



# God saw that it was **BUEN**

## God Saw that It was Good

### Trees

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Look up.

Your feet are resting lightly on the surface of the earth, even raising your arms and reaching out in full stretch to the heavens, your body extends less than a few metres towards the sky. The twig-tips of the long bodies of Beech and Oak around you will comfortably stretch to 30 or 40 metres above the earth<sup>3</sup> and these are not even the tall ones. Imagine these slender trunks 10 times as wide, 3 times as tall...they go by the name of Sequoia. Their congregations are the true Gothic cathedrals, formed over centuries, even millennia<sup>3</sup> of uninterrupted Sun-directed praise. Maybe it makes you feel quite small, quite temporary?

So, how long will you stay, looking up? You might pass the time watching for squirrels scrambling up and down the vertical highways of the trees. Or looking out for forest aviators as they expertly navigate the air within the branchy canopy. You might attempt to count how many different types of ant, beetle, spider, snail, *frog and bat*? can be found going about their daily business on each high-rise trunk. You could stay a long time! If you're a fancier of fungi, lichen and moss, that's more time still...In the cloud forests of more tropical climes, even the trees are like forests, as epiphytes, the aptly-named 'air-plants' and ferns colonise the canopy far above the forest floor. By nature, the trees are in it for the long-term.

But unlike them, if you stay standing here, in time, you will get hungry, thirsty and cold. You will have to leave this spot, but the trees will remain. In the right undisturbed spot, the trees can remain for hundreds of years, the forest might remain here for thousands of years...or more. Quietly growing, discretely busy.

Trees are stealth environmental engineers. They've fooled most of us into thinking that the real action of nature is going on around them whilst they are surely only a little less inert than rocks...? The dappled green light which is filtered through the forest canopy is soothing, makes us feel tranquil amongst these inaudible solar-powered bio-engines: you can't hear it, but they're creating matter from sunlight and air, drawing moisture from the soil and pumping it into the clouds, building soil from rocks and old leaves, incidentally or otherwise providing foodstuffs and habitats for everyone from human beings to bacteria.

To stand where you are, beneath that dappled canopy, beside the mossy trunk, above the knobbly roots, you stand on a sort of anchor, that anchors at both ends – sky to earth; and earth to sky. The sky needs the tree to make the earth yield its moisture through evapotranspiration, which keeps rain falling far away from the sea even when there isn't a mountain around to help<sup>2</sup>. The earth needs the tree to harness the sunlight pouring down from the sky, and through the process of photosynthesis, transforming it into every material necessary for life, even oxygen to breathe<sup>3</sup>.

But it has been wisely said that "a tree is not a forest". The strength of a tree is neither in its root stock or its woody trunk – it's in the forest. It's the forest that quietly nudges its own environment, making life better for its community, bit by bit. Foresters apparently say that "a forest creates its own ideal habitat"<sup>2</sup> and thankfully trees have an open-mind when it comes to who they're content to co-habit with, even with us, if we'd let them. We now know that trees partner with fungi in the soil, forming a "wood wide web" – the trees of the forest communicate and interchange materials with one another. In this way, 'mother' trees support the saplings developing in their shade. In this way, the stump of a felled tree is maintained alive for decades by nearby trees – perhaps to avoid compromising the network. In this way, trees that are feeling a bit sick or shady can ask the others for a boost – and they receive it from their healthier neighbours<sup>2,3</sup>. The largest and longest-living individuals on the planet are social organisms, designed to thrive in community.

Trees are vital for human existence on planet earth and yet the most simple of things are beyond us when it comes to trees. Which of us could plant a hundred acorns and live to see the mature forest? Perhaps we think it might not be so far-fetched. Modern plantation forests are considered ripe for harvest at only 80-120 years old, depending on the species. But your average oak tree is still a juvenile at this age! The true life of just one tree is beyond us, hidden by time. Just as we weren't here yet when the earth was commanded to bring forth green plants of every kind, the average tree of the forest can easily outlive anyone of us too – well, they do now. In the ancient past, before the Flood, you and the oak tree could have lived and died as contemporaries. I'm hopeful for the time that has been promised, when all things have been renewed by the one who created them. In that time, we will be contemporaries, we and the trees, once again.