GOD SAW THAT IT WAS GOOD

Film Jandboo

Dave Gregory



Г_{ТНЕ} **FUEL** _LСАSТ_



The **"God Saw That It Is God"** films entwine scientific and Christian narratives with stunning imagery, enbling a fresh appreciation of the wonder, playfulness and communion of the world in which we live, and share with a vast array of life. Looking along coasts and up to the sky; walking among the trees and alongside other life, God's presence and creativity is to be found. This handbook to the films will help indivduals and groups to reflect and respond to the **"God Saw that It Was Good"** films, and hear afresh God's invitation to share in caring for the good Earth.

Praise for "God Saw That It Was Good"

"The power of the visual is key to science, theology, and environmental action. In a world where there are many words, these films engage both heart and mind in a transformative way both for individuals and groups. They provoke both wonder and a call to action in an accessible and joyous journey."

(Revd Prof David Wilkinson, St John's College, Durham University and Director "Equipping Christian Leaders in an Age of Science")

"God Saw That It Was Good' is a beautifully filmed look at the natural world, bringing together God's works and word. As both a practitioner in the world of science and a Baptist minister, Dave is well placed to explore both. I highly recommend these ... films ... that ... will inspire people to find even more of the wow of God's creation."

(Michael Harvey, Missional Entrepreneur, Director "God and the Big Bang")

"Beautifully produced and thought-provoking, sharing the wonders of creation as revealed by science and reflecting biblically on our place in it. While they do highlight the crises of climate change, pollution and habitat loss, the overall message is one of inspiration and hope."

(Dr Ruth Bancewicz, Church Engagement Director, The Faraday Institute, Cambridge)

"As climate change becomes more and more evident ... the wonderful imagery of these excellent films connecting science and biblical insights will inform, inspire and challenge people to act."

(Dr Martin Hodson, Principal Tutor of Christian Rural and Environmental Studies (CRES))

"These films are bound to inspire viewers to perceive the world differently, as a wondrous creation in which humans are called to be both playful in and have communion with the natural world around them. Dave Gregory's informative commentary combines serious science with pointers to deep biblically grounded faith traditions in a way that is easy to digest and absorb."

(Dr Celica Deanne-Drummond, Laudato Si' Research Institute, Oxford)

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Setting the Scene

We live in a visual age. Our TVs and mobile devices are filled with the stunning visual imagery of natural history and science programmes. They give us with a wider appreciation of the wonder of creation, together with insights into science's understanding of the world. Yet, away from our screens, in our everyday lives, we are perhaps more disengaged with the natural world than any previous generation.

We live too in an age of Climate Change. Our use of fossil fuels leads to rising levels of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases in the air, warming the Earth. Our media feeds are constantly filled with stories of extreme heatwaves and weather events: of melting ice caps and rising sea levels; of their impact upon people, both near and far; of the loss of habitats and the creatures who inhabit them, with whom we share the planet.

Our awareness of wonder and the changing world is increased by these visual encounters. Yet, they can seem distant. Exotic landscapes, filled with wondrous and strange animals in hard to get to places, and stories of people impacted by climate change half-a-world away. This distance can make our increased awareness fleeting. Our gaze is caught by the next programme or news story, and the moment is past. Even if their impact lingers, well, it all seems so big and so far, far away; both in distance and into the future.

The film series **"God Saw That It Was Good"** is a collaboration between BUEN – the Baptist Union Environment Network – and Fuelcast films. It draws upon this visual feast that is part of our everyday media diet. Taking you deeper, it's a visual journey that will allow you to encounter both the wonder of creation and the wonder of the creator who declared the world in which we live to be very good. The films are inspired by some of the earliest natural history programmes ever made, found in the pages of the Bible. There, in one of the stories of creation, the first human being is invited to be attentive to the natural world as God invites them to name the animals. Later in the Bible's pages, we meet the troubled Job, full of questions in the face of a life that has been turned upside down, in part due to extreme weather events! In response, God takes him on a grand tour of creation, taking in the sea and sky, and the vast range of awesome creatures that inhabit them. His many words of lament and complaint are silenced by the wonder he sees, and he simply responds; *"my ears have heard of you but now my eyes have seen you"* (Job 42v5).

Watching the **"God Saw That It Was Good"** films, with their themes of Coasts, Sky, Trees and Life, our hope is that you will begin to see the world afresh like Job. For you to encounter creation through the eyes of science and faith, engaging both your head and heart. Reenchanting your perception of the world: recognising its value, beginning to see it with God's eyes. And discovering new connections with nature and a deeper connection with its divine shaper, you may be led to share more fully, day by day, in God's Mission to the whole of creation.

While the films explore science and faith from a Christian perspective, it is hoped that anyone concerned with the natural world and the climate and environmental crises will be inspired by them to consider how they might walk humbly and lightly across the world. A world which we share with one another, together with a vast array of other creatures on whom we depend upon, and to whom we are connected. Connected also with the creator behind it all, in whom we all *"live and move and have our being"* (Acts 17v28).

So, come and join the journey. Taking a fresh look at our world - and perhaps beyond it!

Looking Through New Glasses

I wear glasses and I know when it's time for me to get a new pair; when the branches of distant trees no longer appear sharp!

There are many reasons why we have been slow as a society, and as people of faith within it, to connect and act on the issue of climate change. Perhaps one reason is that we have forgotten how to look at the wonder of the world. Despite science enabling us to have a clearer view and understanding of the world around us, from the microscopic to the vast, distant, and ancient cosmos, our sense of the wonder of it all has become clouded. Maybe, we all need new glasses?

The sociologist Peter Berger¹ suggested a prescription for these new lenses. He asked how people might get a better view of the "beyond" – of God's presence, being and activity - in their everyday experience of life. He pointed to several ordinary experiences that might be signs of divine presence within the world. Among them, people's sense of wonder when they encounter the natural world – a beautiful sunset or majestic mountain. Also, the human capacity for and enjoyment of creativity and play, along with the security we find in order and connection.

Looking into the Bible, perhaps this prescription is not surprising. In its creation story, God says "let us make humankind in our image, in our likeness" (Gen 1v26). A declaration of our being shaped by the being of God, with the capacity to connect with God. And experiences of wonder, play and order are characteristics of God's being and action in the world around us.

Long ago, in the thirteenth century, the Franciscan Bonaventure, taught that encountering God begins through looking at the created world. There, God's creative power is found in our experience of wonder. God's playful creativity is seen in the vast diversity of life

¹ Peter Berger, "A Rumour of Angels" (1970), Anchor

which speaks of the divine artist's work. And the connectedness of all things expresses God's heart to bring "unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ." (Eph 1:10).

In **"God Saw That It Was Good,"** we look at the natural world around us through these new spectacle lenses, shaped by wonder, play, and communion, helping us to gain a glimpse of God within the world that he declared as very good. Completing the prescription, we add a further correction that brings things into even clearer focus. Science!

Now science is not something we always connect with helping us to see God. Yet, wonder, play and communion have long shaped science's exploration of the world. We shouldn't be surprised at this. Like art, music and literature, science is a creative human activity, and we are beings shaped by God's creative, playful ordering. The mystery of wonder raises questions that scientists creatively and playfully explore by devising experiments and developing ideas of how the world works. Through observing the world and experimentation, we begin to gain understanding of the processes and patterns that order the world.

I am always amazed at the transformation of my sight when I put a new pair of glasses on. Combining our human experiences with the creativity of science, and the Christian understanding of God's work in creation, provides us with new glasses to view the world around us. Giving us the possibility of encountering God through nature. And, as we appreciate creations' value, both as a gift to provide for our lives and as a place of spiritual encounter, we grow to be more attuned to sharing in God's mission to bring hope to all creation in Jesus;

"all things have been created through him and for him ... and in him all things hold together ... and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross" (Col 1v16-21).

How to Watch "God Saw That It Was Good"

There are four films in the **"God Saw That Was Good"** series exploring themes linked to the climate and environmental crises; Coasts, Sky, Trees, and Life. Each is around 25 minutes long and has three sections.

A brief introduction lasting a few minutes, setting the scene for the episode.

A central section of around 15-20 minutes exploring the scientific understanding of the world at a popular level through the lenses of wonder, playfulness, and communion.

A shorter reflection, around 5-8 minutes, connecting the science to spiritual themes and bible passages, drawing together an encounter with creation and creator. There are also suggestions as how you may want to respond in prayer.

The films might be used in a variety of ways;

As an individual, you might want to watch each film all the way through. But don't rush it. Take time at the end or part way through to pause and think about how it has impacted and spoken to you; to re-imagine the way you look at the natural world as a place to encounter God who brings it into being. Consider too, how you might need to respond in your own living to care for a world that God sees as very good.

In a small group, with the reflection starters enabling people to explore further what they have seen and heard. There are several ways they could be used;

- You may want to watch one of the films straight through.
- You could watch the science part and then pause to explore together what you have seen and heard. If it's more helpful, pause after each of the sections of wonder, playfulness, and

communion to talk about what you have seen and heard. Then watch the reflection prayerfully, leading to further discussion around some of the bible texts suggested and on how you need to respond to the climate and environmental crises.

- If time is short, you might want to watch the first part in one session and reflect in a later session.
- There may be parts of the science that people are not familiar with or puzzled by. Why not use smart phones to explore further and discover more together?

With a larger group, you could show a whole film or break it into parts allowing questions and conversation in smaller break-out groups. They might be used as part of a Sunday service in place of the sermon or shared in several parts within an act of worship. Each film comes with a suggested Bible text that could be used to plan a sermon series connected to the films.

Other suggestions for using the film;

- **As pre-discipleship course** before Alpha or Christianity Explored for example, connecting with people's love of nature and concern for the environment.
- With a group of young people or young adults, who are increasingly aware of the impact climate change is having upon their hope for the future.
- In secondary school settings, exploring issues around the climate and environmental crises, or informing the conversation between science and faith.

Reflection Starters - Introduction

The following reflection starters are provided to enable you to go deeper into the themes of the films.

Rather than directly exploring the theology of creation and the environmental crisis brought about by human activity, the suggested questions focus upon the visual experience of seeing the world through the lens of wonder, playfulness and communion. This provides viewers with an opportunity for a fresh encounter with God. And learning of the spiritual value of creation, they are invited to journey deeper into sharing with God's mission to the whole of creation, which brings life and hope.

The discussion points do not aim to take people to a prescribed answer. It is important to leave room for the Spirit of God who was present at creation, and continues to sustain creation, to be at work as people watch and work with the films creatively!

The questions are offered as a tool to enable people to engage with the films. Not all need to be used. Please think about your own context, and the group of people you are working with. Feel free to adapt and add to them, or even to develop new ones that are appropriate for your setting.

Episode 1 : Coasts

Key Bible Texts : Job 38v1-11; John 21v4-6

Ice Breaker

• "The ... Bible speaks of God having a moment of wonder ... seeing that all that was made was very good"

Share together when you have experienced wonder. Was it in a spectacular place? At a special moment in time? Or is it an everyday experience? How did it make you feel? Where was God in the experience?

Exploring the Science

- What fascinated you? Was new to you? Puzzled you? Challenged you?
- "As Ice Ages have come and gone over the past two million years with the dance of the Earth around the Sun, so has the sea. Strip[ing] the rocks, revealing layers laid down through ages longer than human existence."
 Science reveals the long, epic, changing history of the world. How does it add to our wonder over God's character and activity in creation?
- "Picking [a fossil], holding it in your hand, ... touching a long-disappeared world over which God was silent as he revelled in its playfulness."

What might this say about God declaring creation "very good"? Name as many sea creatures – past and present - as you can. How does "naming" declare the natural world is "very good"?

 "Half of [the] greenhouse gases we have added ... [have] been taken up by the sea ... [and] 90% of the warming ... Oceans become more acidic ... making shell of molluscs and other creatures thinner, more fragile. Warmer seas put stress upon beautiful corals, home to a wondrous community of life."

> How does science lead us to gratitude over the seas? How might we express our gratitude for God's provision of life through the seas?

Reflection – Deeper

• *"Where were you when I laid the earth's foundations ..."* (Job 38v4)

Science takes us back through the long history of the Earth. How is science God's gift, revealing to us his activity with creation?

• *"Who shut up the sea behind doors ... when I said, 'This far you may come and no farther; here is where your proud waves halt'".*

(Job 38v8, 11) How does the rapid rise in sea-levels due to global warming contrast with God's ordering of the world to provide life? How might this call us to action to limit the impact of climate change?

"Jesus called out to them 'Friends haven't you any fish?'" (John 21v5)
 How might this contrast of empty and full nets speak to the ravishing of the seas through pollution and climate change?
 How is Jesus calling us to live so that the seas continue to be a place where life flourishes and sustains human lives?

Prayer

Reflect in stillness on Job's response to God after his tour of creation; "My ears have heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes." (Job 42v5,6)

How will you respond to what you have seen and heard in the film?

Give thanks for the sea! Times of fun and laughter at the seaside. Its provision for life. The wonderous and amazing diversity of life found in it!

Pray for those around the world whose lives and livelihoods are being washed away by rising sea levels.

Pray for the life of the sea; that we will work with God to enable it to flourish.

Share with one another one thing you will do to help bring God's peace to the sea? Pray for one another that God will help you act on it.

Episode 2 : Sky

Key Bible Texts : Job 36v22-33; Ps 18v7-19

Ice Breaker

• "When did you last look up? ... At the stars? At the clouds? When did you last take a moment to be engulfed by it all?"

Share together your experiences of looking up at the sky. What you saw? What you imagined? What surprised you? How did it make you feel? Was God there, sharing in the experience?

Exploring the Science

- What fascinated you? Was new to you? Puzzled you? Challenged you?
- "It takes something that is really big and ancient the Sun. And something that is really, really small ... ice crystals ... only together at the right time and place, they produce a spectacle that is wonderous and beautiful."
 How does this combination of the big and small, speak

about our meeting with God in the gift of wonder? Might the gift of wonder build awareness of God within our lives?

• "One of the miracles of science is that we can ... predict the weather ... A gift of science's understanding of the world building through ... the persistence, playful, creativity of scientists."

Our artistic activities reflect God's creativity. Does science do the same? Is science only valuable for the practical benefits it brings? Or does it say something more about our connection with creation and creator?

• "Small though a butterfly's wings are, it might have a huge impact on the world. And small though we are ... we play a part ... [in] a game that we cannot fully control or know the ending."

Do the benefits of science give us a false sense of security as to our ability to control the world?

Facing an uncertain world, are we driven to seek security or live with humility? In what or whom should we trust?

Reflection – Higher

• "God is exalted in his power. Who is a teacher like him ... all people have seen it; they gaze on it from afar." (Job 36v22, 25)

What might the natural world teach us about the being, action, and purposes of God?

God comes to be part of the world in Jesus. How might this help us gain a view of God in the beauty and brokenness of the natural world?

• "How great is our God – beyond our understanding ... Who can understand how he spreads out the clouds ...?" (Job 36v26,29)

With our understanding of the science of weather, might we answer God differently from Job? Given what the science of weather tells us about uncertainty, should we answer differently from Job?

• "He made darkness his covering, his canopy around him – the dark rain clouds of the sky" (Ps 18v11)

How does the wonder of the sky draw us towards God? How does it make God seem further from us?

What about the extreme weather associated with climate change? A sign of how far we are from God. Or a call to share God's nurturing creation?

Prayer

Reflect in stillness on Job's response to God after his tour of creation; "My ears have heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes." (Job 42v5,6)

How will you respond to what you have seen and heard in the film?

Give thanks for atmosphere and weather and its provision that sustains life

Remember those who face hurt and insecurity due to climate change's changing weather patterns.

Share with one another one thing you will do to help bring God's peace to the sky? Prayer for one another that God will help you act on it.



Key Bible Texts : Gen 2v4-9; Rev 22v1-5

Ice Breaker

• *"We think of the Earth as a human planet. Yet, this look back reminds us that it is truly is a planet of trees."*

Together, name as many tree types as you can. Gather some leaves from different trees. Or show pictures of leaves from the internet. Try and identity which trees they come from.

Exploring the Science

- What fascinated you? Was new to you? Puzzled you? Challenged you?
- "We can feel dwarfed by the size of the trees ... by their longevity of their history and individual lives ... City builders and world shapers long before we began to move and live among them."

Where is the wonder for you in trees? "City builders, world shapers." How does this challenge the way we see our role in the world.

• "Trees play the game of life at a pace slower and seemingly more static that our own rapidly changing game. Play that is just as complex than that within our own bodies, lives, within our cities."

What might the slow pace of life within the city of the trees say about how God works out his purpose? With our shorter lives, do we find it difficult to plan for the long term?

• *"Eight billion people disturbing the balance of carbon in the atmosphere which three hundred trillion trees have helped sustain throughout human history and deeper into the past"*

Are trees conscious of the role they play in shaping the Earth? Do our scientific insights make us responsible for supporting the trees in their role?

Reflection – Wider

• "Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed" (Gen 2v8)

What does God placing Adam into the garden say about our relationship with the natural world? "Creation care is God's first priority for mission." Do you agree? Thinking of your own church, how might its sharing of God's mission better reflect how God values the natural world?

- "And the Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food" (Gen 2v9a)
 Is the natural world just there to provide for our physical needs? Or might nature sustain our sense of wellbeing too? How does nature speak of God's provision for life? Might this wider appreciation of nature affect how we treat it?
- "The angel showed me the river of the water of life ... On each side ... stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations." (Rev 22v1-2)
 What do you think "leaves ... for the healing of the nations" might mean? How might science's insights as to trees' role in sustaining the climate of the Earth, give us new insights in God's ongoing healing of the world? What might you practically do to share God's healing?

Prayer

Reflect in stillness on Job's response to God after his tour of creation; "My ears have heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes." (Job 42v5,6)

How will you respond to what you have seen and heard in the film?

Take time to go for a walk and look at the trees. Take time to give thanks to God for his creativity in them, and his sharing of life through them.

Pray for those who are seeking to protect trees in their community and countries often against commercial interests who want to cut them down.

Episode 4 : Life

Key Bible Texts : Gen 2v19-20; Ps 104; Col 1v15-20

Ice Breaker

• "... the Moon has ... caused us to wonder about life ... the Bible asks of God, 'when I consider the ... moon ... which you have set in place, what are humans that you are mindful of them.'"

Share together your experiences of looking at the moon. What do you feel? What questions does it bring? Have you ever looked at it through binoculars or a telescope? How did it change your perspective of it? (Try to get hold of binoculars or a small telescope and look together.)

Exploring the Science

- What fascinated you? Was new to you? Puzzled you? Challenged you?
- "[Is the] Earth is a special place ... or just one part of a vastly larger story of life spread across the universe? ... regardless of the answer, Earth is still special ... a rare being [arose] ... able to say ... 'wow'."

If life were found elsewhere, would it change our perspective of the value of the Earth?

Would it silence our "wow" or increase it, make it more precious or less?

• "... the world is chaotically playful ... out of a mess ... complexity and order emerge. Resonating with the Bible's story of creation ... "

How might science's view that complexity and order arise from disorder connect with the Bible's story of creation and Easter? Might this shape our response to the environmental crisis? In adding to the mess of the world, do we limit God's possibilities for the future?

• "The Earth is wonderous ... A community of life, of which we are a part, to which we are connected."

How aware are you of your connection to the world? What responsibility might that bring?

Reflection – Fuller

• "So the Adam gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field" (Gen 2v20)

Considering the environmental crisis, what would the animals name humans? Science's exploration of the world continues Adam's naming. How do both activities express attentiveness and creativity

How might science enable us to see the goodness of creation and creator?

• "When you send your Spirit they are created, and you renew the face of the earth" (Ps 104v30)

Is God's creative activity limited to the beginning of the world, or does it continue through the long history of the Earth? As followers of Jesus, and bearers of God's spirit, how might we share in God's creative activity to "renew the face of the earth"?

• "For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth ... all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together ... [God] through him ... reconcile[d] to himself all things ... by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross." (Col 1v16-17, 20)

Our relationship with Jesus should lead to a sense of connection to other forms of life. Do you agree? How might we grow in this? Do we need a bigger gospel that embraces God's reconciliation of all things and not just people? How might we share in it words and action? How might this change the way we live as Jesus' followers?

Prayer

Reflect in stillness on Job's response to God after his tour of creation; "My ears have heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes." (Job 42v5,6)

Give thanks for the vast variety of life. Pray for those working to conserve the natural world – focusing upon a local project?

Pray for future generations – of people and other creatures; for their fears over the climate crisis and that we will hear Jesus speaking to us through them.

In response to the films, name one thing you will do individually, and agree one thing you will do together to bring God's hope to creation.

About Dave Gregory

Dave Gregory is a Baptist Missioner in Science and Environment. He previously served as minister of churches in Milton Keynes and Croxley Green and was Baptist Union President from 2018-19. He has a masters in applied theology from Oxford University focusing upon the dialogue of science and faith. Previously he gained a doctorate at Imperial College in tropical thunderstorms and worked at the Met Office, Hadley Centre and European Weather Centre for Medium Range Weather Foreasting researching weather and climate.

He convenes BUEN – the Baptist Union Environment Network, inspiring the Baptist Together family to engage with the environmental and climate crises, growing into "Whole Earth Disciples". An experienced science-faith communicator working with churches, theological colleges and community groups across a wide range of ages, Dave was editor of "Messy Church Does Science" (2017). More recently he contributed to the "Messy Church Goes Wild" (2022) and was science director of "Messy Adventures" (2023), helping families to connect to the environment and faith. Dave also works with the God and the Big Bang project, exploring science and faith with primary and secondary schools.

Contact Details

Email : BUEnvNet@outlook.com

For more information on BUEN – the Baptist Union Environment Network - go to our page on the Baptist Union website

https://www.baptist.org.uk/Groups/349554/Baptist_Union_Environment.aspx

or visit BUENs Facebook page

https://www.facebook.com/BaptistUnionEnvironmentNetworkBUEN

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