

## Reflections

by Silvia Purdie, April 2022

Reflections on the process of writing *Awhi Mai Awhi Atu: Women in Creation Care*  
(for an online talk to the Anglican Women's Studies Centre)

There is no more interesting question, to me, than – what is God up to?  
and there is nothing more worthwhile to do with my life than to be part of what God is  
doing in the world at this time.

For me, in my own work, this is quite surprised me by taking me out of parish ministry,  
which is where I always assumed I could best serve God, out into the big wide open space of  
the community sector and therapy and writing books and climate action.

Without the institution of the church to define for me what God is doing, the question  
becomes all the more critical. And it becomes all the more important to tune up our skills  
for noticing God at work, and responding to God's call on our lives.

These questions led me into the work of interviewing interesting women. What could be  
more interesting than interviewing fascinating awesome women!?  
Partly it was lockdown. I was not able to get far with some of the other projects I had on the  
go.

Doing this talk tonight is a good challenge for me to step back from the project and reflect  
on why I did it and what I have learned particularly in this question of noticing God at work.

Firstly it has affirmed my hunch that one of the really good places to look for God at work is  
in the lives of godly people. I found a fancy name for this – narrative missiology. Actually I  
made that up. It is missiology because that is the study of God at work in the world. And it is  
narrative because it looks in the ground of ordinary everyday people, rather than  
institutions and organisations. Though, actually, along the way we have told the story of one  
particular organisation, A Rocha Aotearoa NZ, and we just so happen to have recorded the  
history of its establishment and vision. But that was a bonus. The focus is on the women for  
whom faith means leadership and service, and for whom their discernment of their calling  
by God is to environmental action ... it's just a natural thing for people to work together,  
and then that becomes a 'thing' which (hopefully) enables more people to catch a vision and  
align energy and effort in sustainable ways.

In this book I wanted to put all that in the context of ordinary human lives. To ask people to  
reveal themselves in a public area turned out to be more challenging than I initially thought.  
It is a big ask. Who am I really? What am I willing for others to know about what truly  
motivates me? How have the various threads of my life come together at this point? Where  
is God in all that?

Ani Kartikasari is from Indonesia originally and now leads the sustainable business centre at  
Lincoln University. She described it this way:

“When I was a child I didn't know it was a calling. I just enjoyed being in nature.  
When I was at university I was privileged to learn ecology as an academic subject,  
and it formed my understanding of how things are connected. I found my role in that.  
When I came to faith this was all bound together into a strong foundation: I have this

passion, I have this training – mission, theology as well as academic – and I have these opportunities. God has a plan for me!”

You don't need to do the academics and get a high-profile position to make an impact for God. Marg is a full-time mother whose story is around recovery as a family from mental health challenges and the power of cycling together. It is simple but so moving. Over and over I have been blessed with women sharing with me, and bravely, with the big wide world, that they trust that God is in their story, even through moments when they could no longer feel that – like when Elise was caught in the Kaikoura earthquake and for a long time afterwards struggled feel safe, or to see God in the mountains.

Secondly, this project has affirmed the biblical principle that God calls us 'for such a time as this'. We are in crazy times. There are big shifts going on in our society. The climate is changing and we now know that we are to blame. All the women in this book have seen for themselves the destruction of our environment. And they are motivated to act. It's not just someone else's problem. I can do something, in my space, in my way, here and now. That is a key mission principle that comes through again and again. Be where you are. Make a difference there. And together we are part of something happening, it matters. This is so exciting for me. We are making history. And this book has documented that and I am enormously proud to have facilitated it.

And lastly – though I could rave on but I won't. As this work developed I just knew that it had to do 2 other things as well as tell women's stories. It needed to be practical and it needed to be prayerful. When I come to answer the question of 'how do I notice God at work?' this leads me in both paths at the same time and somehow both are required. Maybe they are twin tyre tracks. One is action, one is prayer. I just don't think we can have one without the other. Not that everyone needs to be doing both necessarily – that's why we need each other. So in this book we have Ana Lisa who writes fabulous poetry, and that is her calling. And we have karakia threaded through the book. And we have over 80 Action Points to give practical suggestions and expression. I hope people don't feel overloaded by so many jobs to do! My hope with having so many is to make it blatantly obvious that none of us can do more than a few but that there is a rich and wonderful diversity of ways to engage in creation care. Surely everyone can find a few things that seem totally achievable, and probably several you are already doing. I hope this book cheers you on.

My theology there is all about grace and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. God fires us up and sustains our energy and God's work is marked with joy and peace and love. There is no shortage of guilt and pressure and blame surging around in the world. That's not for us to buy into. We work from the kingdom of God, we are women of Jesus Christ. Environmental action and leadership for us comes from a place of grace and freedom.