

BACKGROUND TO

CREATION CONNECTION

SERIES FOR CHILDREN



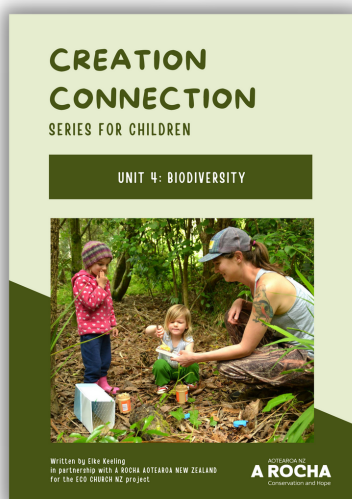
Written by Elke Keeling
in partnership with A ROCHA AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND
for the ECO CHURCH NZ project

AOTEAROA NZ
A ROCHA
Conservation and Hope

CREATION CONNECTION

SERIES FOR CHILDREN
(5-11 YEARS OLD)

An experiential and contemplative approach where children connect to God, each other and the natural world around them by connecting to and becoming aware of God's Creation and discovering together how to act with love, care and responsible, compassionate action within it.



Note: Cover images and titles subject to change.

INTRODUCTION

I would like to introduce this series with some words about our human ability to learn from Creation, as presented in the book, *Earthwise* by Calvin de Witt. These words form the basis for the motivation to produce this series for children. They speak deep into my heart and I hope to yours also as we journey with children to connect with God through God's world and God's works. I wish you joy and peace in this endeavour.

In his book, *Earthwise*, Calvin de Witt states:

“God endowed human beings with the ability to learn from creation. The precious gift of being able to learn from the “beautiful book” of nature gives us the ability to observe, behold, investigate, and record in our mind’s eye what we see, feel, hear, and smell. The images and ideas that then take shape in our minds help us plan and do our work in this world to the glory of our Creator. The learning we gain is also continually tested against our experience. We learn from our mistakes, learn from others whose observations and experiments we trust, and revise our models of the world to better represent the reality of the creation we live in.” (Earthwise page 36)

Colossians 1:15-20 reminds us to be like-minded with Jesus Christ, who reconciles all creation to it's Creator.

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross. (NRSV)

De Witt concludes the chapter with this challenge to us all:

“The Creator, in providing for all people, has given us minds and the capacity for mindful nurture of worldviews that allow us to image how the world works, to understand our place in it, and to act on our understanding in wisdom. We have been given the gift of being able to know God from his created world and from his Word, and to act on that knowledge to care for each other and for all creation. This provision allows us to adopt the mind of Christ, learning from the book of God's world and the book of God's works, to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth, in harmony with God's love for the world.” (Earthwise page 38)

Elke Keeling

In partnership with **A Rocha Aotearoa New Zealand**
for the **Eco Church NZ** project.



ABOUT THE CREATION CONNECTION SERIES

(1) Units in the CREATION CONNECTION Series

The first unit of the series - *Introduction to Creation Care* - forms the foundation for all the others. We suggest you run the first unit or offer a summary each time you run any of the other units.

Unit 2 onwards will cover environmental themes such as waste, biodiversity, food, water etc.

Each unit consists of five sessions.

- Sessions 1-4 are for the children and their families.
- Session 5 is an intergenerational celebration to conclude a unit, to share stories with your community and begin some Creation Care projects.
- The units are designed to be flexible for a variety of contexts and can be used for example for a Sunday School Children's Programme, a midweek Creation Connection Club or a five day Holiday Programme.

(2) Home Connection

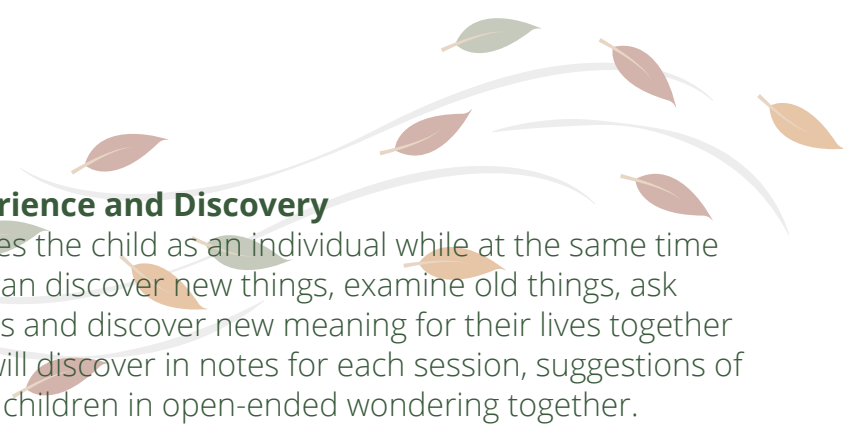
The home is a place where much is practiced and parents are encouraged to get involved with the ongoing learning in this series. Every unit has suggestions for ongoing learning and engagement at home.

(3) Link to 'Rich Living' series by A Rocha Aotearoa NZ

This series for children is linked loosely to the ["Rich Living" series](#) for adults and can be run alongside each other to create intergenerational involvement in creation care. However they can also stand alone. The series is particularly suited to communities already involved in Eco Church NZ.



The Rich Living series



(4) Building a Circle of Trust for Experience and Discovery

This resource uses a process that engages the child as an individual while at the same time building a circle of trust where children can discover new things, examine old things, ask questions, express their fears and doubts and discover new meaning for their lives together with a community of other people. You will discover in notes for each session, suggestions of how to build a circle of trust and engage children in open-ended wondering together.

(5) Principles of Creation Stewardship

This resource is based upon Principles of Stewardship as laid out in “The Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation”:

- We must keep the creation as God keeps us.
- We must be disciples of the Last Adam, not of the First Adam.
- We must not press creation relentlessly, but must provide for its Sabbath rest.
- We may enjoy, but not destroy, the grace of God’s good creation.
- We must seek first the kingdom, not self-interest.
- We must seek contentment as our great gain.
- We must not fail to act on what we know is right.

(from R. J. Berry , *The Care of Creation*, 2000, Chapter 4)

(6) Biblical Perspectives related to Creation Care

God communicates to us through God's Creation and God's Word. Therefore we need to pay attention to both these sources of wisdom as we engage children in nature to learn how to love it and care for it. The creation story in the Bible is used with an emphasis on the goodness of creation as a gift that needs to be cared for. Principles of living a sustainable life rooted in love is the focus when using the biblical text as an inspiration to do good and live life to the fullest. As we live a life of faith that is expressed in our love for each other as well as our love and care for the environment, we have hope that together we can all make a positive difference.

Some key Bible passages:

- Genesis 1 (Creation is good and we are created in God’s image and need to be good stewards of creation – in other words: Creation is a gift that should be cared for.)
- John 1:1-6 (Jesus was present in creation and now fulfils it. Presence of the Trinity in all creation.)
- Psalm 104 (The magnificence of creation.)
- John 13: 34 and 25 (Jesus commands us to love one another. We show this love by how we take care of creation which we all need to provide food and livelihoods for us all. Social justice focus.)
- Matthew 6:25-34 (Do not worry, God looks after creation and will provide you with all you need. Simple living, focus on God’s kingdom)
- Colossians 1:15-20 (We need to be like-minded with Christ. Christ is with all creation from beginning to end)



(7) Engaging the BIBLE and SCIENCE in the 21st century

It is important to make clear my biblical approach in this series for children. I recently heard a presentation from Sarah Beattie at Auckland University called: *Finding meaning in Scripture and Science*. Her hermeneutic approach was very compelling and I have tried to use it for this series as it seems useful for dealing with Creation in the 21st century context. She describes a method of interpretation of Biblical text as: “A hermeneutic of radical departure from the familiar, exploring imaginative alternatives to extend the boundaries of the thinkable.” (Sarah Beattie, *Finding Meaning in Scripture and Science*, 2020 Winter Lecture series)

This approach helps us to engage the Bible and Science in a productive manner in a 21st century context. Children have access to much information about the world we live in and need to make sense of it all through experience, discovery, exploration and imaginations, extending their knowledge of science as well as the biblical stories to make meaning for themselves in this context. Scientific discoveries can help us to stand in wonder and awe as we discover new and wondrous things about our world, leading us to awe and respect for the Creator. The biblical narratives, particularly the teaching of Jesus, can help us discover what is important if we want to lead loving, compassionate lives within the limits of our worldly resources.

Above all we have hope, because the depth of creation gives us hope for the future. As Nicola Hoggard-Creegan (2018, p3) puts it: “The depths of nature funds and undergirds our stories of hope, because in nature we intuit the deeper hidden ultimate concern and love of the divine.”



SPIRITUALITY AND HOW IT CONNECTS TO CREATION



(1) CREATION CONNECTION as a part of spiritual formation

Children are born into this world with an innate sense of connection with the spiritual. Rebecca Nye (2009) identified this INNATE ability as 'relational consciousness' and explains that it includes how children relate to themselves, others, the world and something bigger than themselves that is transcendent, like God. We need all these four aspects to become whole human beings, able to act with love, grace and good ethics in our world. The love and care of creation is part of this holistic development for our children.

The way we therefore relate to our natural world is an important part of healthy spiritual nurture and growth. When we live simple, honest lives in gratitude to our Creator, we become human beings that can live abundant lives alongside all other human beings AND all of nature, without having to degrade the earth. Humans are designed to be in deep connected relationship with all of creation and to live lives of faith expressed in love that reflects the love of the Creator.

(2) SPIRITUAL PRACTICES to connect to Creation

To care for creation, we need to notice creation. To discover God through God's Creation, we need to learn how to notice God's action and presence in our lives and in the world around us. Living a life of faith expressed in love therefore means that we will use contemplative practices for personal examination and awareness, as well as action practices to make a tangible positive difference in our world. Some practices are suggested in the sessions.

(3) Characteristics of the FACILITATORS for these sessions

To facilitate an experiential learning and growing environment requires careful preparation of and by facilitators. They should be people who:

- are spiritually aware themselves
- have a high respect for the innate spirituality of children
- are spiritual facilitators or guides for the children rather than teachers
- are respectful of children's spirituality and willing to learn with the children as well as the children learning from them.
- have a genuine love and interest in creation and can model their care for it.

(4) Access to a natural outdoor environment

This resource will require you to have a natural environment available to explore. Some options are also offered to bring the natural environment into a classroom space. Exercises are included to help children notice their surroundings. You can also use other experiences like family camps or outings to take the children into natural environments.

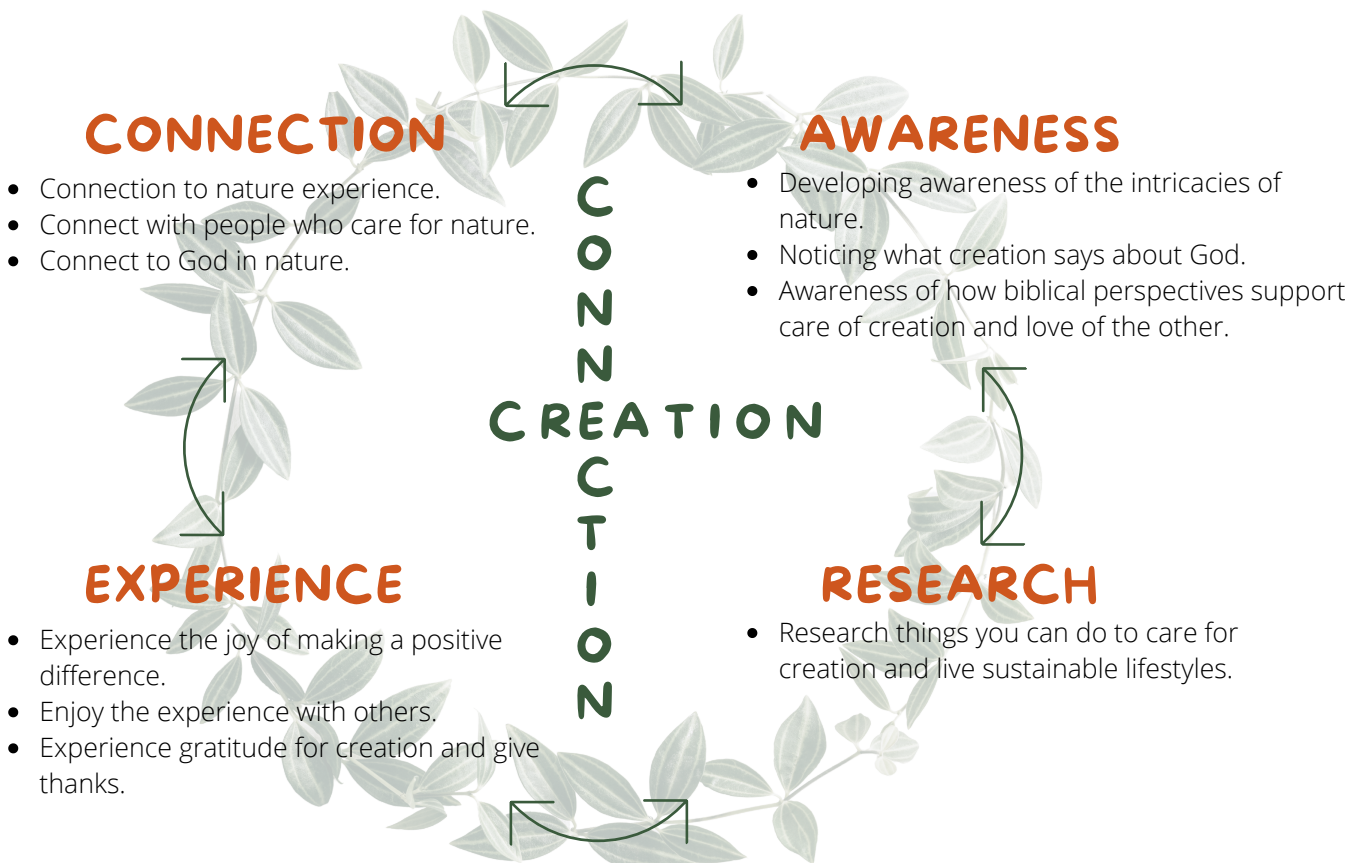
ELEMENTS IN THE SERIES

In light of the above introduction we offer this resource. This is an experiential and contemplative approach where children connect to God, each other and the natural world around them by connecting to and becoming aware of God's Creation and discovering together how to act with love, care and responsible, compassionate action within it.

We aim to give children experiences in nature where they notice the world around them, connect to it and learn to care for it. Through connection to nature, children notice the Creator at work in every detail and connect to God and each other through their experiences. We thus follow a cycle of Ecology, Theology and Contemplative Action to help children experience, learn and make meaning that leads to thoughtful action.

Children will cycle through the series by :

1. *CONNECTING* to what is happening in creation, learning to notice, and connecting to each other.
2. Developing *AWARENESS* of the intricacies of nature and the creative God who made it. Noticing what creation says about the character and nature of God and how biblical perspectives support care of creation and love of the other.
3. *RESEARCHING* environmental projects in their context and discovering sustainable practices for their lives.
4. *EXPERIENCING* the joy of making a positive difference to the environment around them, individually, in their families and in their communities.





ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

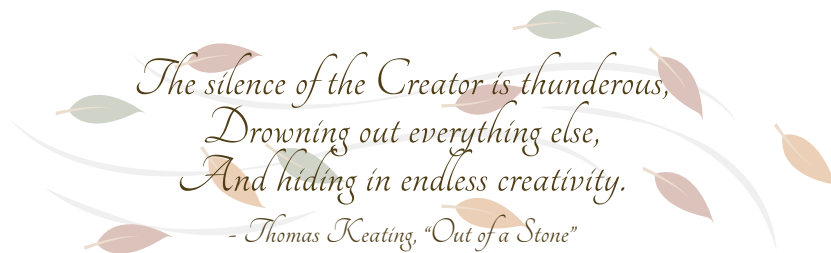
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS and THANKS go to all the people consulted in the process of building this resource:

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Jody Kilpatrick, Ponsonby Baptist Pastor and mum, for invaluable feedback from the coalface. Jaywin Meads, Children's Pastor, Westgate Baptist for being a sounding board to clarify my creative ideas.

THANK YOU for your support and putting your trust in me.

I am grateful to God for giving me a beautiful place in his Creation where I can write, and a husband who supports my projects with loving care and thoughtful insights.



*The silence of the Creator is thunderous,
Drowning out everything else,
And hiding in endless creativity.*

- Thomas Keating, "Out of a Stone"

About the author, Elke Keeling:

Allow me to introduce myself. I am of German descent. My parents arrived as refugees in South Africa after the Second World War and so I grew up in South Africa and was educated there. In 1994 my family and I moved to NZ. I have two grown children and two grandchildren. A friend kindly observed that since we have moved to NZ, our family has doubled in size. We have added two in-laws and two grandchildren. We are indeed blessed.

I was a Children's Pastor for many years and studied at Carey College for an Applied Theology degree at the same time. I consequently did further post graduate study at Carey, with a focus on Children's Spirituality and Spiritual Formation.

I co-lead Godly Play New Zealand which is a method of Christian Education where children are encouraged to discover God for themselves. I enjoy learning new things and read widely. For the last 10-15 years I have been involved in study, research and practice to evolve new processes of Spiritual Formation for children in our 21st century culture. I enjoy creating and writing projects that engage children both in God's World and God's Works.

