

Spirituality of Landscapes

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Pre-learning Assignment

Read one of the following:

Books by Belden Lane

- † Ravished by Beauty
- † Backpacking with the Saints
- † The Solace of Fierce Landscapes
- † The Great Conversation
- † Desert Spirituality and Cultural Resistance
- † Landscapes of the Sacred

Christine Valters Paintner

- † Earth Our Original Monastery
- † Water, Wind, Earth & Fire: The Christian Practice of Praying with the Elements

Write a one page reflection on what you have read. How did you agree or disagree with the author's presentation? How might your journey before God be changed in light of what you have learned from the author?

First ZOOM Session

Key Takeaways:

- † The World is charged with the grandeur of God - as Hopkins would say.
- † Letting landscapes / and the natural world in general teach us requires that we wake up and smell the roses, so to speak. “Full of wonder then are all the things which men never think to wonder at, because . . . they are by habit become dull to the consideration of them.” - Gregory the Great
- † To be aware that God is in all things (*panentheism*) is *not* to engage in “nature worship” (*pantheism*) but is, in fact, a biblical and Christian (even *Reformed!*) discipline.

The First Time Alone with God (Following the first ZOOM session)

Some Quotes to assist you in pondering, journaling, or praying as you spend time in nature.

"Those things which are full of marvels for an investigation deeper than we can reach have become cheap from custom in the eyes of men. . .

. . . if a dead man is raised to life, all men spring up in astonishment. Yet everyday one that had no being is born, and no man wonders, though it is plain to all, without doubt, that it is a greater thing for that to be created which was without being than for that which had being to be restored. Because the dry rod Aaron budded, all men were in astonishment; yet every day a tree is produced from the dry earth, . . . and no man wonders . . . Five thousand men we filled with five loaves; . . . yet every day the grains of seed that are sown are multiplied in a fullness of ears, and no man wonders. All wondered to see water once turned into wine, yet everyday the earth's moisture, being drawn into the root of the vine, is turned by the grape into wine, and no man wonders. Full of wonder then are all the things which men never think to wonder at, because . . . they are by habit become dull to the consideration of them."

GREGORY THE GREAT (c. 540–604 taken from *The Book of Pastoral Rule: Sloth*)



"A few minutes ago," John Muir wrote after a summer squall had swept through his Yosemite campsite, "every tree was excited, bowing to the roaring storm, waving, swirling, tossing their branches in glorious enthusiasm like worship . . . every hidden cell is throbbing with music and life, every fiber thrilling like harp strings."

— John Muir, *My First Summer in the Sierras* 1911 as quoted in *The Great Conversation* p. 13



Psa. 29:0 A Psalm of David. (NRSV)

- 1 Ascribe to the LORD, O heavenly beings,
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.
- 2 Ascribe to the LORD the glory of his name;
worship the LORD in holy splendor.

Psa. 29:3 The voice of the LORD is over the waters;
the God of glory thunders,
the LORD, over mighty waters.

- 4 The voice of the LORD is powerful;

the voice of the LORD is full of majesty.

Psa. 29:5 The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars;
 the LORD breaks the cedars of Lebanon.

6 He makes Lebanon skip like a calf,
 and Sirion like a young wild ox.

Psa. 29:7 The voice of the LORD flashes forth flames of fire.

8 The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness;
 the LORD shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.

Psa. 29:9 The voice of the LORD causes the oaks to whirl,
 and strips the forest bare;
 and in his temple all say, “Glory!”



A poem of Mary Oliver

Praying

It doesn't have to be
the blue iris, it could be
weeds in a vacant lot, or a few
small stones; just
pay attention, then patch

a few words together and don't try
to make them elaborate, this isn't
a contest but the doorway

into thanks, and a silence in which
another voice may speak.



“John Calvin frequently referred to the world around us as a ‘theater of God’s glory.’ everything carries with in its form and texture the signature of its Creator.”

Eugene Peterson — *Answering God*



“‘If the doors of perception were cleansed,’ said Blake, ‘everything would appear to man as it is —Infinite.’ But the doors of perception are hung with the cobwebs of thought; prejudice, cowardice, sloth. Eternity is with us, inviting our contemplation perpetually, but we are too frightened, lazy, and suspicious to respond: too arrogant to still our thought, and let divine sensation have its way. It needs industry and goodwill if we would make that transition: for the process involves a veritable spring-cleaning of the soul, a turning-out and rearrangement of our mental furniture, a wide opening of closed windows, that the notes of the wild birds beyond our garden may come to us fully charged with wonder and freshness, and drown with their music the noise of the gramophone within.”

Evelyn Underhill (1875–1941), *Practical Mysticism*

†††

Disturb Us, O Lord

*Disturb us, Lord, when
We are too pleased with ourselves,
When our dreams have come true because we dreamed too little,
When we arrived safely
Because we sailed too close to the shore.*

*Disturb us, Lord, when
With the abundance of things we possess
We have lost our thirst For the waters of life;
Having fallen in love with life,
We have ceased to dream of eternity
And in our efforts to build a new earth,
We have allowed our vision Of the new Heaven to dim.*

*Disturb us, Lord, to dare more boldly,
To venture on wilder seas
Where storms will show Your mastery;
Where losing sight of land, We shall find the stars.*

*We ask you to push back
The horizons of our hopes;
And to push back the future
In strength, courage, hope and love.*

*This we ask in the name of our Captain,
Who is Jesus Christ.*

Sir Francis Drake was a 16th century adventurer and, for much of his life, a “legal” pirate.

He set sail in 1577 from Portsmouth, England aboard the Golden Hind with a commission to interrupt the Spanish gold routes along the west coast of South America. Drake explored at least as far north as the non-Spanish parts of California, claiming it as “New Albion” (New England) before returning to England and his Queen Elizabeth via a “short-cut” (by crossing the Pacific and rounding Cape Horn, thus becoming the first Englishman to circumnavigate the globe)>

In return for the bounty he captured (more than half million pounds sterling), Drake was knighted and continued in service to his country until his death in 1596. This is the prayer that Drake is believed to have written as he set sail on his great adventure.



Seeking my love
I will head for the mountains and for watersides,
I will not gather flowers,
Nor fear wild beasts;
I will go beyond strong men and frontiers.

O woods and thickets
Planted by the hand of my beloved!
O green meadow,
Coated bright with flowers.
Tell me, has he passed by you?

Pouring out a thousand graces,
He passed these groves in haste;
And having looked at them,
With his image alone,
Clothed them in beauty.

John of the Cross — *The Spiritual Canticle*

Second ZOOM —

Key Takeaways:

- † God uses beauty, virtue, and attraction (desire) to lead us to *knowledge*.
- † “Only what we deeply long for do we ever really know.”
— Belden Lane *Ravished by Beauty* p.1
- † “God truly waits for us in things....”
— Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu* (1960)
- † Belden Lane’s work on fierce landscapes provides us an example of how we can be attentive to other landscapes wondering how they might inform us or shape us in specific disciplines or specific attitudes of the heart.

Time Alone with God following second ZOOM session:

Jeremiah 18:14 Does the snow of Lebanon leave
 the crags of Sirion?
Do the mountain waters run dry,
 the cold flowing streams?

†††

Jeremiah 8: All of them turn to their own course,
 like a horse plunging headlong into battle.
7 Even the stork in the heavens
 knows its times;
and the turtledove, swallow, and crane
 observe the time of their coming;
but my people do not know
 the ordinance of the LORD.

†††

Psalms 27:4 One thing I asked of the LORD,
 that will I seek after:
to live in the house of the LORD
 all the days of my life,
to behold the beauty of the LORD,
 and to inquire in his temple.

†††

Zech. 9:16 On that day the LORD their God will save them
 for they are the flock of his people;
for like the jewels of a crown
 they shall shine on his land.
17 For what goodness and beauty are his!

†††

When John Calvin wrote his biblical commentaries he used the word “beauty” more than 400 times (405 to be precise)! He used “beautiful” 293 times. whatever else he had to say about God’s Word, it evoked in him a deep attentiveness to beauty in the world.



ANNUNCIATION

And then that girl the angels came to visit,
 she woke also to fruit, frightened by beauty,
 given love, shy, in her
 so much blossom, the forest
 no one had explored, with paths leading everywhere.

They left her alone to walk and to drift
 and the spring carried her along.
 Her simple and unselfcentered Mary-life
 became marvelous and castlelike.
 Her life resembled trumpets on the feast days
 that reverberated far inside every house;
 and she, once so girlish and fragmented,
 was so plunged now inside her womb,
 and so full inside from that one thing
 and so full—enough for a thousand others—
 that every creature seemed to throw light on her
 and she was like a slope with vines, heavily bearing.

Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926)



This, then, is salvation: when we marvel at the beauty of created things, and praise their beautiful Creator.

— Meister Eckhart



"The most beautiful and profound emotion we can experience is the sensation of the mystical. It is the source of all true science . . .
 To know that what is impenetrable to us really exists . . .
 this knowledge, this feeling, is the center of true religion."

— Albert Einstein



Two different ways of relating to a tree... "I can assign it to a species and observe it as an ... object. But it also can happen, if will and grace are joined, that as I contemplate the tree I'm drawn into a relationship, and the tree ceases to be an It."

For Contemplation until Tomorrow:

- † Where is there beauty in your life?
- † What keeps you from becoming a “friend” to a flower or tree?
- † When there is a yearning within to go and be in a certain landscape . . . what are the impediments which keep you from going?

Third ZOOM —

Key Takeaways:

- † We are meant to join with all creation in singing the praises of God.
- † The “conversation” with nature / landscape / God is a
 - * complex,
 - * conflicted, and
 - * costly conversation.
 It is “full-contact” if we want to engage in deep listening and if we desire to facilitate deep transformation.
- † The goal of our discipleship and journey through the various landscapes of our life is *love* — (Mark 12:28 One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, “Which commandment is the first of all?” 29 Jesus answered, “The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; 30 you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ 31 The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”).
 - * Authentic love is always performative: John 14:15 “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”
 - * Love nearly always leads to suffering. Suffering leads to communion.

Time Alone with God following third ZOOM session:

- Psa. 96:1 O sing to the LORD a new song;
 sing to the LORD, all the earth.
- 2 Sing to the LORD, bless his name;
 tell of his salvation from day to day.
- 3 Declare his glory among the nations,
 his marvelous works among all the peoples.
- 4 For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised;
 he is to be revered above all gods.
- 5 For all the gods of the peoples are idols,
 but the LORD made the heavens.
- 6 Honor and majesty are before him;
 strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.
- Psa. 96:7 Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples,
 ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.
- 8 Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;
 bring an offering, and come into his courts.
- 9 Worship the LORD in holy splendor;
 tremble before him, all the earth.
- Psa. 96:10 Say among the nations, “The LORD is king!
 The world is firmly established; it shall never be moved.
 He will judge the peoples with equity.”
- 11 Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice;
 let the sea roar, and all that fills it;
- 12 let the field exult, and everything in it.
 Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy
- 13 before the LORD; for he is coming,
 for he is coming to judge the earth.
 He will judge the world with righteousness,
 and the peoples with his truth.



Psa. 98:0 A Psalm.

- 1 O sing to the LORD a new song,
 for he has done marvelous things.
 His right hand and his holy arm
 have gotten him victory.
- 2 The LORD has made known his victory;

he has revealed his vindication in the sight of the nations.
 3 He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness
 to the house of Israel.
 All the ends of the earth have seen
 the victory of our God.

Psa. 98:4 Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth;
 break forth into joyous song and sing praises.
 5 Sing praises to the LORD with the lyre,
 with the lyre and the sound of melody.
 6 With trumpets and the sound of the horn
 make a joyful noise before the King, the LORD.

Psa. 98:7 Let the sea roar, and all that fills it;
 the world and those who live in it.
 8 Let the floods clap their hands;
 let the hills sing together for joy
 9 at the presence of the LORD, for he is coming
 to judge the earth.
 He will judge the world with righteousness,
 and the peoples with equity.

†††

Psa. 148:3 Praise him, sun and moon;
 praise him, all you shining stars!
 4 Praise him, you highest heavens,
 and you waters above the heavens!

Psa. 148:5 Let them praise the name of the LORD,
 for he commanded and they were created.
 6 He established them forever and ever;
 he fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed.

Psa. 148:7 Praise the LORD from the earth,
 you sea monsters and all deeps,
 8 fire and hail, snow and frost,
 stormy wind fulfilling his command!

Psa. 148:9 Mountains and all hills,
 fruit trees and all cedars!
 10 Wild animals and all cattle,
 creeping things and flying birds!

Psa. 148:11 Kings of the earth and all peoples,
princes and all rulers of the earth!

12 Young men and women alike,
old and young together!

Psa. 148:13 Let them praise the name of the LORD,
for his name alone is exalted;
his glory is above earth and heaven.

14 He has raised up a horn for his people,
praise for all his faithful,
for the people of Israel who are close to him.
Praise the LORD!



Psa. 8:0 To the leader: according to The Gittith. A Psalm of David.

1 O LORD, our Sovereign,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

You have set your glory above the heavens.

2 Out of the mouths of babes and infants
you have founded a bulwark because of your foes,
to silence the enemy and the avenger.

Psa. 8:3 When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars that you have established;

4 what are human beings that you are mindful of them,
mortals that you care for them?

Psa. 8:5 Yet you have made them a little lower than God,
and crowned them with glory and honor.

6 You have given them dominion over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under their feet,

7 all sheep and oxen,
and also the beasts of the field,

8 the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

Psa. 8:9 O LORD, our Sovereign,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!



Psa. 66:0 To the leader. A Song. A Psalm.

- 1 Make a joyful noise to God, all the earth;
- 2 sing the glory of his name;
 give to him glorious praise.
- 3 Say to God, “How awesome are your deeds!
 Because of your great power, your enemies cringe before you.
- 4 All the earth worships you;
 they sing praises to you,
 sing praises to your name.” Selah



I. Can We Chant Psalms with All God’s Creatures?

II. We Desire Together

- A. Calvin conceives of the psalms as an “anatomy of all the parts of the soul,” which include and give life to the full range of emotions we experience as fleshy, mortal, earth-goers. This shared desire is demonstrated by how “the Psalter’s facility in arousing desire transcends all ages, embracing lovers of every kind” (89).

III. We Perform Together

- A. Performing together signifies an understanding of Psalmic praise as “a world-embracing and world-transforming event” where all are invited to be members of the community.

IV. We Are Embodied Together

- A. Worship modeled in the Psalms is deeply embodied, “performed in and through the body, intimately engaging all the senses” (92).¹ It *cannot* be merely cerebral.
- B. “Psalmic praise is a “contact sport”” (93).

V. We Lament Together

¹ Lane notes that there is more attention paid to the human body and its anatomy in the Psalms than in any other biblical book (excluding the Song of songs). Hebrew Scriptures mention no less than 80 different parts of the human body, and yet “curiously, the brain—is not one of them” (93).

A. “Worship in the psalms embraces the ambiguity and risk of a life lived in a broken world.” The Psalms weep, rage, and cry out an agony, and complain to God. Psalms of lament reference the natural world in three ways:

1. “Bewail the threats that human beings experience from a world beyond their control”

(95)²



² Belden cites Psalm 58 to illustrate such a psalm.

Post-learning Praxis —

Over the coming thirty days be in *conversation* with some *friend* in your landscape(s). Contemplate the nature of that landscape and wonder what it is wanting to teach you about your life and your friendship with God. It will help you to keep a journal of your reflections and observations. Keep a special watch for the ways the natural world is teaching you to join in the ongoing praise of the Creator.