



JOURNEY INWARD *to* JOURNEY OUTWARD

Week 2: Sensing God in the Natural World —Introduction



Hopefully last week, you began to ponder how God is present in your day to day life, sometimes in unexpected ways and places, but mostly in your normal, everyday routines. This week, as we move into a new season, we turn our eyes to the natural world around us. We see a sunrise or sunset and recall that God's mercies are new every morning. For some, God is most 'real' in these beautiful and awesome spaces, but don't forget that God's creation of the natural world includes YOU as well! As you read the offerings below, take some deep breaths and focus on what is good in this world.

Week 2: Sensing God in the Natural World—Scripture

Psalm 19: 1-6 (The Message)

God's glory is on tour in the skies, God-craft on exhibit across the horizon.
Madame Day holds classes every morning, Professor Night lectures each evening.
Their words aren't heard, their voices aren't recorded,
But their silence fills the earth: unspoken truth is spoken everywhere.
God makes a huge dome for the sun—a superdome!
The morning sun's a new husband leaping from his honeymoon bed,
The daybreaking sun an athlete racing to the tape.
That's how God's Word vaults across the skies from sunrise to sunset,
Melting ice, scorching deserts, warming hearts to faith

Acts 17: 24-29 (First Nations Version)

For the God who made the world and all that is in it, the God of heaven and earth, doesn't live in sanctuaries made by human hands, and isn't served by humans, as if in need of anything. No! God is the One who gives everyone life, breath — everything. God created all of humankind to inhabit the entire earth, and set the time for each nation to exist and the exact place where each nation should dwell. God did this so human beings would seek, reach out, and perhaps find the One who is not really far from any of us — the One in whom we live and move and have our being. As one of your poets has put it, we too are God's children.



Week 2: Sensing God in the Natural World—Readings

“Earth’s crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God,
But only he who sees takes off his shoes;
The rest sit round and pluck
Blackberries.”

- Elizabeth Barrett Browning: Excerpt from “Aurora Leigh” PoetryFoundation.com

“The miracle is not to walk on water, but on the earth.”

– Thich Nhat Hanh as quoted by Barbara Brown Taylor in *An Altar in the World*, HarperOne, 2010

“For some, the most natural way to listen to God is through creation. Creation has a unique language of proclamation and praise. Each part of the created order speaks eloquently of its Creator, just as consummate artistry reveals the soul of the artist. The Creator also speaks to us through creation. All aspects of the created order can teach us about human realities and struggles. But God speaks to us through creation in another sense as well. Are not the distress signals of our earth and the collapse of entire ecosystems a message from God? Surely a word is being spoken to us through the earth’s suffering about the urgent need for greater simplicity and more..”

- Marjorie Thompson, *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life*, Westminster John Knox Press, 2014

“A couple years ago a friend fell off a bike and hurt her knee. She and her husband were going on a hike in a national park and she could only walk very slowly. She discovered her slowed pace helped her look at the world as if through a microscope.

As they walked along so slowly, she saw a lizard in the process of devouring a centipede. They spent 10 minutes watching something she would’ve missed had she not hurt her knee.

Right behind them was a single hiker with a big camera. Every time my friend stopped to examine a wildflower, he would stop and look at the wildflower too—as if she were discovering something for him.

Finally the hiker came up to her and said, “You’re seeing so many wonderful things!”

“I’m seeing wonderful things,” she told him, “because I can’t walk very fast.””

-Sue Bender, *Everyday Sacred: A Woman’s Journey Home*, HarperCollins Publishers, 1995.



Week 2: Sensing God in the Natural World—Readings

“One of the ways I practice contemplation in my life is through fishing. It’s the space and the place where I find a real connection through the ocean, the waves, the sound of the water, the birds diving, and the struggle with the adversary, which is the fish. Now, normally we throw them back, but on occasion we bless them for giving us nurture and nourishment and we keep them

I fish with my husband George. Because I am one of the Gullah [1] women who is a shaman in my family, I am really open. So I don’t look at a lot of violent movies and I don’t like to kill things and I can’t put live bait on. And I can’t take hooks out of fish that are wishing they could live. All of those sensitivities make this a practice that I need a partner for. And my husband George loves to be in support of it, so we don’t talk a lot. We commune, we listen to music sometimes, other times not. But it’s being in the cycle of life and enjoying that struggle. And enjoying giving life back and releasing some. And realizing that this is the dream that I asked God for long ago. And so God’s grace for me has been that my husband and I live out a dream I’ve had since I was a child, to breathe salt air, and to just learn how to be....

(Richard Rohr continues)

I suppose the equivalent of Barbara’s fishing in my life would be walking my dog. It really can be a contemplative practice where I engage with God, with nature, and with my own beloved friend, Opie. I’m not really doing anything. I’m just being me and being in love with the world.”

- Barbara Holmes, “Introduction, Race and the Cosmos, unpublished Living School Curriculum” as quoted in Center for Action and Contemplation Daily Meditation, February 17, 2021 cac.org

“Why must people kneel down to pray? If I really wanted to pray I’ll tell you what I’d do. I’d go out into a great big field all alone or in the deep, deep woods, and I’d look up into that lovely blue sky that looks as if there was no end to its blueness. And then I’d just feel a prayer.”

– L.M. Montgomery *Anne of Green Gables*, Mehlinger - Spark Pub., 2002



Week 2: Sensing God in the Natural World – Questions for Reflection and Discussion

Depending on your group, you may want to begin each week with a check-in on any prayer requests, and make sure everyone knows other's names!

1. The Psalm above is one of the many Creation Psalms. Look up Psalm 104, if you'd like, another Creation Psalm. It's an invitation to look at the wonder-land we live in! It begins with a call to "Praise the Lord" and continues with reasons for that praise. And the reasons here really point to ordinary, everyday things (that we might miss if we walk too fast!).

2. A Creation Psalm we might write could include things like dandelions, the oriole at a bird-feeder, the shadows of the tree branches on the snow under the moonlight, the taste of freshly-picked tomatoes. As you consider the natural world—the sights, sounds, smells and tastes of all God made for us—what would your Psalm include? In other words, where have you specifically noticed or sensed God's presence this summer? What in the above poems/scripture/reading excerpts resonated with you and why? What common thread stands out to you?

3. Much in the readings above call the reader to attend to what already surrounds them with *intention*. Barbara Holmes suggested that she found that gift arises naturally while fishing. Richard Rohr found that walking his dog could become an opportunity to be entirely aware and open in the moment. Thich Nhat Hanh suggests that the real miracle is to be present. What are the routines, the times or places in your own life that most naturally call you to be fully present in the moment, open to God's presence around you? What impact has that had on you and how has it or could it call you to a greater awareness of God's presence?

4. As a result of your reflections, is there anything you would like to start doing, stop doing or do differently? Or, is there something you already do that you now recognize as a gift?



Week 2: Sensing God in the Natural World—Spiritual Practices

Following are some exercises to try to help you grow in your awareness of God/God's fingerprints in the here and now.

- **Breath Prayer:** A breath prayer is a simple prayer practice easily woven through our day. For our focus of “sensing God in the natural world” we can pray to have our attention piqued with this prayer. As often as you think of it during the day using your breath, pray the following;
 - (On the inhale) “Creator God”
 - (On the exhale) “Open my eyes”
- **Attend to Creation:** In the Anne of Green Gables quote above she talks about going into nature to “feel a prayer”. That might feel a little “out there” but can you recall an encounter with nature that seemed to ground you in an unspeakable way? This invitation is to seek out an opportunity this week to attend to nature in an intentional way. It could be as simple as going outside your home after dark and gazing at the stars, or in the day time notice cloud formations in the sky, maybe follow the path of a squirrel around your yard or tune into the song of a bird whose call you might take for granted. In the midst of these encounters notice the divine fingerprints right before you. Harkening back to Week 1, “pause, notice, name” and then give thanks.

