

lesson seven  
FEBRUARY 9-15

*Through a Glass,*  
**Darkly**

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*“The wisdom of this world is foolishness in God’s sight. As it  
is written: ‘He catches the wise in their craftiness’ ”*

*(1 Cor. 3:19, NIV).*



Ps. 8:3–9

## Introduction

# Take Nothing for Granted

The cool wind caressing my face. The fresh scent of pine wafting through the air. I gaze at the lush forest around me. My eyes travel up and up and up at the tall, stout trees waving to the craggy mountains standing guard in the distance. Not an industrial sound can be heard. *This is peaceful*, I think. *This is church*. How can this place, this moment, this feeling come from anywhere but God? I don't see how the cleverly camouflaged lizard crawled out of the primordial ooze or that the efficiency of fungi cleaning the forest floor was anything but planned. Evolutionists base their theories on the concept that nature evolved out of the instinct for survival—the dog-eat-dog world. But what about the things in this world whose only function is beauty? Or what about the thoughts and actions that cannot possibly stem from competitive survival, such as human kindness?

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### Why do we take for granted the beauty God creates?

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What about the tropical bird fluffing its colorful feathers in unusual ways and doing little dances to impress a mate or the natural instinct of a mother to protect her child. Such things did not evolve. They were designed. From the little ants working together to carry their meal to the giant unmovable mountains; from the quiet chirp of a single cricket to the roar of a lion heard from miles away—all of these things come together for the glory of God. He has staked His claim on this earth by His word alone. We are His.

Why do we take for granted the beauty God creates? Why do we constantly demand proof that we belong to Him? What does nature tell us? That He provides. He cares. He loves. “I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; / your works are wonderful, / I know that full well. / My frame was not hidden from you / when I was made in the secret place” (Ps. 139:14, 15, NIV). You have all been “churched.” You know this verse; so why continue to ignore it? Take a walk through a forest. Smell the flowers. Praise Him. And as you study this week's lesson, may you learn more about what nature does and does not reveal about God.

# Logos *The World Around Us*

Isa. 43:1;  
John 12:31, 32;  
Rom. 8:20–22

## ***God Made a Perfect World (Isa. 43:1; Ps. 24:1)***

When God first created the world, it was exclusively His, and it reflected Him perfectly. In this glorious place, He created two people for the beautiful home He had made. It was flawless, just like its Creator. The time Adam and Eve spent in nature was to be for their benefit.

In Isaiah and the Psalms, the Bible declares that God made everything and everything is His. Everything about this planet—from the blades of grass to the nations and their peoples—are all reflections of His design. And at the beginning of this world, it was an unspoiled reflection.

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## **Despite our sin, God still listens and cares.**

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## ***Humans Ruined It (Gen. 3:17; Rom. 8:20–22)***

Adam and Eve made a devastating mistake. They disobeyed God—first Eve, then Adam. Both became equally guilty. Through their sin, the Bible tells us that the natural world in which we live was cursed by its Creator, but not, as many assume, purely to punish sinners. It was cursed “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” (Rom. 8:20, 21, NIV).

So by their sins, humans ruined God’s perfect work. In an attempt to bring us back to repentance, the world was cursed. Even though to some degree nature still reflects God’s glory, sin has marred what God designed. Even what seems to be the most perfect scene is spoiled by sin. Roses have thorns. Bees sting. Waterways are polluted. What God made as a flawless work of art and architecture, humanity has defiled. But even in our sin, God has made a way for us to be saved. Sometimes it may not seem that the cursing of this world is to our advantage. God, however, is still in control. We can trust Him. By studying nature and the marvels it still contains, we even now can see how creative and powerful God really is.

## ***The Devil Gained Control . . . Sort Of (John 12:31, 32; Eph. 2:1, 2)***

When Eve and Adam chose to believe the serpent over God, Satan became the ruler of this world. Fortunately for us, it’s only a temporary position. In fact, God has already won the war for this world. Satan rules over those people who don’t let God govern them, who choose not to follow His perfect instruction. Despite the Fall, God is still in control. It is still, ultimately, His world. God still controls nature too. Without His intervention,

the devil would have destroyed everyone and everything by now.

Granted, there is still evil in the world, even in nature. Animals kill and maim, and people do even worse things to themselves and to each other. It can be all too easy to focus on the bad and miss the good God has given us. Praise Him that He has already defeated the enemy! Soon we will be going home, and this world will be remade as God intended it to be—perfect and perfectly like Him.

### ***God Won the World Back (Psalms 8; 19)***

It is a wonderful thing to know that God is the ultimate Power in the universe and that through Christ's sacrifice, this world has been won back to God. Some days, it certainly doesn't seem like it, but that is where faith comes in—faith in the Bible, faith that Christ has saved and lives in us through the Holy Spirit. Sin still has consequences and death still exists. Even though we are saved through Christ, there are still repercussions from our sins. And because Jesus lived a perfect life in an imperfect world, death is not forever.

God is so merciful that we don't even have to know how to pray right to receive His mercy! When we do not even know what to tell God or how to express ourselves, the Holy Spirit speaks on our behalf. Romans 8:26 tells us that "the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express" (NIV). Despite our sin, God still listens and cares.

Even with the encouragement that abounds in Scripture that instructs us regarding God's mercy, it can sometimes still be discouraging to continue on in the world surrounded by sin. That is why God has given us more than just the Bible to encourage and guide us. Even though nature is nowhere near as stunning as it was when God first created it, each thing in this world—trees, animals, people, the stars, and so on—all still show the unique mark of their Creator. The psalmist wrote, "The heavens keep telling the wonders of God, and the skies declare what he has done" (Ps. 19:1, CEV). Whether the shining stars at midnight, the brilliant blue sky in summer, or the breathtaking colors at sunrise or sunset, nature keeps telling us how amazing, glorious, and present God is. Next time you see a particularly stunning vista, remember that God made it all, and that it is an expression of His love and care for you.

### ***REACT***

1. What in nature strikes you most as glorifying God? How have you seen His hand in creation this week?

2. Do you see the continued destruction of the earth as a sign of God's soon return? Why or why not?

## Testimony *God's Love in Nature*

Pss. 24:1; 50:10

“In the beginning, God was revealed in all the works of creation. It was Christ that spread the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth. . . . It was He that filled the earth with beauty, and the air with song. And upon all things in earth, and air, and sky, He wrote the message of the Father's love.

“Now sin has marred God's perfect work, yet that handwriting remains. Even now all created things declare the glory of His excellence. . . . There is no leaf of the forest, or lowly blade of grass, but has its ministry. Every tree and shrub and leaf pours forth that element of life without which neither man nor animal could live; and man and animal, in turn, minister to the life of tree and shrub and leaf.”<sup>1</sup>

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### “In nature itself are messages of hope and comfort.”

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“Our Father in heaven is the source of life, of wisdom, and of joy. Look at the wonderful and beautiful things of nature. Think of their marvelous adaptation to the needs and happiness, not only of man, but of all living creatures. The sunshine and the rain, that gladden and refresh the earth, the hills and seas and plains, all speak to us of the Creator's love. . . .

“Even amid the suffering that results from sin, God's love is revealed. . . . The thorn and the thistle—the difficulties and trials that make [a human's] life one of toil and care—were appointed for [man's] good as a part of the training needful in God's plan for his uplifting from the ruin and degradation that sin has wrought. The world, though fallen, is not all sorrow and misery. In nature itself are messages of hope and comfort. There are flowers upon the thistles, and the thorns are covered with roses.

“ ‘God is love’ is written upon every opening bud, upon every spire of springing grass. The lovely birds making the air vocal with their happy songs, the delicately tinted flowers in their perfection perfuming the air, the lofty trees of the forest with their rich foliage of living green—all testify to the tender, fatherly care of our God and to His desire to make His children happy.”<sup>2</sup>

### REACT

Why does God allow difficulties and trials in our lives? What encouragement can we find in nature?

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1. Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 20.

2. White, *Steps to Christ*, pp. 9, 10.

Gen. 3:6

## Evidence

# Creator—Loving and All Powerful

Theologian William Paley authored *Natural Theology* in 1802, in which he wrote about how animals exhibit the care and skill of the Creator. Despite his failing to recognize the effects that the Fall has on nature, his thesis has never been refuted, despite numerous claims to the contrary.

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### Answers are found in a place where only faith can lead.

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Charles Darwin argued that a God who designed every feature of nature would not be good. As evidence, he referred to a parasite that feeds within the living bodies of caterpillars and the cruel way in which a cat will play with a mouse.

Today, especially within postmodern society, some Christians are not appalled by Darwin's argument. If a few Christians buy into Darwin's view, then that's between them and God. Right? The problem here, however, isn't just about creation versus evolution or Christianity versus Darwinism. It's attacking the existence of God and His character as an all-powerful Creator. Restated in modern terms, Darwin's argument would sound more like this, "Cancer is destroying millions of lives and making them suffer! Humans consistently do evil things every day! A Creator God could not be a loving one. He would be only bitter and vengeful!"

This argument addresses the following age-old questions: Why do bad things happen? And why does God allow bad things to happen? Answers are found in a place where only faith can lead. Eve made the costly mistake of believing she would be on equal ground with God if she ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And look where the world is now; look how corrupt, and full of war, disease, and hunger it is. But it isn't our fault, is it?

Sin has infected our world much like that parasite Darwin refers to. Yes, there are some beautiful things in this world much like what Paley refers to. But because sin entered this world and because many of us consider ourselves as great as God, we, too, have made the world what it is today. We must thank God daily for His Son's sacrifice for sinful humans who have perverted and destroyed His perfect creation. One day everyone will know the true power of God. Not everyone, however, will experience the new beautiful creation He has in store for us. Let God help you not to be a member of that group!

# How-to Seeing Through the Glass

Eph. 2:10

All of Christ's followers are fighting against darkness. But when we let Christ clean the glass daily, we can draw strength from Him. We can be encouraged to uplift other Christians who are trying to see through dark glass. Here are three ideas about how to let God clear a view through the darkness.

## He created you with a purpose. Let your roots grow deep in Him.

*Acknowledge your own poor sight.* One thing we know for sure: when we actively seek God, He will not hide from us (Jer. 29:12). When we are looking to grow in His wisdom, we will see His wisdom everywhere.

*Decide what you will look for.* Will it be darkness or light? Deciding to look for what is positive and realizing that the difficulties are not ours to conquer is crucial to this step. If we think we are able to advance in life through self-discipline, we must think again: "Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Eph. 6:12, NIV).

*Beware of self-confidence.* Self-confidence is imperative for personal growth; but what is faith if it is not letting go of what we are sure of? It is when we are most sure of certain strengths in our daily walk that we begin to regard them as infallible. This is when Satan blackens the glass with temptations in areas we thought we had conquered. This is when we become unable to see beyond the darkness and where recognition of and faith in Christ's all-knowing and creative power must step in. "We are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Eph. 2:10, NIV).

God knows when the sparrow falls (Matt. 10:29); do you not believe that He knows when you fall because you're trapped in darkness? He created you with a purpose. Let your roots grow deep in Him. Let your eyesight be guided by His healing hands. Let Christ clean the glass.

### REACT

1. Recall a time when you thought you had worked on a defect of your character only to find it still governing a part of you. How did you feel when you realized that your strength alone could not get rid of that character defect?

2. Think of ways you can strengthen your relationship with God this week.

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Mark 2:27

**Opinion***Dos and Don'ts,  
or Something More?*

I'd been so busy during the week with classes and extracurricular responsibilities that I couldn't get my dorm room cleaned for Sabbath. Now it was Friday night, and I sulked in the messy room I desperately wanted to clean. As I sat there looking at everything I could be doing but "couldn't because it was Sabbath," I was confused. If Sabbath was made for man and cleaning my room would actually relax me, why was I just sitting here? Then I realized that I really didn't know what the Sabbath was about. We can't do this, but we can do that. Not all the rules and obligations made sense. Nor did they answer my question about where the Sabbath came from, why it was instituted, and what its purpose was. So I decided to learn for myself what it meant to keep the Sabbath from God's point of view, because where I was, I could only see through the glass dimly. And what I discovered literally changed my life.

**The Sabbath is about building a relationship with God.**

I discovered that the Sabbath isn't about a list of dos and don'ts. Instead, the Sabbath is about building a relationship with God. Think of it this way: the Sabbath is like a wedding ring (or watch). Such a wedding gift signifies a commitment to a relationship. And that's what the Sabbath is for Christians. It shows the world that we are committed to the God who made the heavens and the earth. This relationship signifies that He justifies and sanctifies us. He alone can save us and when He does, He places His robe of righteousness on us.

With Christ's robe covering us, He then sees us without sin; and even though we still may sin, if we ask for repentance, His robe continues to cover us. Sabbath is a reminder that we are seen as spotless and that we are saved as long as we remain in Him. And the beautiful thing is that all of creation points to that one day, that one relationship. Now for me, the Sabbath is not about a list of dos and don'ts but about building that relationship with God.

**REACT**

1. How do you keep the Sabbath, and why?
2. What do you not understand about what Seventh-day Adventists believe?
3. How can you start discovering for yourself what our doctrines mean to you personally?



## Exploration

# *Designer Restores Crash-Test Dummies!*

Isa. 43:1

### CONCLUDE

Some days we feel like crash-test dummies—locked in a vehicle (earth) hurtling uncontrollably toward certain destruction. The cumulative effect of generations of selfishness, coupled with our own sinful errors, guarantees a shattering conclusion to the ride. Piercing this dark hopelessness is a ray of hope that, miracle of miracles, the One who designed and created us is anxious to restore His shattered creation. Although our self-centeredness has marred His creation, He will restore us as only our Creator can. Entrust your wrecked and mangled soul to the One who loves His creation and who will spare nothing to make it new.

### CONSIDER

- Interviewing one or more scientists about their understanding of nature's origin and their viewpoint about earth's future in light of human wrong-doing (sinfulness).
- Making a class video during a Sabbath afternoon walk in which various class members select a nature item and explain how it speaks to them about God's love.
- Meditating on the vastness of God's creation by observing the night sky on a moonless night or by visiting a planetarium.
- Memorizing Isaiah 45:17–25.
- Shattering a lightbulb or other glass object during class before estimating how many pieces there are after the shattering, calculating the probability that the object can be restored, and discussing how much God must love us to undertake such a formidable task as restoring our shattered lives. Heighten the effect by passing out bottles of glue and/or mending tape and telling the class to restore the object! (For safety, shatter the lightbulb or glass object in a box to prevent pieces of glass from flying into any class members.)

### CONNECT

Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, chap. 2, "The Creation."

Randall W. Younker, *God's Creation* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press®, 1999), pp. 37–49; John T. Baldwin, ed., *Creation, Catastrophe, and Calvary* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald®, 2000), pp. 40–62.

Richard F. Carlson, ed., *Science and Christianity* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2000), pp. 19–51, 105–110.