the sound of your thunder they took to flight; they flowed over the mountains, they went down into the valleys, to the place you assigned for them.

You set a boundary they cannot cross; never again will they cover the earth.

Psalm 104:6-9 (NIV)

In most of Psalm 104, we can see how water serves as a central element of creation.

In verses 10-13, water symbolizes God's care, unconditionality, faithfulness, and provision for us. We recognize that creation depends on God and how He responds to and satisfies the needs of His creation through this vital element: water.

What functions or roles are attributed to water in these verses, and which beings or aspects of creation benefit from it?

He makes springs pour water into the ravines; it flows between the mountains.

They give water to all the beasts of the field; the wild donkeys quench their thirst.

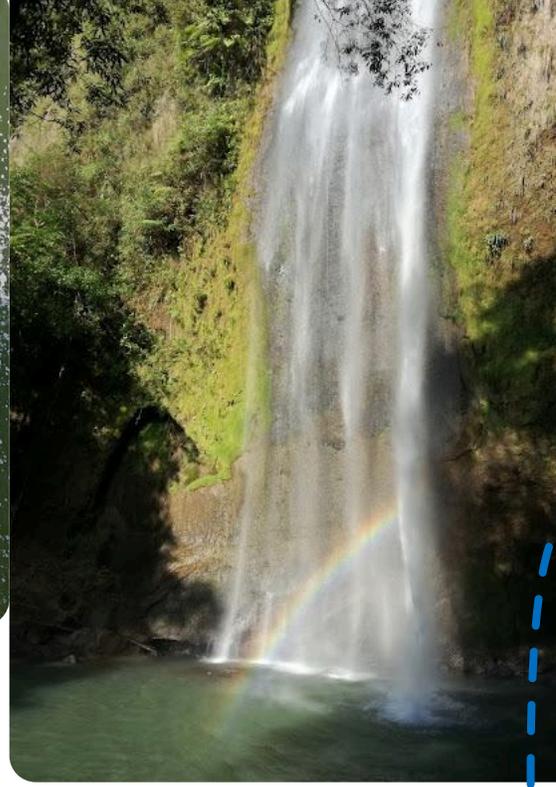
The birds of the sky nest by the waters; they sing among the branches.

He waters the mountains from his upper chambers; the land is satisfied by the fruit of his work.

Psalm 104:10-13 (NIV)

Reflection

1. We know that the Bible has literary diversity among its books. Taking this into account, do you think there is any symbolism in the fact that water is present at the beginning and end of the scriptures?
2. In Psalm 104, what is God's role in creation according to verses 5-9? How is your control over nature shown?
3. In what ways can you become more aware of God's provision in your life, even in the simplest things, such as the water you drink or the nature around you?
4. Do you believe that water is in creation only for our use and benefit?
5. How can you imitate God's care for creation by being more environmentally responsible or helping those who have basic needs, such as access to water?
6. How are God's faithfulness and mercy reflected in the water? What kind of lessons can we draw from this comparison?
7. What actions can you include to be a blessing to others, just as water is a means of provision and life in creation? How can you reflect God's care for water in your daily life?



Practical actions

Individual:

- Gather information on the current status of water resources in your country and the decisions being made regarding them.
- Raise awareness about the origins of what you consume and the associated water footprint of your consumption.

At home:

- Turn off the faucet while soaping dishes to save water by adopting small habits.
- Turn off lights and electronic devices that you are not using. By reducing energy consumption, you also help conserve water used in hydropower.

In the community:

- Join river cleanup campaigns and help protect water bodies.
- Plant trees to conserve the environment and maintain the water cycle.
- Gather information about the water source that serves your community (well, spring, or surface water intake) and its current condition to encourage its care and preservation.

Final reflection

When I was a kid, I used to watch a show called Dinosaurs. A quote that stayed with me was: "It's so easy to accept nature effortlessly because it's always there." By relating this phrase to water, we can reflect on how easily we neglect and irresponsibly take advantage of this resource, especially those of us who have the privilege of accessing it directly at home. I clearly see God's sustenance and faithfulness through water.

This serves as an invitation for each of us to adopt small habits that enable us to be better stewards of what we have received, defending and preserving these resources. The Lord, in His grace, allows us to enjoy His creation, but with this enjoyment comes the responsibility to care for what has been entrusted to us.

Prayer

Thank you, Lord, for your perfect work. Thank you for the immensity of your power, which divides, shares, and sustains all creation. I am grateful, Lord, because, although I do not fully understand the depth of water, you allow us to comprehend and respond to the responsibility we have in caring for water, a resource that has accompanied human beings throughout their history. Today, I ask you, Lord, to grant us greater sensitivity to recognize the importance of this resource, not only for our benefit but as a gift intended for all of creation. Help us understand that our responsibility extends beyond ourselves, and we must care for the environment and the well-being of all that you have created. Amen!

Teva

[NATURE]

Then God said, "Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds." And it was so.

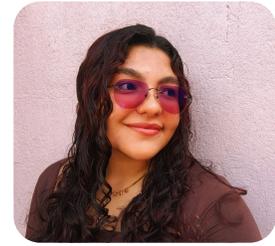
The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.
(Genesis 1:11-12 (NVI))

And God said, "Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: the livestock, the creatures that move along the ground, and the wild animals, each according to its kind." And it was so. God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.

(Genesis 1:24-25 (NVI))

Roots of faith: Caring for ecosystems

By Valeria Duarte Fernández - Forestry Science Engineer



Introduction

As a child, I loved watching television shows like National Geographic and Animal Planet. I have always been fascinated by animals and wildlife. However, I never thought this could relate to the Scriptures. When discussing topics in biological sciences or other fields, the focus is typically on study and research. A connection to faith is rarely made, let alone a commitment to care for Creation as part of our responsibility as Christians.

When I started leading field tours as part of my career, I developed a passion for plants that I hadn't experienced before. From that moment on, going to the mountains to observe and identify plants became one of my favorite activities. Studying their structures allowed me to appreciate the detail with which God created each plant, flower, and fruit; somehow, I felt that

He was communicating peace to me through His creation. Furthermore, as I have explored the teachings and biblical texts that discuss creation, I have discovered that we have a calling to be responsible stewards of the Earth, as mentioned in Genesis 1:26-28.

Latin America is one of the most biodiverse regions in the world. This region is home to three of the top five countries with the most substantial number of birds, amphibians, mammals, reptiles, fish, and plants. Although Costa Rica is not among the top three (generally Brazil, Colombia, and Mexico), it stands out for having the highest biodiversity density of any country in the world. In fact, it is estimated that Costa Rica contains approximately 5% of the officially described species on Earth, with plants being a considerable proportion.

Thus, we see how the Lord does excellent work: every leaf that is born, grows, and then falls to the ground decomposes and transforms into essential nutrients that the trees use to keep growing. Ultimately, everything is part of a cycle that sustains the Earth. However, it is unfortunate that Latin America faces numerous environmental challenges, primarily due to biodiversity loss, which is largely caused by human activities. In light of this, it is crucial to safeguard our natural wealth, which holds immense value.

(12) WWF. (2024). ABC del Marco Global de Biodiversidad Kunming-Montreal: Desafíos y oportunidades para América Latina y el Caribe. <https://wwf.panda.org/es/?12568966/ABC-del-Marco-Global-de-Biodiversidad-Kunming-Montreal-Desafios-y-oportunidades-para-America-Latina-y-el-Caribe#:~:text=En%20este%20escenario%20y%20teniendo,su%20diversidad%20biol%C3%B3gica%20y%20cultural>

(13) Carey- Webb, J. (2020). La biodiversidad de América Latina es crítica. <https://www.nrdc.org/es/bio/jessica-carey-webb/biodiversidad-america-latina-es-critica#:~:text=Am%C3%A9rica%20Latina%20alberga%20tres%20de,de%20la%20biodiversidad%20del%20mundo>

(14) Condega, X. (2022). Costa Rica posee la mayor densidad de biodiversidad del mundo, destaca medio internacional DW. El Mundo CR. <https://elmundo.cr/costa-rica/costa-rica-posee-la-mayor-densidad-de-biodiversidad-del-mundo-destaca-medio-internacional-dw/>

(15) Jiménez, Q. (2022). La gestación y culminación del Manual de Plantas de Costa Rica: una herramienta para el conocimiento y la conservación de la flora neotropical. Revista de Ciencias Ambientales, 56(1). <https://doi.org/10.15359/rca.56/1.14>

(16) Haz. (2023). América Latina: desafíos y oportunidades medioambientales. Revista Haz. <https://hazrevista.org/rsc/2023/07/america-latina-desafios-opportunidades-medioambientales/>

Invitation

Close your eyes and imagine a forest filled with diverse trees and inhabiting animals. Listen to the birds singing, the wind rustling through the leaves, and the monkeys swinging from branch to branch. Suddenly, all species begin to vanish, and gradually, the forest you envision transforms into a desert.

In small groups, illustrate the forest you envisioned, incorporating the animals you encountered. Use colors to emphasize the diversity and beauty of the ecosystem.

Reflect on the following:

1. What emotions come over you as you imagine this diverse forest and then watch it disappear?
2. What do you think caused the disappearance of the species in this forest?
3. Do you know of any site in your country that has undergone a drastic change like this?

Biblical text:

Psalms 104:10-30

Context

The psalms are equivalent to poems, many of which are meant to be sung. The Hebrew poets composed praises and prayers that they used to worship God, presenting them in the form of psalms. Psalm 104 is a hymn that exalts the wisdom and majesty of God

In Psalm 104, we can appreciate how God's sovereignty is demonstrated and how He takes joy in what He has created.

As you read the text, reflect on: What specific actions does God take to care for His creation?

Verses 10 to 13 describe a functional and harmonious ecosystem, where God provides water to meet the needs of the animals and plants He has created, thereby sustaining biodiversity.

"10 He makes springs pour water into the ravines; it flows between the mountains. 11 They give water to all the beasts of the field; the wild donkeys quench their thirst. 12 The birds of the sky nest by the waters; they sing among the branches. 13 He waters the mountains from his upper chambers; the land is satisfied by the fruit of his work."
Psalm 104:10-13 (NIV)

In verse 13, the importance of the rain that the Lord sends is emphasized. This rain not only promotes the growth of grass to feed the animals but also supports the development of crops that nourish humans. This demonstrates the interconnectedness of life f

orms and the dependence of living beings on the sustenance provided by God.

In verses 16 to 18, we are shown that the Lord gives life to the trees and has also designed a specific habitat and shelter for each animal he has created.

The trees of the Lord are well watered, the cedars of Lebanon that he planted. There the birds make their nests; the stork has its home in the junipers. The high mountains belong to the wild goats; the crags are a refuge for the hyrax.
Psalm 104:16-18 (NIV)

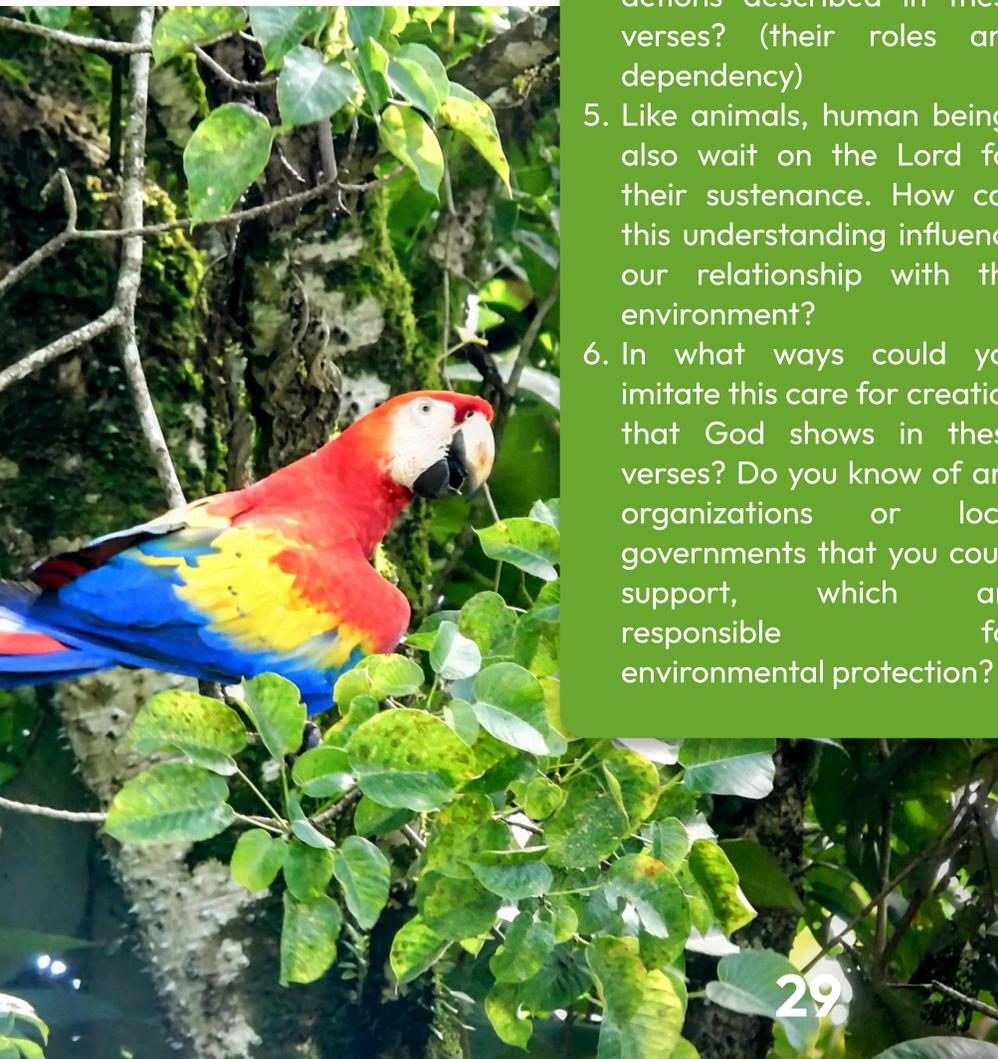
In verses 19 to 23, God demonstrates balance: He creates the moon and the sun, establishing the diurnal and nocturnal cycles that set rhythms of life for living beings, thereby maintaining order.

He made the moon to mark the seasons, and the sun knows when to go down. You bring darkness, it becomes night, and all the beasts of the forest prowl. The lions roar for their prey and seek their food from God. The sun rises, and they steal away; they return and lie down in their dens. Then people go out to their work to their labor until evening.
Psalm 104:19-23 (NIV)

And finally, verses 27 to 30 tell us that the created species wait upon the Lord. How does this highlight the dependence of all creatures on God for their sustenance and survival?

All creatures look to you to give them their food at the proper time. When you give it to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are satisfied with good things. When you hide your face, they are terrified; when you take away their breath, they die and return to the dust. When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground.

Psalm 104:27-30 (NIV)



Reflection

1. After the creation of day and night cycles, how do you think God's care contributes to ecological balance?
2. After reading and reflecting on these verses, how do you think it affects our perception of the importance of the environment, knowing that it is an intentional and beloved creation of God?
3. The text shows how God provides for everyone, including humans and animals, but even though God created everything with order, why do you think that balance has been lost? Why is there an environmental crisis today?
4. How are human beings' actions described in these verses? (their roles and dependency)
5. Like animals, human beings also wait on the Lord for their sustenance. How can this understanding influence our relationship with the environment?
6. In what ways could you imitate this care for creation that God shows in these verses? Do you know of any organizations or local governments that you could support, which are responsible for environmental protection?

Practical actions

Individual:

- Do not capture wild animals as pets.
- When visiting a national park, reserve, or forest, do not feed wild animals and always take all trash with you, even if it doesn't belong to you.

At home:

- Avoid excessive consumption of plastic and single-use products, and choose more durable alternatives instead. For example, use reusable bags, bottles, and straws. Conduct research on the effective management of the waste we produce.

In the community:

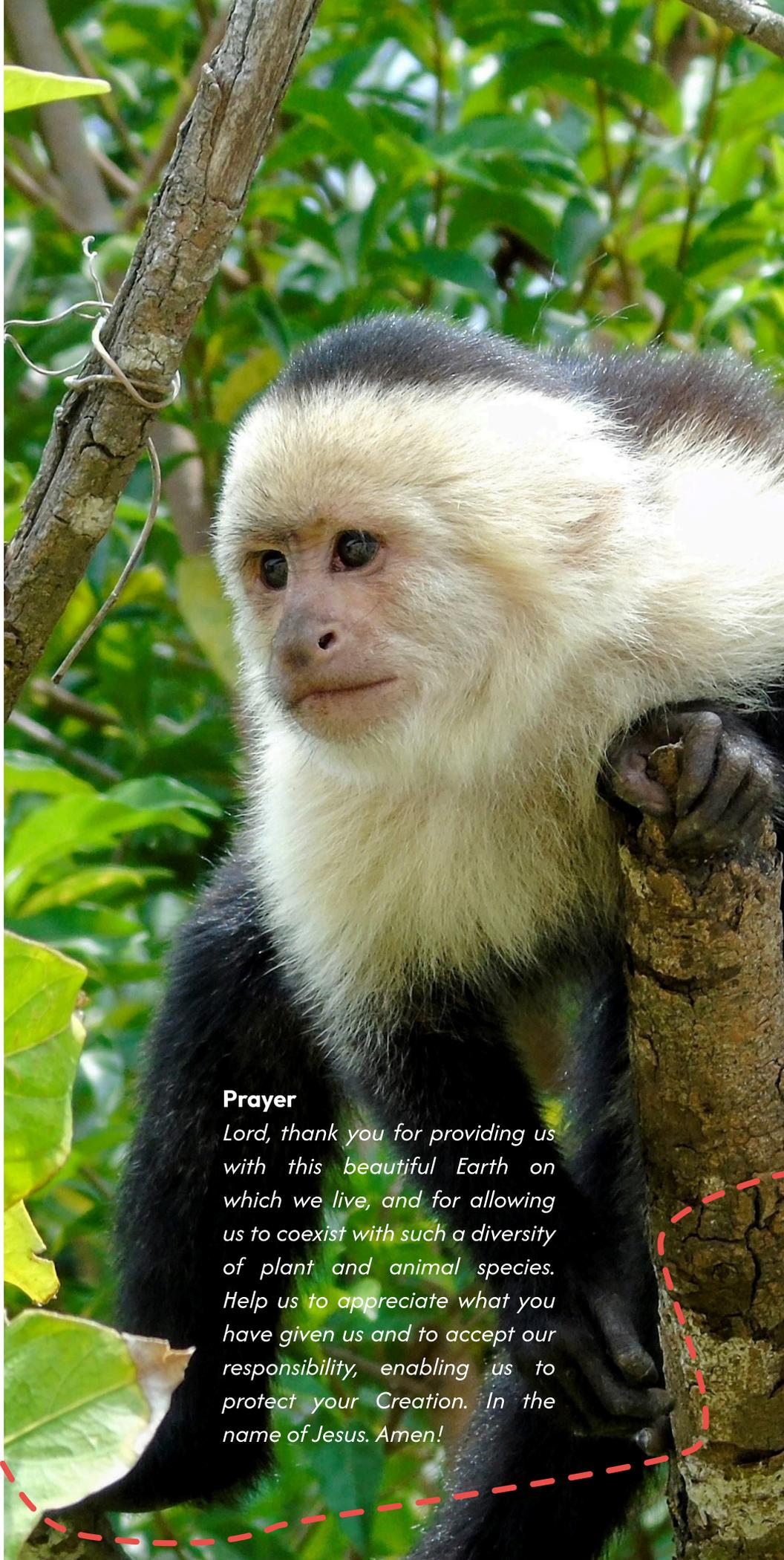
- Participate in tree planting programs and discover the native species of our country.
- Report any instances of illegal logging or animal abuse.

Final reflection

The reading of Psalm 104 leads us to admire the beauty and complexity of Creation, particularly regarding all the animals and ecosystems that have been created. As we observe how the Lord cares for every detail of the Earth, from the water flowing through the streams to the shelter He provides for wild animals, He demonstrates the love He has for all the creatures of the planet. All this reveals God's character, His relationship with creation, and His care for living beings. As believers, we are called to preserve and protect the biodiversity that God has entrusted to us. May our faith inspire us to action, reminding us that caring for flora and fauna is a way to honor the Lord. Just as it is mentioned in Genesis 2:15, "cultivate and care for the garden of Eden," we should consider that this mandate includes caring for forests, rivers, mountains, and all the beings that inhabit them. By protecting nature, we express our gratitude and respect for God, the Creator of all that surrounds us.

Prayer

Lord, thank you for providing us with this beautiful Earth on which we live, and for allowing us to coexist with such a diversity of plant and animal species. Help us to appreciate what you have given us and to accept our responsibility, enabling us to protect your Creation. In the name of Jesus. Amen!



Avad

[TILLING, CULTIVATING]



Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food." And it was so. 31 God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. [...] Genesis 1:29-31 (NIV).

God the Great Provider

By Rubén Tomás Langston Smith - Agronomy Engineer



Introduction

I want to introduce you to Pablito, a boy from a big city whom I met a few years ago. Pablito lives in a part of town where fresh vegetables are scarce. The nearest farms are more than an hour away, but he has never visited one. One day, while we were talking about food and I mentioned beans, I realized that Pablito didn't know that beans come from a plant. Since he had never seen a bean plant or anyone harvesting them, to him, beans came from a can, milk from a carton, and everything from a supermarket.

Modernity has caused a separation between urban and rural populations. Today, less densely populated rural areas produce food for the world's largest and most densely populated cities. Additionally, with globalization, someone in a cold, dry country can access tropical fruits from warm, rainy regions, regardless of distance. This has connected the world's cultures, but it has also created a dynamic in which the primary consumers of agricultural products are increasingly distant from their productive realities.

Latin America is one of the primary food-producing regions, yet much of its production is exported to countries with higher purchasing power. In Costa Rica, due to its history and size, the connection to the countryside remains significant, although it is evolving. In 1960, agriculture accounted for about 26% of the economy, whereas today it contributes roughly 4%. Additionally, the country has experienced a significant demographic shift: whereas previously the majority of the population lived in rural areas (only 34% resided in urban areas), today 80% of the population lives in urban areas. This widens the gap between those who consume the food and those who produce it.

Biblical Text:

Romans 8:18-25

Invitation

I invite you to reflect on the two main foods you consume on a daily basis. Consider basic ingredients like rice, bananas, lettuce, beans, tomatoes, corn, milk, or meat. Then, research or contemplate the following: Where and by whom was it produced? What was the process to get it to your plate? How long was it planted before being harvested? How far did the product have to travel? Was it produced in your country or another country? Was it harvested by hand or machine? Was it processed in any way?

If you can't find this information, don't worry. Try to discover something new about the food you eat.

After reflecting, share your findings with the group. Do you think the process is adequate? Did anything surprise you?

(17) IndexMundi. (2025). Costa Rica - Agricultura, valor agregado (% del PIB). Recuperado el [16 de marzo, 2025], de <https://www.indexmundi.com/es/datos/costa-rica/indicador/NV.AGR.TOTL.ZS>

(18) IndexMundi. (2025). Costa Rica - Población urbana (% del total). Recuperado el [16 de marzo, 2025], de <https://www.indexmundi.com/es/datos/costa-rica/indicador/SP.URB.TOTL.IN.ZS>

The God of the Bible is a providing God, from meeting needs during the Exodus in the wilderness to feeding the 5,000 with only five loaves and two fish.

From creation itself, God established the provision of food.

"I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. [...] God saw all that he had made, and it was very good..."
Genesis 1:29-31 (NIV)

The Israelites experienced this in the wilderness, where they relied solely on God's provision of manna.

"I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions."
Exodus 16:4 (NIV)

God provided them with their fair share each day. If someone collected more than necessary, the food would spoil. They grasped the importance of relying entirely on God for their livelihood. Today, even though we stockpile food in supermarkets and warehouses, we still depend on God for crop growth and daily provision.

However, with God's provision, He also entrusted us with its administration. Sometimes we may believe that our production capacity makes us self-sufficient, but in reality, we depend on Him.

"He makes grass grow for the cattle, and plants for people to cultivate—bringing forth food from the earth."
Psalms 104:14 (NIV).

By entrusting us with its administration, he also informs us in Isaiah 28:25-29 about how to treat the Earth with wisdom in a fallen world and creation.

"... His God instructs him and teaches him the right way. Caraway is not threshed with a sledge, nor is the wheel of a cart rolled over cumin; caraway is beaten out with a rod, and cumin with a stick. Grain must be ground to make bread, so one does not go on threshing it forever. The wheels of a threshing cart may be rolled over it, but one does not use horses to grind grain. All this also comes from the Lord Almighty, whose plan is wonderful, whose wisdom is magnificent."
Isaiah 28:26-29 (NIV).

The farmer must use the appropriate tools and practice at the right time. Sometimes we

think our innovations are superior to God's design, but the best management of the Earth adheres to the principles He established.

Although living in a fallen world suggests that the work will be challenging, in 2 Chronicles 7:13-14, God promises not only forgiveness of sin but also the restoration of the land.

"If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land."
2 Chronicles 7:14 (NIV)



Context

This passage, written by Paul, is part of the letter to the church in Rome. It primarily discusses the salvation we receive solely by the grace of the Lord through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and how it enables us to live in the power of the Holy Spirit. It is interesting, then, that this same book mentions creation. Creation has a place in this great plan of redemption that God is implementing on Earth. I invite you to discover this great restoration plan. The apostle Paul, in his letter to the Romans, offers us and all creation a vision of the present with hope for the restoration of all.

In Romans, he starts by recognizing the current state of the world as a consequence of the fall of creation in Genesis.

I consider that our present sufferings..."
Romans 8:18a (NIV)

It depicts a time in the world characterized by affliction and suffering, the world in which we live today. This state of affairs is a direct result of Adam's disobedience. However, in the same vein, we see that something is on the horizon that will be far better than our current condition.

"...are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."
Romans 8:18b (NIV)

The text states that the upcoming glory will be revealed in us. Thus, we will share in this future glory. At this juncture, the author of Romans refers to creation:

"For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God."
Romans 8:19-21 (NIV)

The liberation promised in this text—of a coming glory manifested in the children of God—will be revealed not only in them but also in creation itself, after having been enslaved to corruption. Again, the text reminds us of the Earth's condition, which longs for this forthcoming restoration:

"We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time."
Romans 8:22 (NIV).

In the fall of humanity, not only did we fall, but the rest of creation fell with us. One thing that creation recognizes, which

we sometimes fail to acknowledge, is that God established a means by which there is hope:

"Not only so, but we, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently."
Romans 8:23-25 (NIV)



Reflection

First of all, this passage paints a world of affliction. What components of distress do you see in this world?

It is mentioned that the creation itself "groans" and feels "labor pains". What afflictions do you consider that creation is experiencing today? What do you observe in the food production fields in your country?

This passage presents a hope for us and all creation. Do you feel there is hope for this world? Does it embrace hope for food production?

The words "adoption", "redemption", and "freedom" are used. In mentioning the hope that there is for us and creation, it is abundantly clear that it refers to the hope and salvation given by Christ. What is the relationship between our salvation and the hope for creation?

As a child and heir of God's promise, how should your posture be toward the creation that groans for the same hope given through His salvation? How can you be a participant in the restoration of Earth as a child of God, to bring Him all the glory?

Practical actions

- Visit a farmer's market and talk to the farmers. Ask them where they grow the products they sell and learn a bit about the process if they're willing to share.
- Discover the origin of the food you eat by checking labels and asking questions.
- Based on this acquired knowledge, stay informed about what you are purchasing. Make choices by selecting products that promote sustainable farming practices.
- Try to buy local or national food when possible.
- Pray for food producers and good stewardship of natural resources.

Final Reflection

The world we live in can sometimes feel devoid of hope, but the message of the Gospel offers hope to the followers of Christ. This hope is for freedom from the slavery of corruption, adoption of redemption, and forgiveness of sins... of salvation. Christ promises this to God's children and to all creation, which was subjected to afflictions as a consequence of the fall. As believers who have received this hope, it should inspire us to participate in the restoration of creation where we live, reflecting the restoration that Christ is working in us.

Prayer

Lord, we regret the state of the world and creation, and our role in this condition. We join in creation's groans, anticipating your coming glory. Thank you for giving us the hope of salvation and freedom through the person of Christ. We ask you, Lord, as you have saved us, to enable us to participate in your redemptive work on Earth. Thy Kingdom come, Lord. Amen!

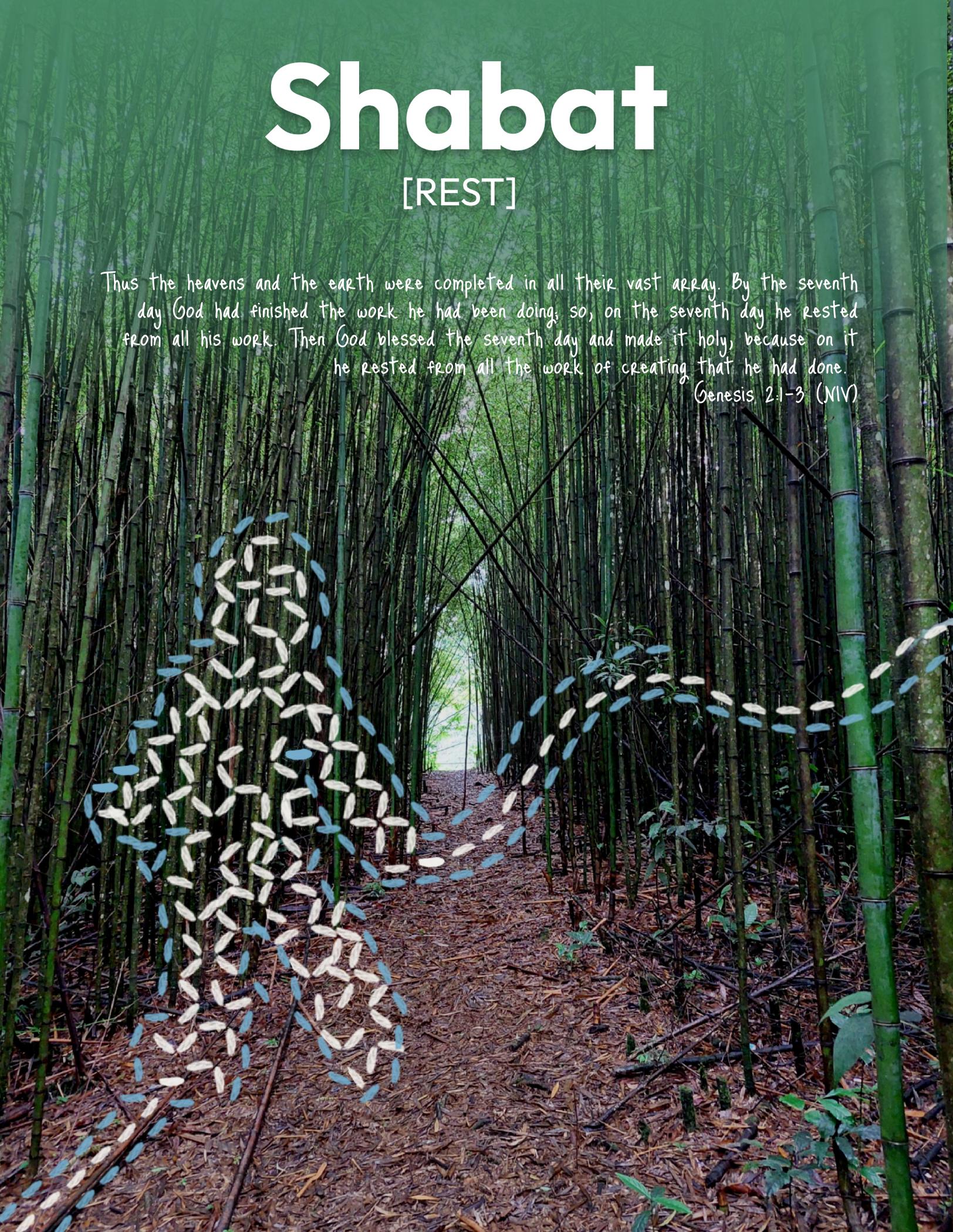


Shabat

[REST]

Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so, on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

Genesis 2:1-3 (NIV)



Rest: a gift from God since creation

By Yuliana Miranda Villegas - Social Worker



Introduction

In my childhood, I faced situations that made it very difficult for me to understand the importance of resting. I remember that my parents always had to work hard to support our family of five children, and during school vacations, they worked alongside my two older brothers picking coffee. Meanwhile, I took care of my two younger sisters and handled all the household chores, so I don't recall taking walks or enjoying much free time to play or relax.

Now I understand that it was not my place to assume those responsibilities when I was so young, but without realizing it, my brain and nervous system were conditioned to take on not only the physical burdens of housework, but also the emotional burdens of my family. All these things became a very heavy snowball that, at some point, I had to surrender to the feet of Jesus, and I am still working on it today.

I know that the subject of rest not only challenges me, but it is also very likely that you have encountered situations in your childhood and adolescence that shaped the way you relate to rest. Many people feel valuable only when engaged in productive activities or feel guilty when they try to take a break. This poses a challenge for us as believers because, from a biblical perspective, rest is not just leisure time or a luxury in this age of productivity; rather, it is both a command and a gift from God to His sons and daughters. UNICEF, in its Self-Care Manual, recommends that sufficient rest periods be an essential part of comprehensive care, as they are crucial for achieving optimal performance in various areas of life. Additionally, it highlights that rest is not solely a time of physical recovery but also a period for psychological and emotional rejuvenation. Currently, many problems related to stress, burnout, and

other physical and mental health issues stem from a lack of rest in its broadest sense.

Therefore, it is important to approach the subject from a biblical perspective that allows us to understand rest holistically, not just on the physical plane, but also as a gift from God since creation.

(19) FUNDASIL El Salvador. (2022). Manual de Autocuidado. Fondo de las Naciones Unidas para la infancia (UNICEF). Recuperado de <https://www.unicef.org/elsalvador/media/5036/file/Manual%20de%20Autocuidado.pdf>

Invitation

Find a quiet place where you can be alone and enjoy some silence. We will now engage in two brief activities that encourage us to take a moment to relax, along with a third activity that will serve as a task to complete in eight days:

- 1. Breathing exercise:** Close your eyes and breathe deeply. As you inhale, think in your mind, "I receive your peace, Lord," and as you exhale, say, "I give you my burdens" (you should inhale and exhale through your nose). Perform this exercise for 1-2 minutes. Use a timer to help you track the time.
- 2. Short prayer:** Pray alone, quietly, or aloud, asking God to renew your physical and spiritual strength. You can tell Him, for example: "Lord, I come before you today seeking rest for my body and soul."
- 3. Practical action:** Consider an activity that can bring rest to your body and soul. It should be something that allows you to connect with yourself, nature, and the Creator; options include going for a walk, watching the sunset, observing the stars, or having a meditative experience surrounded by nature, among others. Plan and allocate time for this activity within a maximum of eight days.

Biblical text:

Exodus 20: 8-11

Starting with rest as a gift from God since His creation and continuing to the present day, we will begin with a text in Genesis that will help us enter the subject, then move through the book of Exodus, and finally arrive at the New Testament with a call from Jesus to rest in Him.

In Genesis, it says:

*"Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done."
Genesis 2:1-3 (NIV)*

How beautiful! This is the first time in the Bible that rest is mentioned, and it was not a man who rested, but the Creator of the universe — the One who made the heavens and the earth and everything that exists. He rested at the end of His marvelous work, not because He was tired, but to establish a model for His people.

In Exodus 20:8-11, the Lord gave Moses a commandment for His people, instructing them to set aside one Sabbath day each week to sanctify and dedicate it to Him.



Context

This passage in Exodus is part of the Ten Commandments that God gave to Moses on Mount Sinai for the Israelites after their deliverance from Egypt. In this commandment, God established fundamental moral and social justice principles for His people. However, Shabbat is rooted in creation, as we saw in Genesis chapter two, which makes rest a universal principle – not just a law for Israel at that time, but a reflection of the divine design for all humankind at all times.

The direct commandment from God to the people was to set aside one day a week to rest and consecrate it to Him, just as He rested on the seventh day after the completion of creation. According to the Contemporary Bible Commentary, the Sabbath does not refer to rest in our typical understanding but rather signifies sanctifying or setting apart that day for the Lord. It is evident that God did not need to rest; instead, with "His decision to cease the act of creation on the sixth day, He left us an irrefutable example of the planning, execution, and delight in what He had created."

In verses 8-10 of Exodus 20, there is a directive from the Lord stating the following:

"Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns." Exodus 20: 8-10 (NIV)

So, the first thing we can ask ourselves is: What specific action does God command regarding the Sabbath? As seen in the text, the direct command is to "sanctify" the Sabbath, which means to set it aside as a special time for God, not only to refrain from work but to dedicate it to Him.

Furthermore, verse 10 leads us to ask who should abstain from work on the Sabbath. The answer is that not only the Israelites, but also their families, sons and daughters, servants, foreigners, and even animals should do so. This demonstrates that Shabbat was intended by the Lord not only as a time for individual rest, but also as a commandment that involved everyone in the community, promoting justice and general welfare.

We may ask ourselves: What is this commandment's *raison d'être*? Verse 11 gives us an apparent reason when it says:

"For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore, the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy." Exodus 20:11 (NIV)

Rest is essential in a world that never stops and pressures us to live in constant productivity and movement. The rest that Jesus offers is a haven for expressing the love of the Creator for all humankind, aimed at fostering greater closeness and communion.

Shabbat serves to acknowledge that God is not only the Creator but also the sustainer of the world, and that human beings should not rely solely on their efforts, but instead place their trust in God, the Provider.

Finally, in Matthew 11:28-30, Jesus expanded the theme of rest beyond what is presented in the Old Testament texts with the following words:

“Come to me, all you who are **weary** and **burdened**, and I will give you **rest**. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find **rest** for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”
Matthew 11:28-30 (NIV).

In Jesus’ time, the Jewish religion was significantly marked by legalism, imposing a burden so heavy and oppressive that it was very difficult for people to carry (Matthew 23:4). The very shabbat, which was supposed to bring rest to the people of Israel and serve as a time consecrated to God, had become another burden.

That is why Jesus invites us to rest in Him, for the burdens imposed by religious leaders can only be lifted in the true rest offered by the easy yoke and light burden of discipleship, found in an intimate relationship with the Son of God, as opposed to the yoke imposed by the Pharisees, which required fulfilling the entire law and resulted in a burden so heavy that it was impossible to bear.

Similarly, we are called today to surrender our physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual burdens before the Master, acknowledging our weaknesses and his infinite grace and unconditional love for us as part of His creation.

Reflection

1. How can you apply the biblical principle of Shabbat in your daily life, and what practices could you put into action to honor God with your rest time?
2. In a society where productivity has become a priority, what challenges do you face in setting aside time for rest in accordance with the biblical vision?
3. What burdens and worries do you need to bring to the feet of Jesus to find rest in him?
4. How can you incorporate rest into your weekly routine as an act of worship to enjoy the Lord and His creation and thus renew your strength?

Practical actions

It is crucial to extend the topic of rest beyond mere reflection and understanding; it must be put into action. Here are some ideas for individuals and groups to consider.

Individual:

- **Disconnection:** Dedicate at least 30 minutes each day to unplug from technology and immerse yourself in nature, pray, read the Bible, or simply enjoy moments of silence.

- **Do-nothing day:** Dedicate one day or a few hours a week to do nothing productive. Instead, you can do something you enjoy, such as reading, napping, listening to music, drawing, painting, etc.
- **Conscious breathing and prayer:** Take a few minutes before going to sleep to take a deep breath and say a prayer, surrendering your burdens of the day to the Lord.

As a group:

- **Load exchange:** Gather together to share the things that are burdening you and pray for each other.
- **Creative relaxing activity:** Arrange a morning or afternoon with friends or family and engage in an activity that allows you to disconnect from your worries and reconnect with nature and with God.
- **Rest circle:** Sit in such a way that you can see each other and share an experience where you have experienced the Lord’s rest. End by saying short prayers of gratitude out loud.

Final reflection

Discussing rest today may be revolutionary; however, it is important to emphasize that as long as believers continue to live according to society's demands rather than the original design of our Creator, we will not be able to assign rest the value and significance it holds in God's plan for all of His creation, including us, His sons and daughters, the animals, and Earth.

Resting is much more than a physical act. It is a gracious initiative of the Lord to which we do well to respond in joyful obedience, worship, and trust in the God who sustains all. For believers, it should be a spiritual practice as important as prayer and biblical meditation. Therefore, Jesus' invitation to rest in Him is still valid; coming to the feet of the Master has become necessary now more than ever. In a world that never stops and pressures us to live in constant productivity and movement, the rest that Jesus offers us is a haven for both body and soul.

Prayer

Lord, thank you for sustaining all of creation and for demonstrating your great love for humanity through your care in every aspect of our existence. May our lives be a constant sign of obedience, worship, and trust in you, reflecting the rest that you modeled for us from the moment of creation. Amen!



In pain and hope

I went out and walked in the moonlight, the shade of the trees brushing their branches in the night wind. My mind wandered among the thoughts that arose and faded, a product of the pain experienced at Lupe's house. The steps I took on the sidewalk as I headed home were becoming un-lived moments. Suddenly, a dog barked, and in the midst of a jump, I fell back to reality. I had already traveled more than halfway! I realized then that this is how we typically live.

Lupe had noticed everything she had embroidered, through colors and pains, because she knew how to observe. She was empathetic, and she already understood the true purpose of life: to make known in order to learn and improve reality.

Improving reality. That was it! Improving reality, improving reality... A phrase that lingered in my mind for several days. In my thoughts, Lupe's threads danced by, and those vibrant threads allowed her to dream, design, and create. Now, I

was noticing these threads everywhere. I'm not sure if psychology has a term for this, but as I walked and observed things happening around me that gradually degraded the environment, all I could think about was the driver who was now urging me to act. It felt as if she had managed to create a new reality, a new hope in a gray and dark image. It seemed like that driver was guiding me to transform the image of pain into one filled with color.

There were threads of hope everywhere. Threads were always present, waiting for someone to come along and examine the white fabric with a realistic design. I hoped that this time, whoever began to embroider would have the courage to create something different, free from the fear of making mistakes, tangling the threads, having to start over, or, in the worst case, not understanding why a color shifts from one place to another. In the midst of the tragedy, there is often no complete plan for the marvelous work being created through small actions. Threads anticipate drawing stitches toward a new reality in all areas: environmental, social, religious...





*Walking, I learned that living aware of your surroundings
brings you closer to...*

It brings you closer to yourself, others, and God.

Because we are part of it.

And the invisible God becomes visible in common things.

And the invisible God embraces you when you care

*To those and that which He created and joyfully
expressed:*

This is good!

Mónica L. Cortés, November 2024

Through this guide, we invite you to reflect on seven themes of creation care: sky, ocean, soil, water, ecosystems, agriculture, and rest. We invite you to gather with friends to discuss each theme and create action activities together. This is a resource for you. We hope it can bring you closer to a more holistic mission of God's kingdom.

We thank the Lord for the lives of those who created each devotional and were involved in the design of this resource.

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This is a resource produced by the Level 2 project in Costa Rica called "Healing the Earth of the Creator's Garden," led by the catalyst Mónica Cortés Cortés.

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