Enjoying Creation With Jonathan Edwards

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[0:00] It is an honor to be with you this morning. In anticipation of our time together today, I did a bit of research on the Learners Exchange website. You are probably aware that this exists, but in case you need a bit of a refresher, the past 10 years of Learners Exchange presentations are all archived there, all 276 of them.

Multiplication helps make that counting go a little faster. That is a lot of learning and exchanging. And as I was reading through the presentations and the presenters, I saw a lot of familiar names. Harvey, Dr. Packer, Olav, Sheila, among others. And I realized as I was doing that that I attended my very first Learners Exchange almost exactly two years ago on April 13, 2014, where I sat exactly where Kyle is sitting right now.
And I listened to him share with us about BART. So it seemed somewhat fitting to take a turn at the front of the room today, almost two years after walking through that door for the first time.
But I will note, if you are an aspiring presenter, maybe look at the archive after your first presentation. It can be a little intimidating to see all of the wonderful conversations that you all have been having.
[1:22] But even so, it is very good to be here with you this morning. Our topic today is Jonathan Edwards and the way he understood and appreciated God's creation.

So even though I'm from Kansas, I spent some of my high school years in the southern part of the United States. And that is where I was first introduced to Edwards in my grade 11 English class. But I've chatted with a couple folks, an informal poll of friends and colleagues, and I've learned that maybe that's not standard. Grade 11 English for an introduction to Edwards.
And so I would be curious to hear from you, how did you first meet Jonathan Edwards? What comes to mind when you think of him? Puritans.
Puritans, okay. Something about his wife. His wife, Sarah, she is lovely. Yes. The story I hear, I remember, is that when she heard Jesus' name, she would, at dinner, she would fall into her suit.
[2:31] She did have a number of ecstatic religious experiences, which Edwards recorded and was quite envious of in certain ways. He never had quite those same religious experiences.

How did you first hear about Edwards? I never heard of him. I'm here. Welcome. I'm here at Learner's Exchange.
Great. So it's wonderful to be here. It's a job. And lit. Okay. Sinners in the hands of an angry God. Sinners in the hands of an angry God.
And that is, in fact, how I first met Edwards in that grade 11 English class. In case you have not read this sermon, here's a short excerpt.
Edwards writes and preached, Your wickedness makes you, as it were, heavy as lead, and to tend downwards with great weight and pressure towards hell.
[3:36] And if God should let you go, you would immediately sink and swiftly descend and plunge into the bottomless gulf. And your healthy constitution and your own care and prudence and your best contrivance and all your righteousness would be no more influence to uphold you and keep you out of hell, then a spider's web would have to stop a falling rock.

And so until I came to Regent's and took a class on Edwards, that is about all I knew of him. He sounded pretty stern and a little scary. And if I'm honest, I was not overly excited to spend an entire semester studying him.
So it was a surprise to discover that the man who wrote the scary spider sermon had a lot to say about beauty. The beauty of saints, the beauty of creation, and the supreme beauty of God, source of all beauty.

As Dane C. Ortland notes in his recent guide to Edwards, I will commend this to you, Edwards on the Christian life, subtitle, Alive to the Beauty of God.
He says, to read Edwards is to be ushered into a universe brimming with beauty. Edwards walks us through the wardrobe into Narnia.
[5:04] We are given glasses, not sunglasses, which dim everything, but their opposite, lenses that brighten everything. This morning, we are going to try those glasses on for size.

We will learn to see, with Edwards, that God's world is personal, that it speaks to us, and that we need the new ears of conversion to hear it clearly.
God's world is personal, it speaks to us, and we'll need new ears to hear it. We'll also look at Edwards' toolkit for interpreting what God's saying through creation, which is called typology.
So we'll look more at his typology. These ideas surface throughout Edwards' writings, but this morning, we'll be looking primarily at two of them, a private notebook called Images of Divine Things, and his personal narrative, which was published in 1739.
And this is just one. So the Images of Divine Things is in this volume here. We've got volume 11 of the Collected Works of Jonathan Edwards.
[6:17] There are 26 volumes in the Collected Works, and I measured them out at the library, and I think, so from my shoulder to the tip of my fingers, about what he takes up on the bookshelf.

So this man wrote a lot. There's a lot to explore and uncover, and we're just going to be looking at a tiny snippet of that this morning. Before we dive in, it will be helpful to recall a bit about the world that Edwards lives in.
He was born in the New England colony of Connecticut in 1703, and he died in New Jersey in 1758 at the age of 54. This was less than 20 years before the American Revolutionary War.
Now, I know that many, perhaps most of you are Canadians, so I tried to brush up on my Canadian history of this time period, and as best I can gather, there were lots of trading, exploring, and lots of battles between England and France.
Am I missing anything important during this time? Okay. And the Indian Wars. Yes, of course, which did profoundly affect the Edwards home, actually.
[7:28] They were in Stockbridge at the time of that and were often in lockdown. Nobody could leave the community because of the fear of Indian raids. So, yes, that is the world that Edwards is living in.

As an adolescent, he studied at the Connecticut Collegiate School, which would be consolidated and renamed the more familiar Yale during his fourth year of study there.
The young Jonathan took full advantage of the library at Yale, immersing himself in the latest books from England and Europe. Years later, Edwards would recall how he studied the philosophy of John Locke with the enthusiasm of, quote, the most greedy miser in gathering handfuls of silver and gold from some new discovered treasure.
A big fan of Locke. His enthusiasm for the scientific findings of his day was no less considerable. His writings while at Yale include an intriguing series of scientific treatises which display an empirical approach to the natural world and a brief foray into the world of Newtonian optics.
Not perhaps as well known about Edwards, but he was something of an amateur scientist, and we'll say a bit more about that in a moment. Edwards would retain a lively interest in intellectual developments across the Atlantic throughout his lifetime, even as his personal and professional responsibilities in New England intensified.
[9:02] So on the one hand, we have the books and the learning that he's experiencing in Yale. And on the other hand, we have Edwards' reformed tradition, which forms the other major pole of his intellectual background.

He's the only son of a minister and a minister's daughter. The only son, he has ten sisters. Just ponder what that might mean for a moment. A lot of women.
He actually, he had a great respect for the piety of women, and Marsden mentions in his short life that this was perhaps influenced by growing up around so many women. He had a number of daughters as well.
So growing up in this family, the only son of a minister and a minister's daughter, Edwards was in many ways born for the pastorate. He inherited from his Puritan forebears a deep commitment to the book of scripture, as well as an appreciation of God's revelation in creation.

175 years before Edwards was born, Calvin wrote of creation as a mirror in which we can contemplate God, a spectacle of God's glory, and a dazzling theater of his works.
[10:14] These are beautiful words. Within Puritan thought, that mirror would become a book, the book of nature or creation, to be read alongside scripture.

So now we're going to talk a bit more about how Edwards read and interpreted that book of nature. During his senior year at Yale, when Edwards was 16, yes, he was at Yale at 16, that's a bit young, but not overly so, you just needed to know some Greek and Latin to get in, so he met the prerequisites.
He departed for Yale. While he was there at Yale, he had an intellectual breakthrough that he would later describe as a conversion experience in which his objections to God's sovereignty were overcome.
He writes in his personal narrative, I remember the time very well when I seemed convinced and fully satisfied as to this sovereignty of God and his justice and thus eternally disposing of men according to his sovereign pleasure.
My mind rested in it and it put an end to all those cavils and objections that I had till then abode with me all the preceding part of my life. And in his short life of Jonathan Edwards, which I mentioned, so just for comparison, this is the short life and this is the long life.
[11:46] So if you're looking for a starting point in Edwards, this could be a good place to start, though if you want to just dive full into the big life, it's also an excellent book.

But in the short life of Jonathan Edwards, George Marsden comments on this time in Edwards' life. Like many of the great thinkers in this era, immediately after the Newtonian revolution in natural science, Edwards was attempting to understand how everything in the universe fit together.
For him, it all fell into place when he realized that the central theme of his own heritage, the sovereignty of God, could be the solution to finding the grand scheme of things.
Edwards now saw that the universe was essentially personal, an emanation of the love and beauty of God, so that everything, even inanimate matter, was a personal communication from God.
Edwards now saw that the universe was essentially personal. This is the first thing we notice when we wear our Edwards glasses and look at the world as he does.
[12:57] The universe, far from being subject to blind, impersonal, mechanical forces, is the personal creation of a personal God who remains intimately and personally involved with this creation.

This conclusion placed Edwards out of step with the growing number of thinkers, as Marsden notes, in contrast to many contemporaries who saw Newton's laws of motion as providing the model for understanding an essentially impersonal universe, Edwards started with a personal and sovereign God who expressed himself even in the ever-changing relationships of every atom to each other.
Again, that's Marsden. His verb choice there, expressed, when we say the sovereign God who expressed himself in the universe, that's a key telling verb because it points us toward the second thing that we notice when we look at the world as Edward does.
Creation, which we've discovered to be personal, speaks to us. Creation, which is personal, speaks to us. Now, for many of us, this doesn't seem at all surprising.
We are familiar with the opening verses of Psalm 19. The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament shows his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech and night unto night showeth knowledge.
[14:25] Their line is gone out through all the earth and their words to the end of the world. That's the translation that Edwards used in a sermon in the early 1720s.

And that sermon, The Duty of Hearkening to God's Word, expounds upon this psalm, noting, this is Edwards' words, there is God's creating voice, that is, the voice of God by the creatures.
The whole creation of God preaches to us. Its creatures declare to us his majesty, his wisdom, and power, and mercy. And that is just the beginning.
For Edwards, the entire world hums with God's personal speech. Trees, mountains, spiders, rainbows, and even silkworms each tell us something specific if only we can learn to hear them.
And the key to hearing this and translating it for Edwards is typology. Maybe an unfamiliar word for you. We'll unpack that a bit as we go along.
[15:39] Although Edwards engages typology throughout his writing, he does so most frequently in a gray notebook that he began during his tenure in Northampton, Massachusetts, where he

served from 1726 to 1750.

The notebook had a number of titles, Shadows of Divine Things, The Book of Nature, and Common Providences. You can hear some Puritan roots in that one.
The Language and Lessons of Nature. Edwards decided on the final title, Images of Divine Things, in entry number 118, which he probably wrote in 1741.
This notebook contains 212 reflections on earthly existence and its relationship to divine reality.
Edwards' language for this correspondence varies.
Sometimes it's an analogy or a type or a signification, representation, or emblem. Lots of key words. He has words that he likes to use and reuse and many of them are interchangeable.
[16:46] But the association, regardless of the word that he's using at the time, is consistent.
We've got an earthly element that is a model, parallel, and prophecy of a heavenly one.

So when we speak of typology, we're thinking, in this case, of an earthly element that is a model, a parallel, and a prophecy of the heavenly.
And so, we read in image number 35, which is one of my favorites, the silkworm is a remarkable type of Christ, which, okay, yes, it's a bit humorous, got some heckling, some laughter, the silkworm is a remarkable type of Christ, which, when it dies, yields us that of which we make such glorious clothing.
This idea of wearing Christ as glorious clothing. So that seems a bit innovative, but Edwards was no stranger to typology. He would have been familiar with it from scripture.
For instance, in Galatians 4, Paul reinterprets Abraham's two wives as sons of the two covenants, as signs of the two covenants. Aspects of the Old Testament were thus read as prefiguring or pointing toward gospel fulfillment in the New Testament.
[18:07] This two-level engagement with the biblical text, the old and then pointing towards the new, eventually led to the development of a four-fold system of spiritual interpretation that predominated during the medieval period.

There's a lot we could say about that. We won't. In response to that development of the four-fold method, when the Reformation comes around, the reformers are calling for a return to the plain sense of the text.
We're going to get back to the literal meaning. But even as they did that, the reformers, particularly Calvin, still acknowledge the occasional need for typological interpretation.
Calvin says, the whole cultures of the law, taken literally and not as shadows and figures corresponding to the truth, will be utterly ridiculous.
When he speaks about Abraham's two wives, Calvin comments, the design of Paul was to raise the minds of the pious and to consider the secret work of God in this history.
[19:12] As if he had said, what Moses relates concerning the house of Abraham belongs to the spiritual kingdom of Christ, since certainly that house was a lively image of the church.

So Calvin looking at these lively images in certain parts of the Old Testament. So consequently, the Puritan typological tradition that Edwards inherited from his Calvinist forebears understood itself as returning to the spirit of the New Testament writers.
They're largely searching for continuities between the two Testaments, but not elsewhere. When New England Puritans read the book of nature, they observed signs of God's providence, but not types foreshadowing or anticipating a future ultimate reality.
Indeed, nature rarely served as a type and only under very specific circumstances. Puritan exegetes in one instance are warned, while the rock that Moses struck was indeed a divinely ordained type of Christ, ordinary rocks in nature hold no such honored place.
So don't go about looking at rocks and thinking that they signify these things. They're just rocks. We've got a special rock in the Old Testament, but the other rocks are just rocks. It seems obvious, but when we read Edwards, we realize it's not.
[20:43] In spite of these prohibitions to not look overly intently for meaning in nature, nature was of profound interest for Edwards starting at a very young age.

his personal narrative speaks about his boyhood play being in a swamp. You can ponder that. Would you want to play in a swamp? And there he speaks of particular secret places of my own in the woods where I used to retire by myself and used to be from time to time much affected.
As we noted earlier, Edwards' attentiveness to nature took a scientific turn during his university years of insects, which is the earliest surviving manuscript we have in Edwards' hand.

In that, he uses empirical science to study the movements of a spider on its web. If you're familiar with Edwards, you may know about the spider letter. This is the earlier version of that that he later then submits.
I'm going to read a bit of the spider letter to you. It's interesting to think about the young Edwards going out and having this scientific experiment. So he's looking at the spider intently, watching it again and again.
[21:54] He writes, I repeated the trial over and over again till I was fully satisfied of the spider's way of working. They let themselves hang down a little way by their web, and then they put out a web by their tails, and the moving air takes it by the end and by the spider's permission pulls it out and bears it out of his tail to any length.

So he's describing the spider creating a new thread on his web. He spends quite a bit of time observing the spider. He would later submit a revised version of this letter to the Royal Society of London in 1723, but it was never published.
He was not the first scientist nor the last to be beaten to publication. Someone else described the movements of the spider first. So it's not that he was wrong, it's just that someone else had done it about a year before.
Another treatise that he wrote at the same time, Of the Rainbow, displays young Edwards' foray into the world of Newtonian optics. In many of these studies, his Puritan heritage is quite apparent. Inquiry into the world of nature frequently leads him to glimpse evidence of God's providential orchestration. In Insects, for instance, his corollaries extol the goodness and wisdom of the creator in providing, quote, pleasure and recreation for these despicable creatures.
[23:15] spiders. So he's interested in how the world works. I don't know if you've ever, as you've contemplated killing a spider, pondered that God, too, offers them pleasure and recreation.

But this is the vision of the world that he's creating. Some years later, Edwards would record in Images of Divine Things that spiders are types of devils and the lusts of men.
So he's gone from looking at spiders and observing their behavior to interpreting them specifically as something that tells us about the world.
How and why Edwards moved from this, moving from a general realization of God's providence in the spider to looking at a specific typological meaning of the spider, that general communication to a specific communication.
In order to understand that, we will need to uncover the logic of his typological approach. And we will see that his typology is rooted in scripture, supported by reason, and animated by conversion.
[24:25] But before we dive into that, we're going to take a brief stretch break, can ponder what you've learned about spiders and other things, and then we'll come back and dive into typology.

As we noted, what we're going to be looking at we will be looking at the way Edwards reads creation, his typology, and that typology is rooted in scripture, supported by reason, and animated by conversion.
So first, we will look at how Edwards' typological vision is rooted in scripture. in image number 70, all these images are numbered, and you just go through image 12, image 15.
So in image 70, Edwards writes, if we look on these shadows of divine things as the voice of God, purposely by them, teaching us these and those spiritual and divine things, to show of what excellent advantage it will be, how agreeably and clearly it will tend to convey instruction to our minds, and to impress things on the mind, and to affect the mind, by that we may, as it were, hear God speaking to us.
wherever we are and whatever we are about, we may see divine things excellently represented and held forth, and it will abundantly tend to confirm the scriptures, for there is an excellent agreement between these things and the holy scriptures.
[26:05] So we see in that passage, instructed by these types, we are able to better understand spiritual and divine things, as well as the scriptures.

scriptures. Additionally, our minds are so affected by the good and clear connections that we don't forget them. So it's a memory device. And the excellent agreement between the types and the Bible further inspires appreciation of God's harmonious world.
Finally, and most significantly, these types allow us to constantly receive communication from God, so that wherever we are and whatever we are about, we may perceive the signs of his words to us.

So within this framework, Edwards reasserts God's intimate involvement with creation, and he does so in the face of competing scientific and philosophic claims. The rise of deism, we've got material science happening at this time.
So far from being ignored, the book of nature is to be read intently, studied intently, alongside the book of scripture. And Edwards is very concerned to establish these connections between the book of nature and the book of scripture.
[27:22] The index at the back of his images notebook lists over 100 scripture passages that correlate with the various types. And Edwards frequently references the Bible with the images themselves.

So he's constantly doing this echoing back and forth between scripture and the images. These citations perform two functions. First, they validate Edwards' typological reading of the natural world.
As we see in one of his images, image number 27, when he quotes three passages of scripture and alludes to two others to support his conclusion that, quote, the waves and billows of the sea and a storm and the dire cataracts thereof of rivers have a representation of the terrible wrath of God.
So he's looking at the waves and the billows and the rapids and noting that they represent the terrible wrath of God. And when he does that, he quotes three scripture passages and alludes to two others.
Similarly, he asserts that the sun is designed by God as a type of Christ. And he says that that is arguable from scripture when we look at the names and representations that are in the Bible.
[28:37] Edward's use of argued there when he says we can argue that the sun is a type of Christ is somewhat curious and it points to the second way he's using scripture in his images.

He is legitimating his assertion that the whole universe is full of images of divine things. We see this impulse in number 30 when Edward says, if God had so much regard to the names of persons that they might signify things chiefly remarkable concerning them, why should we think he would not, in his ordering the nature of things, have respect to spiritual things so as to signify and represent them?
He uses a similar line of argument elsewhere when he appeals to the many Old Testament laws that although they weren't taken up for specific typological interpretation in the New Testament, they are plainly but quote, shadows of good things to come.
He's looking here at Calvin and what Calvin was doing and since Calvin said it would be foolish not to read these things typologically, he sees the typological mandate as being extended further to contemporary interpreters to look out into the world and see these things.
And here he takes one small step to assert that this biblical precedent is acceptable for and even perhaps incumbent upon Christian interpreters of the wider world.
[30:10] So even though Edwards is kind of leaving scripture in some ways, he's using scripture to inspire what he's doing with the natural world, when he starts interpreting the natural world it is only because he feels that scripture has given him permission to do so that he does.

It's very important for him that this project be anchored in scripture. So, typology for Edwards, rooted in scripture, but secondly, it is supported by reason.
And here we're conscious of the time that Edwards is living in. He's engaging with the Enlightenment philosophy. We heard how much he enjoyed Locke as a young person.
So, though Edwards takes the Bible as his starting point and maintains that the book of scripture is the interpreter of the book of nature, we see logical argument based on reason and experience throughout the images.
In one place, Edwards says, it is apparent and allowed that there is a great and remarkable analogy in God's works. It is very observable in the visible world.
[31:16] Following this observation, Edwards concludes, God does purposely make and order one thing to be in agreeableness and harmony with another. And he says, if there's an admirable analogy between the way that men, beasts, and plants are related, it's very rational to suppose an analogy and relationship between the corporeal world and visible world and the more spiritual, noble, and real world.

And so here we do glimpse some of these Enlightenment rational traces. But rather than allowing reason to sever the person from God, as in deism, that's happening quite a bit at this time, Edwards redirects reason toward its proper end in God.

He's consistently concluding that it is rational to perceive his work in his personal world. Within Edwards' Calvinist framework, however, reason can only go so far.
And here we see the third dynamic of his typological schema. It is animated by conversion. So for Edwards, typology is rooted in scripture, supported by reason, but animated by conversion.
In A Divine and Supernatural Light, one of Edwards' larger treatises that he published in 1734, he asserts, spiritual knowledge is what God is the author of, and none else.
[32:45] He reveals it, and flesh and blood reveals it not. He imparts this knowledge immediately, not making use of any intermediate natural cause, as he does in other knowledge.

Such spiritual knowledge is essential for Edwards because men's minds are quote, full of spiritual pollution and under the power of filthy lusts.
Now, there's just a turn of phrase at that time. We just don't have a lot of preachers saying these sorts of things today. But full of spiritual pollution and under the power of filthy lusts.
Edwards says, it is beyond a man's power to obtain this knowledge and light by the mere strength of natural reason. So if you're unregenerate, if you haven't been converted, the things of the gospel will seem tasteless and insipid.
He says, without conversion, they are a parcel of words to which they in their own minds have no correspondent ideas. It is like a strange language or a dead letter.
[33:48] That is, sound and letters without any significance. I find Edwards' language around sound and words quite interesting. It just keeps popping up.

The world is constantly engaged in communication in some way. Nevertheless, Edwards asserts that the great and universal end of God's creating the world was to communicate himself.
God is a communicative being. So in order to hear God's communication, which he's constantly sending out, we need divine revelation by the Holy Spirit, the new sense of conversion.
It gives us new eyes and ears to understand this communication from God. Though both the letters of scripture and the contours of a landscape might be visible to the natural eye, we can see them, we can see that there's a Bible, we can see that there's a mountain.
It's only after the elect are regenerated that we can be illumined to, quote, discern them in their true forms and mutual relations. So it's only once we're converted that we can truly see them.
[34:56] In his emphasis on the experience of conversion, as outlined in texts like Faithful Narrative, which Edwards published in 1734, we do see strong traces of Locke's epistemology.

Richard Brantley excellently summarizes this relationship. He says, just as Lockean epistemology conceives of a link between sense and reason, matter and mind, so the philosophical categories of Wesley and Edwards, their appropriations of Locke for religious methodology, conceive of a bridge that transports us from nature to grace, returns us from grace to nature, and joins nature and grace, justifying the reality of both.
It applies to the religious arena, the secular trust and experience that helped the early modern mind to position itself in the natural world. So Edwards' experience of regeneration becomes a category of knowledge that allows him to see nature differently.
But because he understands the grace of regeneration is coming solely from God, he's no reason to question this new site or the typological interpretations he makes, because he's trusting that they come from God.
So to review where we've come from, for Edwards, creation is personal, and it speaks to us. He interprets creation's words through typology, which we've just noted is rooted in scripture, supported by reason, and animated by conversion.
[36:29] And it's only through this new birth that we gain ears to hear creation speaking. For Edwards, this was far from a theoretical schema, but was actually a part of his own experience, which he records in the personal narrative.

You may recall that Edwards spent his boyhood in the swamp, and he took solitary walks in the woods where he was, from time to time, much affected.
Such experience is consistent with the general 18th century interest in solitude and nature, irrespective of religious commitment. We've got lots of people taking walks at this time and being inspired by creation.
And Edwards is quick to observe that his affections in those places were not of grace, but a natural consequence of his surroundings. Indeed, his early affections soon wore off, and he returns to a life of distraction.

But it was only after his conversion that he, quote, began to have a new kind of apprehensions and ideas of Christ, and the work of redemption and the glorious way of salvation by him, unquote. [37:41] This was accompanied by reflections on the beauty and excellency of Christ. Edwards was captivated by the Song of Songs, which is a book that has been involved with typological readings for centuries.

In reading the Song of Songs, he was noting that the rose of Sharon, the lily of the valleys, was Christ. He pictured himself being taken up into heaven in this early period, in the mountains, and he identifies the mountains as a type of heaven.
So for him, during this early period of conversion, he does have a great sense of God's nearness, and is describing that, speaking of his experience in creation. During this time, Edwards went for a walk and, quote, looked up on the sky and clouds.
There came into my mind a sweet sense of the glorious majesty and grace of God. I seemed to see them both in a sweet conjunction, unquote. He's been illuminated by the divine and spiritual light of conversion, and he's been schooled in the typology of scriptures, and so now Edwards begins to start to learn the idiom of God's communication through nature.
He's gone for this walk and looked up and all of a sudden is beginning to perceive creation as communicating in a different way. And as he grows in grace, the appearance of everything was altered, he writes.
[39:09] God's excellency, his wisdom, his purity and love, it seemed to appear in everything. In the sun, moon, and stars, in the clouds and the blue sky, in the grass, flowers, trees, in the water, and all nature.

Even the terror of a storm was transformed when Edwards heard the majestic and awful voice of God's thunder. His response to these experiences is quite telling.
Edwards writes about how he frequently is singing and meditating and speaking in response to what he's seen in creation. So he senses that there is a communication happening and he intuitively responds by speech and song.
Just pause for a moment and think about if there's ever been a time when you have encountered God and creation in that way. It's interesting to read Edwards. He makes it sound so beautiful and compelling and it made me wonder if there have been times in my life when I have seen God speaking to me in that way.
So we'll, yeah? Yeah, when I was 10, we had a summer home at Crescent Beach, so I slept in the sunroom. It's a rectangular window. And I woke up before my mom and dad, and I saw the view of Crescent Beach at low tide.
[40:32] I walked all the way out and all the way back, and still I get thoughts that come into my mind and completely overcome with peace. And I miss that so much, and I thought, where can I get that in Vancouver?

So I spent five days walking every trail front to back in Stanley Park, not a five day of the monument. So what I do in Stanley Park, the 19 buses in the middle of the park, you go down the parking lot, down Pipeline Road, you turn right around the Beaver Lake, you see the view of the lake, lake trail, causeway bridge, bridal trail, cross, merrily, Siwash Rock, and then a second long view of the water along the high stone wall where the Siwash Rock, there's a trail, Siwash Rock trail, third beach, second beach along the sea walls, most of it's on soft ground in shade, and around the pool, and then you go to La Sagoone, left sea level, three bodies of water, it's about four miles an hour and 40 minutes, any Georgia street bus takes you to the Central Library, that's an escape from the city, but you're in the city at the same time.
Brilliant. And that's, sometimes that's just what you need. That's great. Yeah. You might need to draw some map afterwards. So yeah, we can talk a bit more about that when we get to the Q&A;, but just ponder that.
When have there been times when you've perhaps encountered God in that way? As a modern or perhaps even a postmodern person, one of the things that I find most interesting about Edward's approach to creation is how he does not restrict God's powerful communication to an unspoiled, wild nature.
Rather, he understands the new science to be essential to God's speech, helping to unlock and clarify it. This perspective would become pretty much untenable in the half century after his death.
[42:23] We have the rise of romanticism, and in the United States specifically, we have transcendentalism. And so they're rebelling against what they perceive to be science's assault on

nature, in which science strips nature of his ultimate meaning and enchantment.

And there's definitely resonances of that in our own time today, still thinking of science as tending to disenchant creation. And we could say that Edwards was very much a man of his time in that he was still optimistic about what science could teach and uncover.
But it is important to note that for Edwards, as for many Puritan early scientists, and there were a lot of them in both England and the colonies, scientific observation was always understood to be in service to the revelation of God.
They look deeply into the function of the world because it was God's and therefore something worthy to be discovered and understood. For Edwards, science didn't strip, but rather translated the glory of creation, allowing us to hear God more clearly in and through it.
And in this way, he provides a model for how we might discern the movement of God in the ongoing process of science. We'll say a bit more about that. Because his perspective is so different from ours, his scientific entries are among his most intriguing, at least to me.
[43:45] In a style that harkens back to his earlier scientific papers, image number 79 perceives the universal law of gravitation, quote, as a type of love or charity in the spiritual world.

Number 58 cast the spectrum of visible light as a variety of Christ's gifts to his church. As one scholar notes, science did not challenge Edwards' typology, but only revealed knowledge of the wonders of God, a God always present in creation.
And this is precisely what we see throughout the images. As Edwards enfolds the process of scientific discovery into the divine communication. Writing about Galileo's heliocentric theory, Edwards sees the reversal of that earlier worldview as being emblematic of, quote, eternal and heavenly things being beyond what the church of God formerly thought them to be.
Similarly, he envisions the invention of telescopes, which was a recent invention, as, quote, a type and forerunner of the great increase in knowledge of the heavenly things that shall be in the approaching glorious times of the Christian church.
So he's just looking out into the whole world and seeing God's truth. In both of these instances, Edwards cast science as bringing to light something that was previously hidden or misunderstood, increasing our comprehension of God's words.
[45:13] As Janice Knight observes, for Edwards, God's disposition to communicate himself inspired and sanctified all human idioms so that even the vocabulary of science became theologically resonant.

Indeed, to read images of divine things is to witness a world where science, history, and nature all cohere into one great whole beneath the authority of God.
Not surprisingly, Edwards' most frequent image for God is the sun, highlighting the utter dependency of all creation and human culture upon his continued maintenance.
As we read in image number 14, the sun so perpetually for so many ages, sending forth his rays in such vast profusion, without any diminution of his light and heat, is a bright image of the all-sufficiency and everlastingness of God's bounty and goodness.
So what do we make of all this? It's quite lovely in some ways. Is it possible that a snake could simply be a snake?
[46:24] Instead of a lively representation of the devil's catching souls by his temptations. Could it just be a snake? The answer for Edwards is no.

As a young man, he discovered creation to be the personal communication of a personal God. That creation speaks directly and specifically as a person would.
Conversion gives us new eyes and ears so that we can see and hear the true meaning of that communication, which for Edwards unfolds within the framework of typology.
To our eyes and ears, his conclusions might seem arbitrary, artificial, even bizarre. There's also something a bit overly tidy about it.
He has this one-to-one vision of the world, which lacks the complexity and ambiguity that characterizes so much of our lives. But we cannot dispute that Edwards' vision of the world has a brilliance and dynamism that ours often lacks.
[47:33] As we close our time this morning, I want to suggest a few things that we can learn from Edwards as we look out at the world through these glasses that we've been trying on. First, Edwards pushes us to gaze at creation more intently.

I will confess that when I'm down at Spanish banks, admiring the water and the mountains, I'm typically thinking, that's beautiful. And if I'm feeling especially pious, I might even think about God creating the mountains and the water.
But if Edwards were standing next to me on the beach, he would say, you have not even begun to enjoy God's creation. You've barely looked at it. For Edwards, the book of creation is no less worthy of close study than the book of scripture.
We cannot look at a landscape for a few minutes and think we have comprehended it. We need to sit with it, contemplating it, perhaps even interrogating it, listening for God's voice.
Now I imagine if we all went down to the beach and spent some time doing this, we might come up with a lot of different things that we think God is saying through his creation, and perhaps none of them would be what Edwards thinks.
[48:46] That's okay. The important thing, if we are to do this kind of work, is to hear clearly from Edwards when he says that God's revelation in creation is always consonant with his revelation in scripture.

Contemplation of creation cannot and should not replace contemplation of scripture. Rather, looking deeply into scripture allows us to see God more deeply in creation.
But this cannot happen if we do not take the time to ponder and wonder at God's good world. Edwards encourages us to move beyond aesthetic appreciation, which cannot change us, to an encounter with a personal living God who can.
This, for Edwards, is true enjoyment. Second, Edwards provides a model for how modern science can enhance rather than diminish our enjoyment of God's creation.
I think this is one of his greatest gifts to us in at least two ways. First, Edwards' fearless engagement with the modern science of his day suggests that we can go and do likewise.
[50:00] Now this may seem like less of a concern in our present setting, but there are still a lot of places in North America where the compatibility of science and faith are heatedly debated.

I grew up in one of those places. Edwards' confidence in the sovereignty of God allowed him to see the new science as an opportunity, not a threat. Certainly, he did not embrace all of its philosophic conclusions.
He rejected materialism outright. But the overall project was one that Edwards could support. This was not because he trusted science or scientists, but because he trusted the personal God who was revealed in science.
But perhaps we're not overly worried about science. In fact, we'd rather not mess with it. Maybe we find it boring or cumbersome, or you never quite wrapped your head around it in school.
To us, Edwards says, learning more about God's world is worth the effort. I'll confess that I am not a science type. I studied literature because I wanted to read great books, not memorize cultivars or chemical chains or laws of motion.
[51:11] But my sister is an environmental scientist. And one of the things that I love about her is how she makes God's world come alive to me. When I talk with her, God's creation isn't just beautiful or interesting or even strange.

It is dynamic, intricate, and marvelous. This was true for Edwards as well. And he invites us to join him in studying creation.
Finally, Edwards' vision of God's personal creation might provide some conversational starting points with our neighbors here in Vancouver. We live in one of the most beautiful cities on earth. People come to Vancouver from all over the world. And many of them are drawn here, or at least kept here, by that beauty. For most of our neighbors, Sunday is a day not for church, but for hiking or skiing or walking along the beach.
Now, I am not suggesting that you strike up a conversation with your neighbor about an 18th century Puritan preacher who had a few ideas about spiders and mountains. I don't recommend it.
[52:19] But I do think that the legacy of Edwards' interest in creation can be helpful to us as we seek to engage our neighbors where they are.

What do they think of the world? Do they sense something stirring in those mountains? Might it be some personality which we might discover and come to know?
The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament shows his handiwork. Day unto day utters speech and night unto night shows knowledge.

Edwards' question to us today is, do you know that voice? Will you listen? Thank you. So, we've got a little bit of time for Q&A;, and I would love for us to have a conversation together.
I know that there are so many people in this room who not only have a lot of experience seeing God in the world, but also quite a bit of experience studying Edwards.
[53:25] So, if there's anything I can answer, I'm happy to do so, but otherwise I'd love for us to just chat a bit. He used to preach in Nova Scotia, because my ancestor was a minister, Reverend John Paysan.

His books, John Paysan, journals in the Regent Library, he talked about how he liked Jonathan Edwards. He was an interesting man. Yeah. Hola.
So, thank you, Becky. That was most helpful, and you know far more about Jonathan Edwards than I do. I appreciate having that. You're very excited. The thing that concerns me about development since Jonathan Edwards is that the word nature has been co-opted by the Enlightenment.
And by talking about nature, we can obscure the face of God in nature. And it seems to me that the determination to talk about creation avoids that problem.
And I wondered if you had seen a balance in Edwards' writing, and I don't know, so I'm asking for information, a balance between the use of the word creation and the word nature, because nature seems to have opened up a whole circular world, which is taking people away from God.
[54:49] Indeed. So I know there's some places where I use nature, but I was actually pretty specific in trying to speak about creation when I used my own words because of this very issue that Olaf mentions.

I think for Edwards, I think nature probably is the word he's using more frequently. He's just so immersed in the time that for him it's not even a concern.
And that's one of the ways that we can possibly critique him, that there just are things that he can't foresee that are going to happen that he potentially opens himself up to. But I don't think he...
He's certainly conscious that people are doing this, that they're severing creation or nature from God. But the very fact of his typology project is...
Which is just one facet of his overall project of trying to bring everything cohering under God's authority. That to him is more important than a specific word that he's using there.
[55:51] Yes? I just want to thank you for your passion, which is very contagious. So, seriously, good job. And please keep doing this.

I think we all need instructors, teachers like this. I sit here and keep thinking. There's a question asked to me many, many years ago when I was studying in Japan by Japanese, not a Chinese. I'm from China, from Beijing. His question, he's a professor, you know, for humanities study. I was in science and engineering.
So he basically said, whether or not I've ever thought about why Chinese were one of the greatest civilizations, how come we just fell asleep for this many thousands, well, at least 2,000 years, that we had no scientific dimension.
What have the Chinese been doing? And I think that really struck me, especially being asked by Japanese, not the Chinese. Yeah, this question has stayed on my mind until today.
[57:03] And so thank you for this topic. And it seems like there's some answers that I've been thinking about. I think that I was going to present it to you.

I used to, one day, I was even saying to a teacher, to say that we had a lot of mathematical, you know, inventions in mathematics at a very early age, a thousand years ago.
But why did we even stop? So I thought, the answer is Chinese language is not alphabetical. It would be very difficult for us to find a Chinese character that we can use in the equation to say that is X, that is a variable.
So I thought, well, that could be the reason why we just couldn't do it. So that's just, we just stopped. But now I think if we can use any sort of, you know, drawing to do that.
So is that we missed the link? Is that we never blessed with a sense of revelation? Which is because we didn't have the first books.
[58:10] We probably focused more on the other books that were created by human beings for science and engineering. Interesting. Yeah. No, there's a lot of discussion about how modern science, even in the West, arises.

And certainly a rich legacy of Christian thinkers who are inspired to go out and trust creation because they trust the God who made it.

That eventually goes some places that we might be uncomfortable with. But yeah, certainly there is a rich, rich legacy of the Christian past leading up to science.
Christian here. You set off a chain of thought when you were talking about the later reaction of the romantics and their sense that science has stripped the world.
Two poetic phrases that come to mind are murder to dissect and dark satanic mills, Wordsworth and Blake.
[59:12] I'm wondering if it is not so much science as technology and that he was pre-technology. Things were still being discovered, but they are not being applied and were not destroying the world.

And that is what we have lived under since science became power. Interesting. Yeah, I am probably not super qualified to speak to that.
I will say that it was actually an interest in the romantics that brought me to this topic in Edwards. I have a background in literature, and so I was just noticing what seemed like some affinities between some of what he was saying and the transcendentalists in particular.
And so I originally set out to chart a course between Edwards and the transcendentalists and realized that's not a thing you can do. So I looked at typology instead. But there are certainly folks who would say that it is not the invention of technology per se that is problematic, but a certain perspective that then gives rise to that.
So he's definitely living in a time when science slash technology doesn't have the same power to shape the world in the way that it does today. But a number of thinkers who would not exempt what was happening in his time from being the roots of where we've landed.
[60:37] But certainly there's, you see different folks who kind of take different paths and they find ways of kind of harnessing intellectual exploration in a way that is constructive rather than harmful.

Yes? I wondered if you were aware of any link between, with a French artist named J.J. Gromoville who drew and published a lot of pictures of plants especially that were anthropomorphized into humans.
Oh, interesting. Very interesting. This was actually the precursor over the last couple of hundred years of what we see now in Disney. Fascinating. No, I'm not aware of a connection.
I mean, my instinct is that Edwards would be quite uncomfortable actually because he's not seeing other people in creation and he's not seeing, for him, the language is a key word for him.
So he's going to talk about speech and translation. So he would always have kind of an intermediary of a linguistic turn that gets from the mountain to then this other thing about God.
[61:51] But that's fascinating. There's one. I think we need to come to a close soon, but yes. Thanks for your rational explanation.

Oh, no. The concept of creation and the memories. I might mention that as I grow older, I very curiously find myself thinking, I hope heaven is like that.
Without the aura of darkness. And the concept of heaven as a place of opulence and convenience is gone in my mind.
I'm really curious what happens. If it were like this or like that. So yesterday, I was going over the bridge to the airport, looking back on the South Bank and thinking, it's a beautiful place.
I hope heaven is like that with communities where people are comfortable with God. So the concept of creation leads into what we will experience the future is putting in us.
[63:03] Most definitely. And for Edwards, this is certainly a theme that we could bring up more, but he is preoccupied with the soul and what happens to us when we die in the new creation.

And for him, everything is tied together and he is aspiring. The beauty that he's seeing in creation now is really just pointing towards that which will be ultimate in heaven.
So he is very, we might say, heavenly minded in certain ways. But yeah, that's a powerful thread in his thought. I think we have one more question. I was wondering, you talked about how conversion affects our ability to see, to read the book of creation.
Does Edwards think that the fall has affected creation beyond human beings? And if so, how does that affect what we see there? I mean, obviously, he is not seeing what Darwin saw.
Right. No, that's an interesting question. I don't, I don't know as much about his doctrine of the fall as I should. The one place that I would point us is actually in the Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God sermon, which I just now noticed this part of the sermon reading it this time around.

[64:20] But he is talking about just how sinful people are and how, you know, they need God's salvation. And he says, you are so sinful that God's creation can't even bear you.

So he definitely has a sense that I think sin is certainly pervading our world, but I think he sees people as being more sinful than creation.
It still has more, I think, because of the reflection of God using kind of Calvin's mirror. But Edwards likewise extends this beauty to the saints, the elect.
So he would say once you are a Christian, you not only do you have new sight, but something is happening to you such that you are more beautiful and so you are also a theater of God's glory in those ways.
So the effects of sin, though pervasive, are not the same across the board.