

Wilderness Spirituality: The Song of the Paddle

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Date: 01 November 2009

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[0 : 0 0] Thank you. Could we have the lights out for about 10 minutes please? Delighted to be with you. The origin in some ways of this presentation was when I was 12 years old at Pioneer Ontario camp in Ontario learning to canoe.

This picture by the way was actually posted on CBC who picked up a chapter that I was asked to write in an anthology of Canadian authors and I chose to write on wilderness spirituality.

It was called the Song of the Paddle. But I learned as a 12 year old that the Canadian canoe is an amazing vessel with about 45 pounds.

You can portage it over your head one person and yet it will carry about 600 pounds of people and cargo which enabled some of our earlier explorers learning from the First Nations people to canoe all the way from New York to Hudson's Bay.

In our country if you've flown over it you know it's just a continuous stream of lakes and rivers. And so the Canadian canoe has in a sense opened up the wilderness for folks like ourselves.

[1 : 1 5] You could slash wilderness slash desert. And here you have a long tradition in the church of absenting yourself from the siren appeal of civilization in order to attend to the presence of God.

We were in Zambia, Gail and I, and I was teaching but we took a little vacation on the Zambezi River. And this is where this photograph was taken.

The guide was in the next canoe and he said, you know, you don't have to worry about the crocodiles. They're underneath you but they're very intelligent and they will stay away.

But you do have to worry about the hippopotamuses because they are really stupid and if you get in their way they'll chop the canoe in half. The bow and the stern person will go in the water and then you have to worry about the crocs.

Well, we we word out more than a minute when we ran into this hippopotamus. And he said, back paddle fast, which he did. No problem, we survived as you can see.

[2 : 1 6] But farther down the river we were watching some wildebeest and some other wild animals. Fantastic to see the wild animals from the water. It's really quite a wonderful experience.

But I was obviously keeping the canoe in perfect formation even though there was flow of water in the river. And he saw that I knew how to paddle. And he said, by any chance would you know the name Bill Mason?

It's the chap in the middle of this picture who is, was, I should say, Canada's premier canoeist. And he's written a book called The Song of the Paddle.

And at the same time was a magnificent cinematographer and won many awards for his wilderness photography. He's a Christian person and I've been in his home.

And he said, would the name Bill Mason mean anything to you? And I said, yes, I've canoed with him on the Patawawa River in Ontario. Oh, he said, you've canoed with Bill Mason? I'm not given to dropping names.

[3 : 16] But he said, he's the god of canoeing. And I thought, here I am, 10,000 kilometers from home. And this is a Zimbabwean tour guide. And he knows about Bill Mason.

Either way, Bill here is on the Patawawa River. He dressed up as a First Nations person and brought his own birch bark canoe. He has several canoes, of course. And some of you will know that he ended his long career with a feature-like film called Water Walker.

And this is Lloyd, of course, doing the portage on the Bower and Lakes. Lloyd has been my primary canoeing buddy. And we've done a number of trips together.

The Bower and Lakes is a world-class trip, which has about nine portages, but allows you to come back through a series of rivers and lakes to exactly where you started. Which is one of the problems of a canoe trip, is getting your car to the end of the trip so you can go home.

And this is a marvelous one. People fly in from all over the world to do this trip. And I did it last summer again with my grandson and son-in-law.

[4 : 23] But access to the wilderness is fantastic and the awesomeness of God's creation. And that's what I'm going to be speaking about briefly. The whole idea of what it means to be exposed to, you might say, the raw, undeveloped, wild creation of God.

This, by the way, was an early morning picture as we were on Myrtle Lake. Myrtle Lake is a canoe-only lake in Wells Gray Park, which you must get into by a 2.5k portage.

But once you're in, you can use a cart to do that, which is really humane. But once you're in, you have 100 miles of coastline and it is really magnificent.

We have marvelous wilderness in British Columbia. And of course, sometimes there's rapids to be navigated. I'm not a whitewater canoeist. Anything beyond about grade two is my limit.

And I don't expect that to increase as I age, as a few of you I see are probably aging as well. But it is quite amazing how even when you're going through rapids, you can back paddle and front paddle, which means you turn the canoe at an angle to the current.

[5 : 32] And if you're back paddling, you're actually changing the velocity as it relates to the river, which enables you to do what the old Albion Ferry used to do, which is to use the current to get you from one side of the rapids to the other.

And you need this because when you're going through rapids, you have to navigate between rocks. And that back paddling and front paddling with what they call ferrying, or front ferry, back ferry, is quite critical.

And sometimes we are certainly privileged to see wild animals, mostly in BC. Moose, meese? Why don't they say the plural of moose? Dr. Packer, you must know what the reason for that is. Why we don't say meese instead of...

Is it mooses or is it just moose plural? I think it's just moose plural. But I think it would be more accurate if we said meese. But oftentimes we're exposed to magnificent scenery and sometimes very calm and sometimes very rough.

Isaac Lake in the Bower and it's 50 kilometers long and the wind whistles right down between the mountains. And it's quite frequently that you're wind bound for a period of time. But this is Bower and Mountain as we were making our way out last summer.

[6 : 47] And sometimes we do experience lots of rain, but sometimes the sun comes out at magnificent moments and we get the end of a rainbow or the entire rainbow. Interestingly, I was trying to get my computer fixed yesterday and the tech saw this picture.

And he said, this is on my screensaver. And he said, oh, where's that? He said, I've just come from Alberta, from Manitoba, and I'm a canoeist. And I don't know where I can canoe in BC, so I'm going to give him some help in that.

But one early morning on Myrtle Lake last summer, I was able to get up. We go to bed early. We go to bed at 8.30 when the sun goes down and get up at 6.

It's really pretty wonderful. We have Starbucks coffee for breakfast, for those of you who think it's privation. And the food can be awfully wonderful eaten in the wilderness.

But in this particular morning at the entrance to Myrtle Lake, there was a pretty fabulous scene, all on the horizontal, so to speak. I was interviewed, as some of you know, for the chapter of the book on CBC on tapestry.

[7 : 55] And it was a fascinating interview in many ways. I used to do a lot of radio and television work when I had hair when I was much younger. So I felt very comfortable with it.

But at the very end, and this got edited out. Some of you heard the program. At the very end, she said, Paul, have you ever done a contemplative canoe trip? And I said, well, it's interesting, Mary, you should ask that.

I just came back from one. I took one of my students, Alvin Ung from Malaysia, with whom I've written a book recently. I took him on a contemplative canoe trip, and we took Augustine's Confessions, and agreed we would read it and pray and discuss it as well.

Augustine, she said, oh, now isn't that the person who said, God make me chaste, but not yet? And I said, yes, that's the person.

And I said, you know, on one hand, you could say the whole story is the story of a sensuous man's search for God. But I said, really, it's the story of a sensuous God's search for a love relationship with his creature.

[9 : 06] And just at the end, that was the last sentence of our interview. It got edited out. But there sometimes are bugs. And here, one of my friends is finding a little bit of a sandbar to put his portable chair down to read and to pray.

Briefly, the article, the chapter of the book covers four metaphors that canoeing provides, I think, for a spiritual life. And one is it's just simply slow.

And we would like to have some kind of quick fix in terms of growth in Christ and going on with God and becoming a mature person, mature Christian, and so on.

There's no quick fix. There's no simple three-step formula. It's slow. And it's ongoing. And it's God's work in us, primarily. But canoeing is slow. And as you go by, you actually get to see the grains in rocks and the particular roots of trees and so on.

And it's very much like the march of God, which is a slow march, as has been said so helpfully. I, as a young person, started building boats when I was 12.

[10 : 16] And my first boat was actually a speedboat. So I'm not against speed. But I think there is something about attending to your environment and being able to reflect and pray about that as you do that.

So canoeing is slow. Secondly, it is a journey. And that's one of the metaphors of the Christian life and spiritual life is it's a journey. And very interestingly, the first Christians did not call themselves Christians.

They called themselves people of the way or disciples. Both the people of the way and disciples implies a question. Where are you going? Of whom are you a disciple?

Each one pointing away from how far along you are to the destination and the one that you're following. I really like that. It was non-Christians or not yet Christians who call it the Christians at Antioch.

And so the idea of a journey, that we are on a journey. And so we in a way on a canoe trip you metaphorically, you're actually participating in what is happening inside with what you're doing outside.

[11 : 27] And that's one of the reasons why I think also pilgrimage has been an important discipline, an important experience throughout Christian history.

Not many Protestants go on pilgrimages. But I think there's something to be said for that because that movement externally can become a movement internally.

And then canoeing is repetitive. And it's interesting. For those of you who have read the chapter in Northern Lights, which is the anthology of Canadian authors on spirituality, I was asked to write a chapter and I should have said no right away.

But you know, I just dithered around for about two months. And then it was the deadline. We have to have this by November. And I hadn't even said yes yet, but I go for a walk every morning for about 50 minutes.

Haven't this morning because I'm jet lagged and slept into the latest possible moment. But on that morning walk, I suddenly realized what's more Canadian than canoeing.

[12 : 30] And by the time I got back, I had the chapter written and I wrote it out quickly and sent it on by email. And they said nothing is more quintessentially Canadian than what you've written.

And so it was really quite delightful to be able to do that. It starts though with the story that Gail and I were in Lijiang, China, and were invited to an international party because one of the large accounting firms in the world had their workers there for a seminar.

And international, both Chinese and every other nation imaginable. But everybody had to sing a song from their own country. And we briefly debated whether we could sing the national anthem.

There's actually a wonderful cartoon that appeared, I think, in the Vancouver Sun of Canadians singing their national anthem. And in big letters, Oh Canada, our home and native.

It gets smaller and smaller. And then by the second line, nobody's singing. Because they don't know it. So we thought we better not try that. I'm sure we won't get past the second or third line.

[13 : 36] So we sang the song we'd learned at Pioneer Ontario Camp, She and Girls Camp and I. Boy, I don't know why I didn't meet her then. And another guy got in there before I did.

And I had to bump him off before I could marry. I didn't literally kill him, okay? But anyway, the song we learned was, Blue Lake and Rocky Shore, I Will Return Once More.

So we sang the canoeing song. It was significant because it is a Canadian song. And very much about our unique wilderness. People fly in from all over the world to experience wilderness slash desert in Canada.

But it's repetitive. You know, stroke after stroke. We were canoeing down the Nisatland River, my son and I. This was quite a few years ago now. It's a long river. It's pure wilderness.

There's no campsites. And it's what they call zero trace camping. So you can't even leave a burnt log if you had to make a fire, which we did because it was raining. And Bill Mason's book, Song of the Paddle, describes paddling as a song.

[14 : 38] You know, it's repetitive. It's like a constant refrain. And it started to pour rain and David turned to me and he said, Is the song getting less audible, Dad?

Do you still hear the song? But it is really repetitive. And a lot of our spiritual growth and life is repetitive. I read, and frankly, I did this morning as well.

That's the one thing I did do. I read one chapter of the Old Testament and one of the new and one psalm every day. It's just three chapters from the Bible. It doesn't take really that long, 20 minutes, 25 minutes.

But I've been doing this for 30 years. I'm sorry to tell you that I graduated with a Master of Divinity equivalent from another school other than Regent. And I had gone all the way through my theological education and never read the Bible right through.

And so since then, I've read the Bible through every year, twice the New Testament and twice the Psalms and a little more than a year, the Old Testament. And then Gail and I, before we sleep at night, and we've missed a few, but we do pray through the family and through the day.

[15 : 45] And, you know, our prayers are repetitive. You know, God be with Carol and Steven and Gwynny and Mary-El and Leon and on you go. But, you know, life is repetitive. You slept last night, most of you, you know, and you had breakfast and there will be lunch eventually and supper and so on.

And life is repetitive. And much of our spiritual life is repetitive. But, finally, and these were the four points that I tried to develop in the chapter, Canoeists are soul friends.

And it is, it's interesting when you remove yourself from the distractions of everyday life and attend to God's creation in the wilderness, if you are with people, it gives you an opportunity to reflect very deeply on your own journey, your own spiritual life, your own walk with God.

And such questions as, when did you in your life feel, first of all, the warmth of God's love? And what helps you grow in Christ?

And what sort of challenges and temptations are you facing? In fact, hikers often say, whatever you say on the trail stays on the trail. There is a, the reason that saying has come up, and some people will say, whatever is said on a canoe trip stays on the trip, is because it is evocative of things that are quite deep within us.

[17 : 09] And so, in some ways, canoeists become soul friends. Now, I think we could have the lights on for a bit. But, one of the questions that I ask, thank you.

One of the questions that I often ask when I'm in the wilderness or quote slash desert, and there's a long tradition of the desert fathers, and Gail was wondering if I might have dipped into it, but I'm not this morning.

But, and mothers, by the way, too. There were a few, wasn't totally liberated, but there were some desert amas. But I often ask the question, if there were no revelation, and that's what we have in the Bible.

That's what we have from the prophets and from the apostles and Jesus himself as the incarnation of God. But if we didn't have revelation, and we only had creation, what would we know about God and the meaning of life from the creation around us?

That's a question that I often ponder. And we've seen evidences of this in First Nations spirituality and in animism and other, you might say, spiritual and religious backgrounds.

[18 : 15] In some ways, I think the animism of Africa was an amazing preparation for the Christian gospel in Africa where it's growing. As you well know, church is growing maybe 15, 20% a year, which led one African student to say to me, how is it possible that all the experts in church growth come from the part of the world where the church is not growing?

Which, I was in Korea last week and quoted that and people just doubled up in laughter because they're the ones who are paying big money to have these experts come to Seoul to tell them how to grow churches quickly.

Anyway, but I think the animism was in some ways an amazing preparation for the gospel. You didn't have to convince people of the reality of the spirit world.

However, what would we know had we only access to creation? Well, Romans 1, 20 does say something to us about that. Since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities, his eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made.

And then Paul adds this very challenging suffix of so that men and women, people are without excuse.

[19 : 37] So we ought to know, even from just simple wilderness, simple creation, something about God that leaves us accountable and a sense responsible to be in a, an awesome, a fearful, in the best sense of reverent, affectionate awe.

Fearful of God. And we are without excuse, even if we didn't have revelation, which we have and are therefore, in a sense, much more accountable.

It was the English novelist, Charles Williams, who said, nobody's ever sent to hell. They insist on going. And I think that is in some ways a magnificent insight into the third chapter of John, where Jesus says, this is judgment, that light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light.

They said, please, send me the other way. So it's a rather interesting insight. Which leads me to say a few things about Job. Because this book does relate very clearly to the issue of wilderness spirituality and the whole question of our relationship with God vis-à-vis creation.

And I call Job the model theologian. And I really do that because a very significant verse, which turns out to be the key for understanding the whole book of Job, one of my favorite books of the Bible, the most favorite is Revelation.

[21 : 04] Because the night I became a Christian, I instinctively opened the Bible to read. But the book I opened to was Revelation. I stopped at the sixth seal. But I've always really loved and still loved that book.

But Job as a theologian started with, as you know the book, starts with the key question of whether Job fears God for nothing.

Which was Satan's question. Now the English word gratuitous is really a very important word vis-à-vis this book. Because gratuitous means it's not for what you get out of it.

And when God was boasting about his servant Job and how righteous and good he was, Satan said, does Job fear God for nothing? That is, does Job have an instrumental faith for what he's getting out of it?

Or does Job fear God because of God? And so they agree on a test, which is that Job will experience the loss of everything.

[22 : 05] The loss of his health, loss of his family, loss of his job, loss of his esteem in the community, and everything will go except that he cannot be, lose his life. In this test of whether his faith is gratuitous, whether it's instrumental.

An awful lot of faith in the world is instrumental. It's what you get out of it. Rather than it is simply a response to our loving and gracious God. So is it possible to love God without expectation of reward?

It's not a commercial contract. It is, in the Bible, a covenant. We don't say in the marriage vows, I take you to meet my emotional needs, my sexual needs, to sour children, and to look after the house.

We say, I take you to be, not to do. And covenantal is essentially a relationship of belonging. And that's our relationship with God, especially through Christ.

It's not contractual, an exchange of goods and services. And really that's the issue behind this amazing interchange between God and Satan in the book of Job.

[23 : 10] But the key to understanding the whole book is in 42-7. Because as you go through the book, Job pounds questions of God and so on.

Three friends come, Eliphaz, Zophar, and Bildad. And they start pretty well by being silent. Gail was a chaplain in the UBC hospital for 10 years. And often would come home and say, you know, with really, really sick people, you just sit with them.

You just are with them. No chatter. And they started that way. But eventually, either because they were really threatened by a condition they could not undo or explain or control, or simply because they wanted to be preachers.

They try to explain to Job why he's suffering, which boils down to simply you're suffering because you're a sinner. And it's most remarkable that in 42-7, at the end of the book, after God has spoken to Job finally, God says to Eliphaz, one of the friends, I'm angry with you and your two friends because you have not spoken well of me as my servant Job has.

That's the most remarkable sentence in the book because you would have thought that Job, who said, you know, God, you're just not fair. I mean, it's not fair that you've chosen me for target practice.

[24 : 30] You know, basically, I'm a pretty good guy and all the rest. Whereas Job's friends would have had their speeches published in Christianity Today, unless J.I. Packer had it edited out.

But they were essentially orthodox speeches. I mean, very orthodox, as a matter of fact, and could have been published in Regents Crux magazine. And so why would this heaven-pounding man, Job, you know, be speaking well of God and these orthodox friends, each gets a turn up to bat three times and so on, and these orthodox friends didn't speak well of God.

And in fact, their speeches seemed to be totally orthodox, pretty close at least to being totally. And the key really is this. Job spoke to God and the friends spoke about God.

And a theologian is essentially a person who speaks to God. He's not a person who speaks about God so much as a person who speaks to God, which led me, I was going to say my favorite theologian, my favorite theologian after John Stackhouse, J.I. Packer, and other politically correct things to say, is P.T. Forsyth, who is a congregationalist theologian from England, who said, prayer is to the religious life what original research is for science.

And by it, we get direct contact with reality. That is a marvelous sentence. And he says in his, what I think is the finest book on prayer, and he starts writing this book by saying, you know, how can you talk about prayer?

[26 : 19] I mean, you really need to do what Jesus did, which is to say, let us pray. Because that's how you learn to pray is by praying. But he says the worst sin is prayerlessness.

I think what he means by that is no communion with God, no friendship with God. I think the most terrifying words in the Bible, the words of Jesus, twice repeated, are, I don't know who you are.

You know, the foolish virgins come to the door having not prepared themselves for a long wait. And inside, someone says, I don't know who you are. And others come to Jesus on that day and say, you know, did I not cast out demons in your name, and do mighty works in your name, and prophesy in your name?

And he says, I don't know who you are. So essentially what God really wants is relationship with himself. And on that day, be it not said of any of us, I don't know who you are.

We don't have any real relationship. I think very remarkably, Job stumbles in his prayer on the gospel. And our Canadian author, who is a magnificent author, Mike Mason, who is a Regent grad as well.

[27 : 34] And some of you will know he's written more than one book. The most famous one is The Mystery of Marriage. But he wrote a book called The Gospel According to Job. And it's an extremely fine book.

It's very, very well done. But as you work your way through the book of Job, you realize that he does stumble in his prayers on the good news. He says, first of all, the problem is that God's not human enough.

If he were a human being, we could get together and we could have a reconciliation. So he stumbles on the idea of the God-man. Now, of course, this is a very ancient book.

We don't know how old, but there's no temple and there's no law and so on. I mean, it's a very, very ancient document in the wisdom literature of the Bible.

And yet he stumbles on the idea of only God were human, we could get together. And that's exactly what happened with Jesus, with God's coming in Christ, which we're about to celebrate at Christmas.

[28 : 39] It's not what the world is coming to, but who has come to the world. It's that God went through a complete human experience from conception to resurrection. And made it possible for us who are guilty and sinful to actually be reconciled with God.

And to become his friends, as Jesus said. But a second gospel discovery that Job makes in his suffering and his prayers is that we have a kinsman in heaven.

There's actually an exact Hebrew word for this that means the person who's next of kin. Who has the ability to redeem you if you're in slavery or to pay the price of your release. And to stand for you when you're in difficulty.

It's called a go ale. Many of you will know that Gail was a bolter before she married me. But when we fill in our passport applications, which we have to because mine's full now.

And I've got to do something about it. But they ask, who's the next of kin? And I write Gail. Now she is not a Stevens.

[29 : 45] But she's become a Stevens through the covenant of marriage. And it's my closest relative. She's family. The closest family member, to be exact. And so this idea of a kinsman who can stand for you.

And Job says, even now my witness is in heaven. My advocate is on high. I have somebody who will plead my case in heaven. He didn't know the name Jesus.

But in his prayers, he longed for and believed that he did have someone in heaven who could plead his case. And most magnificently, we learn in the New Testament through Revelation that he who knew no sin became sin for us.

That we might become in him the righteousness of God. What Martin Luther called a double exchange. We exchanged our sin to him. And he exchanges his righteousness to us.

And so Billy Graham's lovely little handy way of describing justification is, just as though I hadn't sinned. Which is pretty amazing, really, that we're declared a friend of God.

[30 : 52] And we're declared not an enemy, but a child, a son, daughter of God. Not because of any merit or works or performance of our own, but solely and simply on the basis of Christ.

But thirdly, that we have a redeemer God. And so in chapter 19, 9, 16, and 19, the sort of three, what I call, gospel discovery points in the book of Job, we have a redeemer God.

I know that my redeemer lives. And that in the end, he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh, I shall see God.

Those are real high points in Job's journey in the sense that he, through prayer, essentially, rather than through listening to his friends God talk.

That, by the way, is the extraordinary title of a commentary on Job by the South American liberation theologian, Gustavo Guterres, who titled his commentary, God, colon, no, Job, colon, God talk, and the suffering of the innocent.

[32 : 04] God talk. That's what the friends were doing. It was God talk. Talking about God. Whereas Job talked to God. And so, in the end, we see that what Job really wanted, more than anything, it's extraordinary that in this book he never asked for healing.

I mean, that's, I mean, when I get sick, I pray for healing. But it's extraordinary that he doesn't. What he wants, more than anything else, is the friendship of God.

And so, he says, oh, for the days when I was in my prime, when God's intimate friendship blessed my home.

Now, what is really remarkable is that when God reveals himself and speaks to Job at the end, and this does relate to the subject at hand, is that he never answers Job's questions about why he's suffering.

He reveals himself, but he never explains Job's situation and accounts for it, which led Gustavo Gutierrez, I'm sure I don't say this right, and I've always corrected by Spanish speakers about the pronunciation of Gustavo Gutierrez's name.

[33 : 25] But it led this remarkable liberation theologian, as you know, liberation theologians are wanting to see the poor and dispossessed and innocent and suffering people really liberated and liberated in Christ.

And many good things they've taught, as well as perhaps having, in some cases, a kind of Marxian approach to understanding reality. But it led Gustavo Gutierrez to say there's something more important than getting justice in the world.

And that is the contemplation of God, which is exactly what happens in chapters 38 and 39 of Job. In the process of getting there, Job actually says, though they slay me, though he, God, slays me.

It's God who's slaying him. He's convinced of that. Yet will I hope in him, which proved Satan wrong. Satan said, you know, Job is in a commercial relationship with you.

It's what he gets out of it that makes him such a righteous person in your eyes. But actually, it's a commercial relationship. It's an exchange of goods and services. And in this breathtaking moment in the drama, we discover that Job has gratuitous faith, not for what he gets out of it.

[34 : 49] Even if he dies, you know, with a disease. Though he slay me, yet I will hope in him. Job never gets an answer as to why he suffers.

And a fascinating question to me, if you can leap over right to the end of the book, is that Job repents after God reveals himself. And I ask what I think is a probing question, which doesn't have a very simple, clear, obvious answer from the book, which is why does he repent?

And of what does he repent? It doesn't appear that he repents of all the sins his friends accused him of. Basically, in his speeches, he says to his friends, look, you know, I know I'm a sinner, but that's not why I'm suffering.

So he's not saying I'm a righteous person and I've never made a mistake or I'm faultless and so on. He's not saying that at all. So what does he repent of? Well, what we find when God speaks is that God actually takes him on a safari in Africa, a canoe trip in Wells Gray Park.

God takes him into the wilderness of Sinai. God takes him on a journey through his speeches. And it's very poetic and wonderful. And we're going to end our time with a visual meditation on it.

[36 : 15] But basically, God says, I love being God. And do you think you can run the world any better than me? Now, that's a very short, succinct summary of two chapters of the book.

But basically, God says, look, I made everything and I'm keeping everything running. And it's beautiful. And I make flowers in places where nobody's ever going to see them. But I love flowers.

You know, they're beautiful. And describes his awesomeness in creation. Now, of course, it's not the whole message of the gospel of the kingdom of God.

And by the way, I think often the church errs in preaching only the gospel of personal salvation when Jesus came and preached the gospel of the kingdom of God, which is bigger and very wonderful.

The dynamic, saving, life-giving, renewing rule of God. But basically, that gospel is not fully expressed in the book. What we have when God speaks is a sense of God's joy in being God.

[37 : 27] And it has created all these beautiful things. And so, three comments about God's wild work. God does all kinds of work and he's still working.

And he's just as creative today as when he started to build this five billion light year universe. But in his speech to Job, he really emphasizes his wild work.

And shows how his creative and immensely awesome development of what we call, I don't want to call it nature.

I hate that, you know, supernatural BC. It should be super-creational BC. Because the word creation invites the question, who? Who did it?

Rather than the word nature, which always seems to be somehow limp compared with the word creation. But basically, God describes his creational work, his wild work.

[38 : 26] And I think one of the things we learn from this is that God's wild work is so much more awesome than human work.

And that our human work is a pale imitation of God's own work. Never as wild. Never as awesome. And never as worthy of contemplation.

Now, we're all workers. And some of us work for money. Some of us work for nothing at all except love. Hopefully, those of us who work for money also work for love.

Which transforms work. Love of a spouse, of family, of friends, of God. And even of your own country. So this is the first thing that I think we gain from the delightful canoe trip that God takes Job on at the end.

Basically, he says, you know, come with me and I'll walk with you through my creation. That our human work is really a pale imitation of God's own work.

[39 : 31] Secondly, that human work is limited. We do not have absolute control over creation.

It was the German philosopher, existentialist philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche, who said, If there were gods, how could I stand not to be one?

Which I think puts the finger on the nerve as to what our real human predicament is. Going back to the Garden of Eden, you shall be as gods knowing good and evil, the serpent said. And that autonomy tree, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, is really, you can be your own God.

You don't have to eat, have provision, and the delight of aesthetic pleasure, and have power. In communion with God, which God means us to have all those things, but in communion with God.

And under his leadership, under his awesomeness. And so, we tend to think sometimes that human work is unlimited.

[40 : 37] That we have control over everything. I have a computer problem right now, and I can tell you, I have no absolute control over it. My oldest daughter is a medical doctor and gets one of these cartoon books from a drug company.

And there's a wonderful cartoon, I should show it to you, but I don't have it with me right now. Of the Grim Reaper death coming to somebody sitting behind his PC. I'm sure it wasn't a Mac.

But, anyway, sitting behind his PC. And, of course, the guy is visually in the cartoon, is just scared spitless that it's his number. He's going to die. And the Grim Reaper says, no, it's worse than that.

I'm after your hard drive. And I pulled this cartoon, and I would say, someday I'll use it. But the next morning, when I pushed the button to start the cartoon, to start the computer, the hard drive went zzzz, zzzz, zzzz, zzzz, zzzz, zzzz, zzzz, zzzz, it died.

And, actually, even just telling this cartoon to you, in orally, if any of you have computers at home, and you'll start it up tomorrow, expect anything. But we do not have absolute control over creation.

[41 : 50] I think it's pretentious of us, part of the root autonomy of human beings, the absolute predicament of human life, that we might think we are autonomous, that we have absolute control.

There's a very interesting article on this by David Strong. And he says, in our age, nearly everything we confront on a daily basis is either already under our control, or is viewed as something to bring under control, and to be made use of.

In direct opposition to this way of seeing, interpreting, and taking up with things, are the creation stories of the Bible, and the vision of wild creation in Job.

I think it's a very insightful paragraph or sentence, really. It's long. It's like a Pauline sentence. It goes on forever. But thirdly, in our daily work, and here again I'm relating to the whole question of experiencing God's creation, we do well to remember that everything is not for us.

or simply, for our development, improvement, or self-indulgence. In other words, everything does not need to be useful.

[43 : 16] And a big push, I think from a lot of sources, really, culturally, and intellectually, is everything has to be useful. So Gustavo Gutierrez says, utility is not the primary reasons for God's action, and it is implied, not necessarily the primary reason for human work.

This is a fascinating thought about the fact that we're supposed to work, as Ecclesiastes says, because it's the gift of God, but it doesn't always have to be useful.

It doesn't have to have that instrumental quality. And so God, in Job 38, verse 26, waters a land where no one lives.

If you've ever flown over the Arctic in summertime, of course, the snow is pretty much gone. David Dorman, who is a 747 captain, used to be flying Heathrow to Vancouver, and he was very naughty, because as soon as he enters Canada, which, as you know, is around Baffin Island, he would say, we're now entering Canada, and he makes a long pause, and about 50 women get up in the plane and go to the washroom to make their faces.

And then he says, about three minutes later, it'll be four hours before we land. But when you fly over the north, and you know there are a few little scattered settlements.

[44 : 55] By the way, if you want to read a book on the north, there's no better book than The Fateful Passage. It's a Scottish doctor who was commissioned by the British admiralty to discover what happened to the Franklin expedition.

And in the process, he learned from the First Nations people up north how to live through the winters. Whereas Franklin came with two ships and silverware on the table and all the rest, he brought his gun and his knife and lived with the people long enough to know how to live.

But at any rate, when you're up there, you realize this is not all useful, and God's keeping this stuff going, even though human beings are not benefiting from it.

It's not all for our benefit. Everything is not for our use, which should lead, I think, to humility in work and freedom from the domination of utility.

It is all for God and God's pleasure. All for God and God's pleasure, which leads me to say, though these words are not in the text at all, that when God speaks to Job and Job repents, basically what he says is, I'm God.

[46 : 14] And I love being God. In fact, I think I do a pretty good job of running the world. Do you think you could do better, Job? And this leads Job to repent.

Of what? And it's a fascinating question because he repents in sackcloth and ashes, covers his mouth, and of what does he repent?

I think he repents of a small view of God and repents to worship and contemplation of the magnificence of God himself.

And all that through the experience of going on an African safari, of taking a canoe trip in Wells Gray Park, of being led in a hike, doing the grouse grind, whatever, but taking a tour of creation.

I think he repents of a small view of God to a big view of God, that he is so much bigger. If you could fit God into our puny minds and explain him theologically, he would be too small a God to worship.

[47 : 35] And so behind this whole book and the revelation that came to Job is this sense of Job's deepest hard cry was not for healing, but for relationship with God.

Oh, that his friendship might bless our house as it was in the days of my prime. And when God gives him his friendship again, it's not an equal friendship, but friendship it is, two ways.

It's an intimacy. As Curtis and Eldridge say so beautifully in their book *The Sacred Romance*, every human being has two needs deeply.

The first, the need for adventure and the second, the need for intimacy. And he makes an insightful comment which I think is defensible even biblically, that the need for adventure seems to be stronger in men than in women.

And the need and desire for intimacy seems to be stronger in women than in men. But both have both needs. And they go on to say, those needs will not be met by an ordinary human being, but only in a relationship of heroic proportions, which is the relationship we have with God through Jesus Christ, where our needs for adventure and our needs for intimacy are fully met.

[48 : 55] And so, I think Job repents, not of specific sins, which he admits he's a sinner, but he repents to an awesome God. Now, I'd like to take a few minutes to entertain questions, comments, criticisms, whatever, and then I'd like to end with a 10-minute visual meditation.

So, this is your time to ask questions, make comments, disagree, you can shoot me down, I flame out beautifully. I used to say that when I was in student lounges, I guess it's not appropriate with people who are in their 90s and 100s here.

How to lose your audience in one sentence, eh? How to lose your audience. Not quite. Good for you.

You know, in Korea, from which I've just come, the first question they ask you is, how old are you? So, anticipating, as I always tell them in advance, but it used to be a little convenience store across the road from Regent, and a young Korean couple came in and bought it, and I used to go in every day and buy something, and after a few days, she said, how old are you?

And, of course, she doesn't know, you don't ask that in Canada. So, I told her. But, same thing happened in Korea when I was being interviewed on television. The reporter said, the first question is, how old are you?

[50 : 20] And the reason is, they have different terms of respect for different ages. So, I love going to Asia because age is still respected, but in North America, I do not have a future.

So, go to Asia, those of you who are over 50. Comments or questions. Yes? I love this quote. Thank you so much. Thank you. The situation we're facing in Canada is that which 80% of our population in cities.

Yes. And the proportions then have increased in the country. Yes. Do you have some thoughts on the situation? Oh, huge implications. Is it 80?

I thought it was closer to 85. But, it's very remarkable. I was in the plane reading the Southeast Asia Times and they were estimating every country with a percentage of urbanization.

Philippines is 50-50. And then we come to Singapore, 100% urban. You know, and Canada's 80-20. But in the early 20th century, about 1915, it was the other way.

[51 : 28] It was 80% rural and 20% urban. Africa is rapidly urbanizing. So, a city like Nairobi has 500 new citizens every day.

The infrastructure cannot cope with that. It cannot cope with it in the Philippines, in Manila. Pray for them, by the way. Yet one more typhoon has gone through. But, there are 3 million squatters in the city of Manila.

3 million. And so, it's a huge implication, I think, for human life. Now, of course, you're living with other God-imaging creatures, so it's not like you don't have any witness to God's creativity and awesomeness because the city does bring people together.

But I think this makes even more necessary, I think, the fact that we need a rhythm in our lives of living communally and solitude, particularly in God's creation.

But, of the 3 great trends in the world today, I think one certainly is urbanization. It's happening all over the world with enormous impact on the creation itself, actually, because we consume so much in our urban life and it has so much implications with regard to human connectivity or human relationship because our relationships in the city are largely functional and anonymous.

[52 : 55] Whereas, in rural communities, no, I'm really a bad guy because I was speaking in a church of 35,000 in Seoul and I said to the pastor, do you know everybody's name?

That's awful. You know, I need to repent, I think. But, the fact is that in a small village you do know everybody's name and people help you out when you're in difficulty and otherwise care for you and this does not happen as much in the city except at St. John's.

And so, it has a huge impact on human connectivity and relationality, the whole trend. The other two trends, by the way, are the Asianization of the world which is really happening and thirdly, the Islamization of the world which is another pretty awesome trend.

So, I think, yes, this has an enormous impact on us and unfortunately, I would have to say the churches of the world have been largely rural based.

I remember talking to a canon, that's not the kind that blows bullets, but the Anglican kind, in Kenya and I said, you know, Kenya currently is 85% rural and 15% urban but it's moving in the other direction and I said, Canada used to be the same and now is 80-85% urban and I said, a very small percentage of our population is actually actively engaged with the people of God in what we would call church.

[54 : 33] It's a rather small percentage. I said, what do you think is going to happen when Kenya is 85% urban and 15% rural and he said, we've got to think about that and it's quite true.

Now the city does provide, especially on a global scale, with an opportunity for people that are in a tight relational community within their own sort of religious structure and so on to be exposed free of those ties, to be exposed to the good news of the kingdom of God and so we've seen many people coming from villages that were animists or Islamic or Buddhist or Hindu or whatever else that have been able to actually embrace faith in Jesus Christ partly because the city allowed for that to happen.

So there's some pluses in the city and I think everybody here has chosen to live in the city so you must have some positive reason for it rather than living in the country.

So it's interesting to me that in particularly in the developing world I see so many people living in the city but keeping a tiny little plot of ground out in the village and when they retire and this is the exact terminology will return to the village and they do which indicates to me a kind of temporary that's not even a word the kind of temporary nature of urban dwelling in much of the world is that they don't see it as something they want to do forever and their real love and of course in Africa the tie of the land is very deep their real love is the land and the country to which they will return as soon as they can and oftentimes and this is where the tragic spread of HIV in Africa takes place they leave their wife and children on the little Shamba farm and go into the city the men do fine work but can't afford to come back every week so they take up with somebody in the city and that leads to obviously the spread of HIV heterosexually primarily in Africa and in some other countries so the protection of creation and the stewardship of creation

I personally do not believe that God intended for the entire planet to be left in its raw wild state I think that Genesis 1 and 2 and 3 show us that he intended us to be stewards of creation and to develop we don't own it we're stewards and to develop its potential and we do this in even building cities not like Cain and not like Babel cities of arrogant autonomy but building communities of interchange of goods and services I hope we're going to get to Siena next year we're planning on a little vacation but there is this amazing maison with on the city of Siena on one wall it shows the allegory of good government shows how good government allows people to thrive in industry and in creativity and aesthetic and leisure and beauty and in other things and on the other wall it shows how that comes about and they have the classic virtues but over the classic virtues that are kind of incarnated in people they have faith hope and love so

[58 : 09] I think we were not meant to just simply leave creation totally untouched there are people who say that many of them are worshippers of what they call nature I don't think we're meant to do that I think we're meant to develop the potential of creation and everybody in Korea has a cell phone but these little sliding things I think the guy that invented that it was brilliant it's really beautiful the sliding keyboard but any way in which we improve and embellish human life and develop the potential of creation if we can do so responsibly as stewards is God's work good work it's good work and it's God like work but I do think we should also keep some undeveloped raw wild creation I don't think most of it should be that but I think we need this badly we need it partly for our own spirit to experience what Job did when God took him on his creational tour and so that turns out to be in my view a pretty major reason to protect some wilderness some wilderness we happen to have more than our share in Canada but and I think the Germans who come to Canada the canoe and every time

I go north like every second canoeist is German but they don't have a wilderness you see it's so developed in Europe they don't have a wilderness they have parks and they have forests that are managed and so on but no wilderness and we have that precious resource I think to give to the world as well I think it might be time for one more question and then I'd like to end with meditation I was just going to ask about the balance between the and the and the yes thank you I'm going to be dealing a bit on that next week when I talk about growing spiritually while at work or marketplace spirituality which sounds like an oxymoron but I'll try to explain not I think we do need that balance of solitude and also community and engagement and I will say it again next week because I think it's arresting to discover that Jesus did not live a balanced life even though I've heard John Stott give an amazing sermon on Jesus as the model of a balanced life

I don't think he lived a balanced life there are times he was so engaged he couldn't eat but he lived a disciplined life and in Matthew we discover that he dismissed the crowds to be alone with the father and you'd like to think that he dismissed them only because they had already on their way home that's not what the text says he dismissed them please go home I can't do anything more today I must be alone with the father so we have this rhythm of engagement and withdrawal which I think is part and parcel of our spiritual journeys largely lacking in evangelical utilitarian workaholic Christians largely lacking and of course as we go older I think some of us are aging and others are not but as we go older I think we long for that even more solitude than perhaps we ever did as a young person and so that rhythm of engagement and life and work and relationships and then pulling apart is I think fundamental to us now if we could have the lights out we're going to end with a visual meditation from the text of

Job 38 and 39 time as I Thank you.

Thank you.

[63 : 09] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[65 : 39] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[68 : 09] Thank you.