

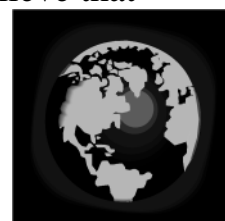
## CHAPTER 3: Our Worldviews and the Physical World Around Us

*Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” (Gen. 1:26)*

We have a choice about *how* we look at the problems in the world around us. Do we have the “mind of Christ” as we look at them? All too often, we judge the problems around us through our old, comfortable worldviews. This leads to incorrect conclusions as to what the problems are and how to solve them. Perhaps the best place to begin is to be sure we have a Biblical understanding of the physical world around us.

### The Secular Worldview & Nature

The secular worldview believes that we live in what is **GOD** called a “closed system.” In other words, even if we believe that God created earth, He has now left it alone, almost as if there is a barrier between earth and God and He created



it with a limited number of resources so all we have is here on earth. There is no possibility of intervention by God, hence the system is “closed.” In this worldview, sometimes the world is referred to as “spaceship earth.” We are hurtling through space all on our own with whatever resources we can discover on this “spaceship.” Thus, wealth is limited: when the oil is used up, there is no more; when the diamonds are all found, there are no more. There may not be enough food for the growing population of the world. Everything is limited.

*Figure 1*

In this worldview, everything here on earth works according to a rigid system and “natural” laws. The natural world is reliable and because of this very reliability, science is possible and changes in the environment can be managed, manipulated and repeated. This reliability provides a platform for people to accept risk. For example, if a certain fertilizer has caused one farmer to realize a huge growth in crops, then it is worth other farmers risking the money involved to buy this fertilizer for their crops, as well.

For many people without God, events are seen as chaotic and meaningless. Christians who hold to this secular worldview also believe that things are finite unless God intervenes. When God does intervene in nature, the intervention is defined as “miraculous,” implying that God is not normally involved in the natural operation of creation. If a

“miracle” is experienced, then they are likely to attempt to reproduce the exact conditions in which the event occurred in order to reproduce the miracle. Most Christians who are influenced by secularism do not expect God to intervene very often in their lives or in nature. However, this is not a biblical stance to take.

### The Animistic Worldview & Nature

The animist believes that nature is ruled and controlled by the spirit world and is, indeed, a manifestation of the spirits. Consequently, man is under the power of nature: the spirits in the forest, the spirits living in the river or the lake or on top of a certain mountain. Nature is something to fear because the spirits control it. There is no natural law or order and it is dangerous to take risks because the spirits could get angry. For example, just because other farmers have had increases from the use of fertilizer, there is absolutely no reason to use fertilizer. What if the spirits get angry about it?

This worldview also believes that resources and wealth are limited. If one man increases his wealth, he must have stolen it from his neighbor or the community in some way. Individuals should not get ahead of, or have more than their neighbor. If they do, the community will pull them down by shame, or worse means. An agricultural official retired from

his government job and returned to his old village in South Africa. Because he used modern farming techniques, his crops flourished. People thought he was using magic and witchcraft to increase his crops and to get ahead of his neighbors. In anger and fear, they burned him to death. I have known people who have refused to pray for others to get blessed, believing that if their brother gets the blessing, he will be receiving what might have been intended for them, instead. After all, there are only so many resources to go around.

For the Christian coming out of an animistic worldview, it is usually quite easy to believe for “miracles” especially in the area of physical healings and understand them as normal life. Belief in the existence of God assumes He intervenes in nature and rules over the spirit world. This is granted along with His existence.

### The Biblical Worldview & Nature

The Bible gives us a completely different understanding of nature and the world around us. We do not live in a “closed system.” God is a God who intervenes all the time. He did not quit doing things when He finished creating the world. Neither are we to be ruled by nature or the spirits residing in nature.

God created a wonderful, perfect world. All creation was in balance—no environmental problems. “. . . And God saw that it was good” (Gen. 1:25). Into this marvelous place, he then brought humans: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” They were created to be spiritual and physical beings in right relationship with one another, with him and with all of creation. God told them to “be fruitful and increase; fill the earth and subdue it.” What’s more, they were to “rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground” (Gen. 1:28). At this point, God was pleased with all that he had made so he pronounced his creation *very* good.

Theologians commonly refer to Genesis 1:28 as the “Dominion Mandate.” “Dominion” means “rule” and “mandate” means “commission.” In other words, God commissioned Adam and Eve to rule over all of creation. Notice, the spirits were not given the rule over creation; man was given this role. Unfortunately, some in history have misinterpreted this to mean that God had given mankind the command to do whatever he wished with creation—including destroying and pillaging the earth, causing God’s creatures to become extinct and ruining the land. If it was deemed good for man, then it was permissible. However, a “good ruler” is one who *takes care* of those he rules over. He protects

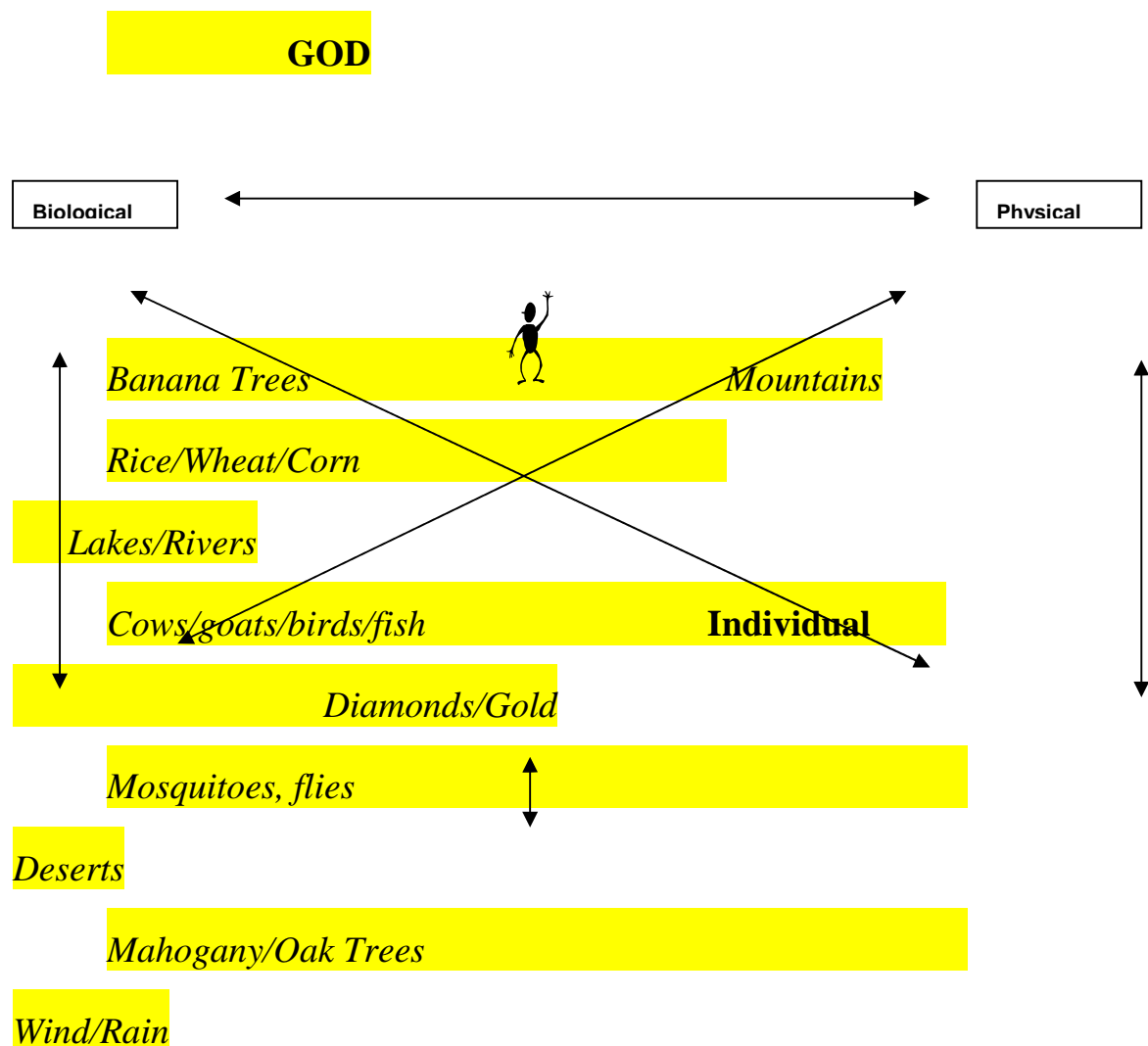
and makes decisions for the good of those he is ruling over. None of us want to be ruled by a leader who is only out for his or her own good.

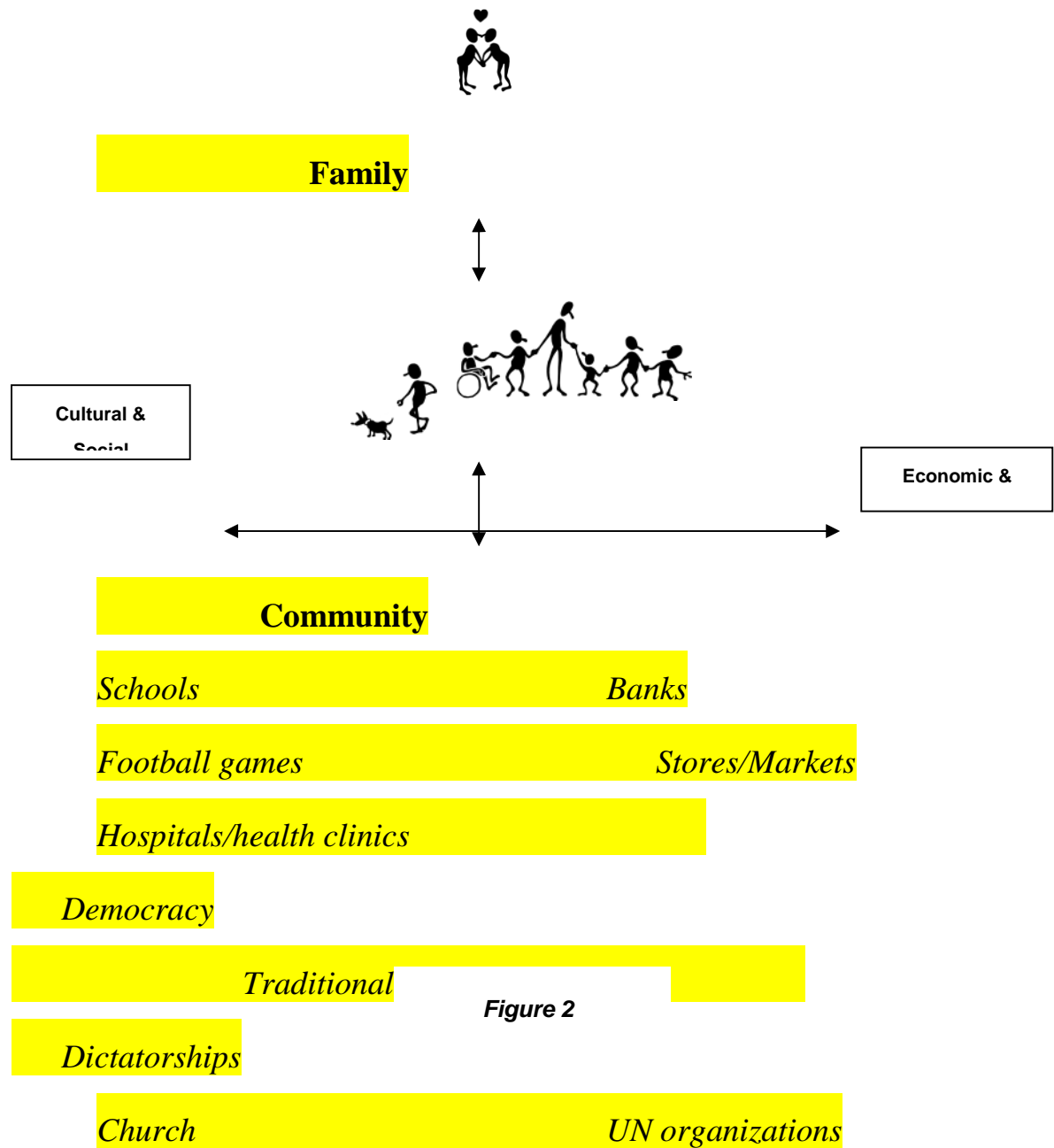
God *entrusted* the care of creation to Adam and Eve. It was never God's intention that mankind would destroy creation, but Adam was put in the garden to "work it and take care of it." A garden needs constant care or it soon gets overgrown. It needs pruning and watering; some plants need more sunshine, some like the shade, some need to be divided at the root, some can't be near others. Ask any gardener today, there's always something to do in the garden.

Adam and Eve had an open, free relationship with God. He met with them each evening, walking and talking in the garden. They could tell him about their day and he would share with them from his heart. Imagine the joy and peace in their life that would have been normal for them. It is almost beyond our comprehension. It was God's intention that Adam and Eve and all of us as their descendants should live in perfect harmony with God and with all of creation.

Below is a diagram which depicts our relationships: with God, with one another and with nature. God and human relationships are shown in the middle of the diagram. God created Adam to have relationship with Him, and then family was created (Eve) and eventually a community was the result. God intended all of us to have right relationships with one another and with Him. In this diagram we have divided up the rest of the

world into four categories: Physical, Biological, Economic & Political, and Cultural & Social. The physical and biological things have been created by God, although as we have seen above, He gave us the responsibility to rule over them. The Economic & Political and Cultural & Social systems are things which we as mankind have created. The arrows indicate the interconnectedness of the different areas: no area can stand alone. Whatever happens to one, affects the others.





I have listed a few things under each category as examples. These are not meant to be complete lists, but, rather, a place to start us thinking. As people we are tempted to see these different items separately and not



understand how they inter-relate so we will look at possible ways these relate to one another:

- If we have mountains and rain in our country (physical), we may have big forests growing (biological). Those forests can be harvested to produce a market for export (economic & political) or to provide furniture in the schools and hospitals (cultural & social).
- If we have enough rain or lakes (physical), we can grow a large crop of rice (biological), enough to feed our own country (cultural & social) and export to others (economic & political).
- The banks (economic) have been created to provide care for the resources created by the sale of diamonds, gold, bananas and fish (physical and biological). This gives the government (political) enough resources to provide schools and hospitals (cultural & social).
- If we have a selfish dictator in power (political), most of the country's resources (physical & biological) will go into the dictator's bank account (economic) and the education and health systems (cultural & social) will suffer.
- If the church (cultural & social) understands the role God has given it, it can speak to the government and market systems (economic & political) to keep them moral, make sure that only crops that are

good for people or the environment are produced (biological) and take care of the land (physical).

God intended only good for mankind but when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit sin entered the world and their relationship with God was cut off. They were sent out of the garden. No more conversations in “the cool of the day” with the Lord God. Animals became enemies and it was kill or be killed. What’s more, the earth was cursed, and now working to get food from the ground would be hard toil. *All* relationships were affected—their relationships with one another, with God and with creation. From here on out, all of creation, including everything humanity might create would be stained by sin—nothing would be perfect anymore. Thus, sin touched and tainted everything: physical, biological, economic, political, cultural and social—absolutely everything.

Soon things deteriorated and God could stand no more of man’s wickedness. He “was so grieved that he had made man” that he decided to wipe humanity and all the animals from the face of the earth (Gen. 6). However, Noah had found favor in God’s eyes so God spared Noah and his family, as well as two of each animal so they might begin again. When Noah came out of the Ark, God told them:

be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth. The fear and dread of you will fall

upon all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air, upon every creature that moves along the ground, and upon all the fish of the sea; they are given into your hands. Everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything (Gen. 9:1-3).

We can see in this, the “dominion mandate” repeated. Although the relationships have changed because of the curse that sin brought into our world, God again gave everything into our hands. We are still to rule over nature by caring for it.

Furthermore, God promised to both humanity *and* “every living creature” that he would never again flood the whole earth:

Then God said to Noah and his sons with him: “I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you and with every living creature that was with you—the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you—every living creature on earth. I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of the flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth. And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to

come: I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth.

Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth. So God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and all life on the earth” (Gen. 9:8-17).

Check out that Scripture—6 times God says he is making this covenant—this promise—with all the *living creatures* on earth. This includes man, but it also specifically singles out living, breathing creatures other than human beings. If God values all of his creation so much to make this promise to all of them, how can we dare think we can use his creation to suit our own purposes? Rather, he expects us as people created in his image to value and care for this earth and its creatures as he does. He has assigned us this responsibility.

Our merciful God did not leave us in our sin, without hope. Already in Genesis Chapter 3, we see the promise of one who would

come to defeat our enemy (Gen. 3:15). To fulfill that promise Jesus came into this world of trouble and hopelessness, this world bound by the curse of sin. He inaugurated his public ministry by going into the local synagogue and reading the following:

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor (Luke 4:18-19).

This was exciting news—he came to change society! He declared that the kingdom of God had arrived. The proof was seeing the sick healed, the dead raised, the hungry fed, and the demon possessed set free (Matt. 11:2-5). He proclaimed startling good news to the poor, with new values and new ways to respond to those who oppressed them: forgive those who hate you or use you in terrible ways. His was a radical new way of living, an example of how God intends people to live in the middle of this wicked world and be an influence on society. Things did not suddenly become perfect, but Jesus restored relationships, between the people and God, between father and son, between neighbors.

Eyes were opened once again to see the bigger picture of what God is doing in history, what He intends for this world and how He desires us

to live: in harmony with Him, in harmony with one another and in harmony with creation. John 3:16-17 tell us:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

I have heard this verse quoted all my life. I always understood that God sent Jesus to save all the people in the world. However, this is only partially what John was writing here. The word “world” in this text is the word *cosmos* in Greek. *Cosmos* is a much bigger term than just all the people on earth. *Cosmos* is *all* of creation. Let’s re-read that scripture and substitute “all of creation” for “world.”

For God so loved *all of creation* that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into *all of creation* to condemn *all of creation*, but to save *all of creation* through him.

When sin entered the world it totally affected *all of life*, all of creation—not just the people. *All* relationships were affected. The problem was total. The solution needed to be total, as well. Jesus came to be the complete and total solution to the whole world’s problems.

This includes our relationship with God (as we usually think of this scripture), but it also includes our relationships with one another and with all the rest of creation. Jesus came to restore right relationships. This is true *shalom*—peace in the community.

This does not mean that Jesus died on the cross to “save” a tree and bring it everlasting life! Rather, it means that in providing the way for the power of sin to be broken, He will also bring about creation’s release from the curse of sin over it. Romans 8:19-22 tells us:

The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.

I wonder what this earth will look like when the curse is finally lifted completely. If we look at the promises God made to the Israelites concerning their crops if only they would obey his commandments (see Deut. 28)), we can see that it is God’s intention to release abundance even today, here and now. This abundance would include enough food to eat, health for our families, and good economies for our nations. We do not

need to remain passive in our neediness, praying for *someday* God's kingdom to come. God wants to extend his kingdom here and now. It will not be perfect in this day and age because we do still contend with sin, but it can be a foretaste of what He wants to do in this world. He has already provided the way.

It is also imperative that we realize that we are not to be ruled by nature or by spirits living inside animals, mountains, rivers or anything else. Jesus told his disciples, "I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you." (Luke 10:19) We do not need to fear those spirits who would try to gain power over us through embodying nature around us. This is truly good news!

Because Jesus came to be the complete and whole answer to sin in this world, we must understand how He dealt with people in all the areas of their lives, not just the spiritual areas. He touched people where they were broken or hurting and brought healing and wholeness into their lives. For example, remember Zacchaeus who wanted to see Jesus, but he was so short he climbed up in a tree (Luke 19:1-10)? He was a despised tax collector. No one would spend time with him for he was a traitor to the people. After all, he was helping the hated Romans by collecting taxes for them. And besides all that, he was cheating the people and getting rich on their money. Imagine the surprise in the



crowd when Jesus looked up at Zacchaeus perched on a branch up in that tree and told him, “I must stay at your house today.” Luke was being generous when he said the people “muttered” at this. I imagine that “muttering” was pretty loud and unanimous complaining, people saying,

“Jesus says he comes to help the poor, and then he goes off to stay at a rich man’s house. And not just any rich man—one who is a cheating tax collector and does such evil to us poor people. Doesn’t he realize he’s honoring this rascal?!”

But Zacchaeus stands up at the meal and promises to give half of everything he owns to the poor and to pay back anyone he has cheated, four times what he took from them. Jesus responds by saying that salvation has come to Zacchaeus’ house that day. But what had Jesus done? We don’t know what he said to Zaccheus but he did go to eat with him. Jesus offered relationship and fellowship to lonely Zacchaeus. When the community looked at Zacchaeus they saw a hard-hearted, miserably rich man who deserved no friends and could only keep them if he bribed them. But Jesus saw a man with a need for true friendship. Consequently Zacchaeus was saved and the community was changed because they would no longer have a cheating tax collector on their backs. Instead, he pledged to restore wrongfully gained money. Justice had come to the community.

Remember the story when Jesus raised the dead young man and restored him to his widowed mother? We can look at this story and think it is only about Jesus having compassion on the widow for her sorrow. But that is not the whole story. Luke 7:12-15 tell us that this young man was the only son of this widow. In that culture it meant he was also her only livelihood unless others were to take pity on her. When Jesus restored her son to her, he also gave her back her means of support. This is also true of Mary and Martha (John 11:17-44). With no husbands and their brother, Lazarus, dead they also would have no means of living. When Jesus restored these relationships, he also gave them the physical means to go on living.

When Jesus calmed the sea (Matt. 8:24-27) or walked on water (John 6:19-21) he certainly demonstrated his “dominion” over creation. He provided great catches of fish twice for Peter and the other disciples; he fed the five thousand, and the four thousand, once again proclaiming God’s desire to abundantly bless his people.

Jesus is the total solution to life’s problems. If we compartmentalize Jesus’ ministry by only saying he came to provide salvation, we rob ourselves of the magnitude of what Jesus has provided for us. He came to bring abundant life (John 10:10) here and now. It is God’s will that we realize the huge scope of the solution he has provided.

Finally, we will look at the Biblical response to the secular and animistic worldviews' contentions that "resources are limited."

Generally speaking, we all believe that there is only a certain amount of oil or other minerals such as gold, silver or titanium in the earth. Those resources do not renew themselves by themselves. Once they are gone, they are gone. However, there is no such limitation with God. Look at examples of God's multiplication of resources outside of nature:

- Creation: God created all things out of nothing. "By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made from what was visible." (Heb. 11:2)
- Elijah, the widow, and her son fed by meal and oil that did not stop (I Kings 17:7-14)
- The widow's oil multiplied (poured out into multiple jugs) II Kings 4:1-7
- Elisha feeds 100 men with 20 loaves of bread (II Kings 4:42-44)
- Jesus feeds 5000 men (plus women and children) with 5 loaves and 2 fish (Matt. 14:13-23)

There are many illustrations throughout church history of God providing for his people when there simply seemed to be no resources. Usually God start with something, a little oil, a little meal, a few loaves and multiplies these. He rarely starts from nothing. Even Jesus temptation to turn

stones into loaves of bread, which he could have done, started with something in the natural realm, stones.

However, there is another arena where God meets life's problems through giving creativity. Where we make the mistake in our thinking is to believe that "things" are our only resources. Shimon Peres (former Israeli Prime Minister) said that in 1995 Israel would make more money from its brains than Saudi Arabia from all their oil wells. This was an accurate statement because resources do not depend solely on physical items, but also on the creativity and ideas of the human mind.

Being created in God's image (Gen. 1:26) means that, among other things, we have a personality, will, the ability to think and the ability to be creative. When we look around us, it is obvious how creative God is. He loves creativity. He created us to look differently, think differently, and feel differently. He could have made us all look alike and act alike. How boring! God loves the differences in each one of us. Not only that, but He has created thousands and thousands of different animals, birds, fish, insects and plants. There are scientists studying in the Amazon that find a new species of animal, bird, plant or insect every day of the year. Even with all the years people have been studying these things, they are still finding new ones.

We can never be as creative as God. "God said" and it came to be, whether it was light, sky, the sea, the land, animals, fish, birds or man.

We do not have the power to speak things into existence from nothing. However, each and every one of us has a measure of God's creativity in us. Some are perhaps more gifted at drawing pictures or writing songs or poetry. But those are not the only ways to apply our creativity so the rest of us do not need to despair that we have been left out. Some of the best ways to use our creativity is to create ways to solve our own problems.

Years ago I used to work for a big corporation, writing computer programs and teaching people to use their computers. One day a problem was brought to us to solve. The two men in my group worked for hours on the problem and finally gave up in disgust, saying it could not be done. At that point, I asked to see it. They laughed, thinking I would never figure it out, but they gave it to me. I went away to my desk and as I sat down I prayed silently, "Lord, what is wrong with this thing? How can we make it work?" I then proceeded to try different things on the computer that came into my mind. Within two hours I had the problem solved. I took it back to the other guys and dropped it on the desk, saying simply, "Try this."

As I walked away I heard them saying, "This will never work!" but a few minutes later they came to me, "How come this works? This shouldn't work? Why does it?" Then I was in trouble! I had to confess I didn't know "why" it worked but that "I just had creative ideas

and one of them had worked.” I had asked God to help me come up with a solution and He had.

Another time in Liberia we had a problem with getting water. Often the pressure was too low for the water to come into the faucets in the house, so we would get water from a faucet outside which was only about 15 centimeters above ground. We would put a short hose onto the end of the faucet and then run the tube up into a bucket and collect our water this way. However, some days even this was too high for the water pressure to reach. One day I came to collect some water. I pulled the hose off the faucet and watched the water drip very slowly from the tap. It was very slow and regular, but the pressure was too low to force the water up into the bucket. I said to the young men in the yard, “This is totally unacceptable.” They shrugged and advised me to get water from the sea, instead. “No way!” I replied. “Please bring me a shovel.” They looked at me like I was crazy, but brought the shovel. I dug a hole next to the faucet and dropped the

into the hole. It was now below the height of the faucet and the water could drip, drip, drip into it directly, without the hose. The men just looked at it and shook their heads in skepticism. Half an hour later I came back and triumphantly collected my bucket of water. This then became our regular back-up method for collecting water. I never had to dig the hole again—the men kept it open. However, if one of us hadn’t

applied our creative thought processes to our problem, we would all have been hauling water from much longer distances.

These are small examples, but they illustrate how we can use creativity in our ordinary day-to-day life. God has given each of us the ability to be creative. Ask Him to help you be creative. He will help you use your brain to solve your problems.

Another time in Liberia I had a visit from an elder from a church where I had taught on creativity. He brought the biggest chicken I had ever seen in Africa. I thought I was looking at a turkey. (I admit, I hadn't seen a big chicken in a long time.) He presented me with the chicken and told me it was all because of me that this chicken was so big. Now, I had a reputation for not liking live chickens so this was quite a surprise to me. I have never appreciated chickens running around the yard and into the houses, so I always said "the only good chicken is a dead chicken" (in the cooking pot, of course!). How could I be responsible for this big chicken? In answer to my question, he told me the story of their chicken feed. They had managed to find the money to import the baby chicks to start a business, but they did not have the money to pay for the imported feed. However, once they learned that they had been created to be creative and that God would help them to be

creative, they sat down and thought about what they could put together to make their own feed. Now they were successfully growing gigantic chickens and their business was flourishing. I learned that affirming a group's creativity to solve their own problems can be a powerful form of empowerment.

Coming back to the thought that resources are limited, we need to realize that it is the ideas that people have had on how to use things that have made things valuable—not the thing itself. For example, until someone invented how to use oil in engines in the 1800's, oil was thought of as a nuisance, not a resource. Today we have what are called “silicone chips” in most electronic items. The silicone chip is at the heart of our whole electronic world and has made many people millionaires, but what is silicone made of? Sand. Yes, that's right, refined sand. Someone had the idea of how to use sand to make silicone and many others have had countless ideas about what to put on those silicone chips. Now companies who can produce silicone chips are wealthy.

In the 1860's a young man named George Washington Carver was a newly freed slave in the American south. George had a passion for growing things. All the neighbors would come to George to find out what was wrong with their plants. Eventually, George managed to put himself through college and got a degree in biology. Cotton was the



cash crop grown in the area George lived in, but some years insects would kill off the whole area's crop. George wanted to find something to help the farmers. He studied the problem and realized that the peanut plant could be the answer to the problem. At this time, the peanut was a weed that grew alongside the roads in the ditches. Few people ate peanuts. It was just considered a weed to be pulled and thrown away, but George learned that it was a fast-growing plant that put good nutrients into the earth which would help the cotton to grow better the next year. One year George convinced the local farmers to switch to growing peanuts to improve their next year's cotton crop. The farmers had all sown peanuts, rather than cotton, when it dawned on George that the farmers had trusted him too much. How were they going to make any money? They usually sold cotton for their money. Now they would have no cash crop because no one would buy peanuts. George realized he needed to find a market for peanuts so he took this problem to God. He prayerfully went into his laboratory and discovered over 100 ways to use the peanut plant! A partial list of things made from the peanut plant includes: margarine, soap, cooking and rubbing oils, cosmetics, milk (a whole glassful made with a handful of peanuts), flour, ink, dyes, shoe polish, creosote, salve, shaving cream, paper finer than linen, soil conditioner, insulating board, fuel briquettes, synthetic marble, mayonnaise, instant coffee, cheese, chili sauce, shampoo, bleach, axle

grease, plastics and wallboard. The peanut plant went from being a weed on the side of the ditch to a valuable resource, all because one man applied his creativity to it. The wealth of the peanut was not in the peanuts, nor its root or leaves. No, the wealth was in the idea created in George Washington Carver's mind.

We cannot all be inventors like George Washington Carver, but at the same time, we have each been created in God's image and we all have a measure of God's creativity within us. Do we believe that we have dominion over creation and have the responsibility to be good rulers? I believe the world is full of wonderful things patiently waiting for our minds to grow smarter and we have only begun to tap into the things that God would want to see us create. Today the economy of the world seems to be held in the hands of those who have created industrial nations and those who own the oil to run those industries. Tomorrow may look completely different. Let's take our places in God's plan to create His destiny for our nations and get back to what God intended when He told us to rule over all the earth. God is waiting for us and believing for the potential He has put in each and every one of us.