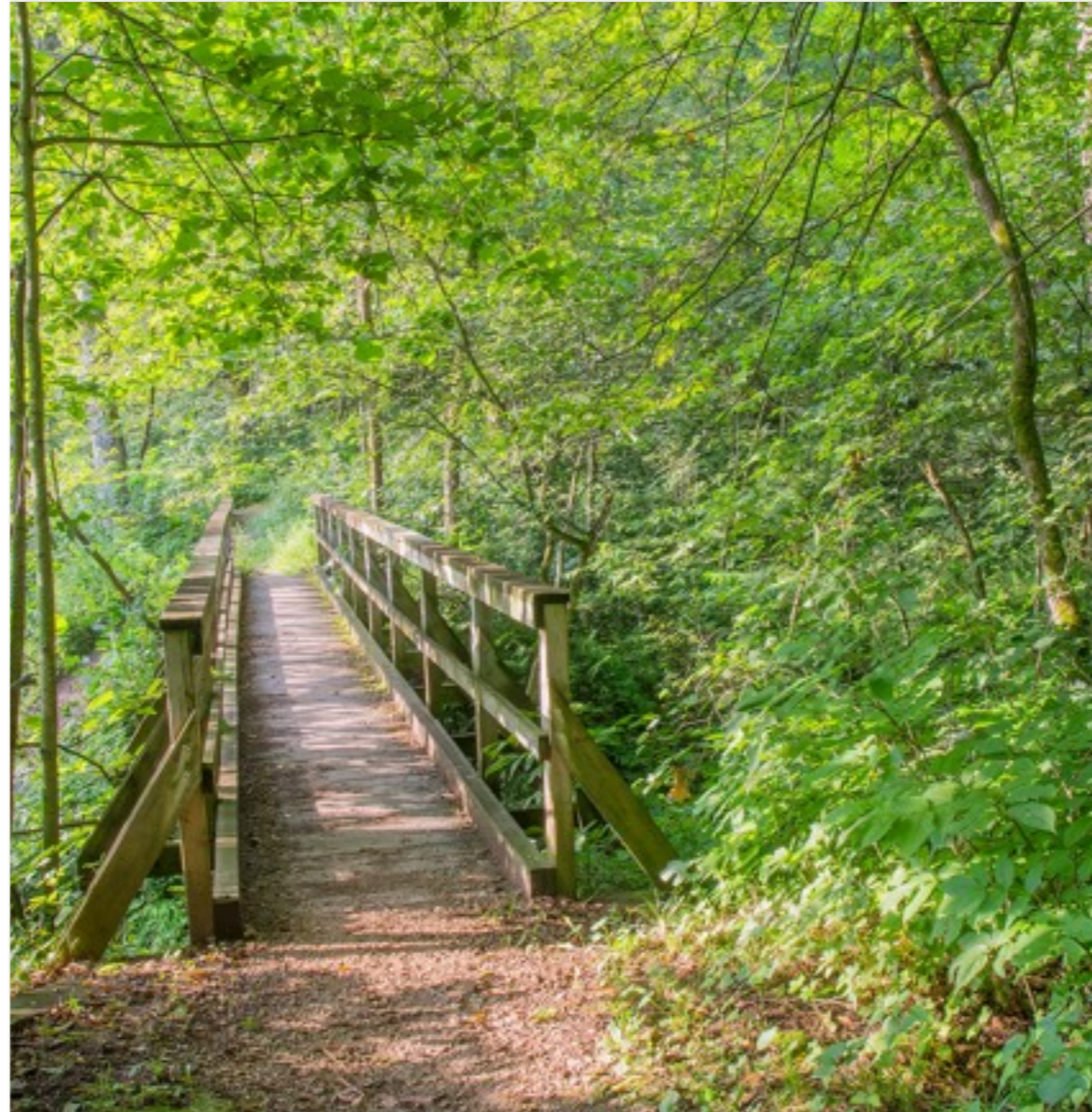


Encountering God
IN CREATION
A SEVEN DAY OUTDOOR
DEVOTIONAL



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Encountering God in Creation: A Seven Day Outdoor Devotional

By Pasquale R Mingarelli

Encountering God in Creation: A Seven Day Creation Devotional

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Welcome

In this series of seven creation devotionals each devotional contains four sections

1. An opening verse.
2. The main devotional thoughts
3. A section called "Taking Time" which contains a Bible passage and some questions to consider
4. A section called "Hiking Farther with the Father" which contains some related scriptures passages to read when you wish.

May all of creation speak to you of the greatness of God!

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• Introduction •



Encountering God in Creation

As an outdoor photographer, I spend a lot of time outside. I enjoy spending time in nature, even when I'm not taking pictures. My family and I like to go for walks or hikes and we like to camp. We just enjoy the beauty of nature. Often, I bring along my Bible and a journal to reflect about God when I am outside. As a result, I have

learned that God speaks to us through His creation and the creation speaks to us about God.

May this short devotional series help you discover God in His creation as I have. My prayer is that you may know Him deeper as a result of using this devotional.

THE CREATOR REVEALED IN CREATION

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. (Romans 1:20)

Those of us who love the outdoors find something spiritual in it. Whether we sit on a boulder by a quiet creek, at a majestic mountain overlook, or on a backyard deck watching birds, we sense a spiritual presence. We don't sense this because some mystical force exists in nature. The reason we sense a spiritual presence in nature is that we see evidence of the Creator in His creation. When we look at something in nature, we realize that something greater exists. Something that transcends. And as people made in God's image, we desire to connect with our transcendent Creator as we sense His presence.



Think about a time when you took an inquisitive look at something simple in nature. Perhaps maybe a flower? You may have noticed that a flower is not simple at all. It is complex, but yet, that complexity had to come from somewhere. Multiply that complexity and think about a mountain range in a forest. Something greater than the mountains and forest

exists that created them. They did not create themselves. Nothing creates itself. We know we did not create ourselves. We also know that nature did not make nature, nor did the universe make the universe.

• DAY 1 •

God exists. He created all of nature and the universe. He transcends the universe and the rest of creation, yet He left His mark on it and His presence holds it together. When we step into God's creation, we sense both the power of His presence and His transcendence. Nature also reveals God's creativity, majesty, glory, and so much more that helps us to sense His presence.

Taking Time

How does nature speak to you about God? Take some time and sit alone outside with your Bible and a journal (this can even be in your own backyard). Write about how God speaks to you through His Word and the natural sites and sounds around you.

Hiking Farther with the Father

Read Psalm 19:1-10, Romans 1:18-23, and Job 12:7-10.

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• DAY 2 •

THE SIMPLE THINGS

*Great are the works
of the Lord; They
are studied by all
who delight in them.*
(Psalm 111:2)

By spending many hours outside, I've learned that we can enjoy God through the simple things of nature. We don't necessarily need to go deep into the wilds of the wilderness in order to experience God. We can experience God's hand in creation in places a lot closer to home.

What a pleasure it is to simply go for a walk in a park, grow a garden, walk through fall leaves, or watch birds nibble at a feeder. Through simple ways like this, one can meet with God in nature. Pastor and author, T.M. Moore calls this practicing creation theology.



Like most of you, I do not live in some lovely wooded area. My family and I live in the suburbs. But one of my favorite places to meet with God is on our back deck in the quiet of the morning. I like to sit under our oak tree, look at our garden, listen to the birds, and watch the squirrels. God uses even birds and squirrels to speak to me about Himself. He tells me He is the One who provides them with good things and He provides me with good things as well.

It does not take much time in nature for God to speak to us. What's more important is that we approach our time outdoors with a still heart and mind. Sometimes, I find it beneficial to read my Bible and journal outdoors, but even when I walk the dog or ride along a bike trail, God speaks.

Taking Time

Find a quiet place close to home. How do the simple things in nature speak to you about God? What do they say? How do you delight in God's works? Perhaps Journal your thoughts.

Hiking Farther with the Father

Read Psalm 50:10-11, Psalm 24:1-2, Psalm 111:1-4

• DAY 3 •

Alone



But Jesus Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray. (Luke 5:16)

God made us for fellowship with Him and with other believers. Fellowship with God often happens during our times of fellowship with others in the church through Bible studies and

other gatherings. But sometimes, fellowship with God happens best when we are alone with Him. The quietness of nature makes for a great place to meet with God alone.

The Gospels record Jesus heading to the wilderness alone at least a half a dozen times. Several of those instances are recorded multiple times in the Gospels, emphasizing their importance. Jesus even encouraged His disciples to spend time alone in the wilderness. In Mark 6:31, He said, “Come away by yourselves to a secluded place and rest a while.”

Why did Jesus go into the wilderness alone to meet with the Father? Perhaps He knew something? In the first devotion, we mentioned how creation reveals God’s transcendence, power, creativity, majesty, and glory. Maybe

Jesus knew that spending time in such places can help us better appreciate God? Or maybe Jesus knew that the unmatched quietness and solitude gives us rest? Whatever the reason, Jesus spent plenty of time alone in the wilderness as did Moses, David, the prophets, and the apostle Paul.



Hiking Farther with the Father

Read Luke 4:42 and Psalm 29 (a psalm written by David, who spent time alone with God in the wilderness).

Like Jesus, let's take a break from the busyness of life and get outside to be alone with God.

Taking Time

Get away to a quiet place with your Bible and journal. Rest, relax, and think about your life. Ask God for: 1) Wisdom and direction on the issues in your life 2) Strength to follow His leading 3) And to fill your heart with peace.

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• DAY 4 •

Great Creator

Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding...
(Job 38:4)

The glory and majesty of natural wonders like mountains points to the far greater transcendent glory and majesty of their Creator. When we see the greater things of nature (and even the lesser things) we can't help but marvel. Something reaches inside us and speaks to our hearts. Whether one believes in God or not, we all see His handiwork and feel His presence there.

Sadly, many deny His handiwork and presence and worship the creation. By doing so, they fall short and do not completely experience the magic in the moment. The only true way to fully appreciate the greatness of creation is to recognize the far greater majesty of nature's Creator. Like with any great artwork, one gets better understanding of it when one seeks the artist.

Nature reveals the greatness of God in many ways. We can easily see the creator's greatness when we watch a sunrise from the shore of the ocean or a great lake. We also see His greatness



when we stand on top of a mighty mountain or at an overlook in a national park.



We can see God's greatness anywhere, not just in magnificent places. Whenever we spend time in the outdoors, study it, enjoy it, and think about God in it, we can see His greatness. We can simply take a walk in the woods or in a park close to home or set up a bird feeder. In birds, we see the greatness of God, for He gave them the gift of flight.

Taking Time

Think about a mountain—maybe one you saw in the past, or perhaps the one in the above photo, or maybe you are blessed to

actually see one as you read this devotion. Think about different traits and qualities of the mountain and ask, “What does this mountain tell me about God? Journal your thoughts.

Hiking Farther with the Father

Read Job 38 and 39.

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• DAY 5 •

God Provides

They all wait for You To give them their food in due season. You give to them, they gather it up; You open Your hand, they are satisfied with good. (Psalm 104:27-28)

Each fall, the oak tree in my backyard fills with countless acorns. Jubilant squirrels from far and wide will come to indulge in the tree's bounty. What does this tell me about God? It tells me that He is a God of provision, abundance, and joy.

If God gives such things to squirrels, how many greater things does He give to us? Life on earth offers many things to enjoy, but there is also much suffering (His creation can also tell us about that). In the next life, God has only good things planned for those who believe in and follow Him.

Psalm 104 brings to life how God remains active in His creation. Verses 10 and 11 say He created the rivers to flow down from the mountains to provide water for animals below. Verse 12 mentions that He provides trees to give a home for the birds. God cares for His creation just because He made it and it needs a caretaker.



Jesus tells us in the Sermon on the Mount that God provides for His creation. He also makes the connection between God providing and caring for creation in the same way He does for us. He says in Matthew 6:30-32, "But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you?"



You of little faith! Do not worry then, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear for clothing?’ For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.”

Taking Time

Sometimes, the simple things in nature can tell us something profound about God. Journal about what these items reveal to us about God’s provision.

- An acorn?

- A wild strawberry blossom?
- A bee?
- A snowflake?

How does God’s provision reveal His glory?

Hiking Farther with the Father

Read Psalm 104, Matthew 6:26, and Philippians 4:19.

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• DAY 6 •

Creations Calls Us to Worship

*Shout for joy, O heavens, for the Lord
has done it! Shout joyfully, you lower
parts of the earth; Break forth into a
shout of joy, you mountains, O forest,
and every tree in it;
For the Lord has redeemed Jacob . . .
(Isaiah 44:23)*

We finally made it to the top. Since many hours had passed since we started the long climb up from the valley below, we decided to eat lunch on the top. I walked over to the far edge of the ridge to eat. After eating, I stood on a boulder overlooking the valley below. The mighty hand of our Creator overwhelmed me as I observed the richness of the valley and the majesty of the rugged mountains. God's power, wisdom, majesty, and infinite nature were clear to see. My heart worshiped Him there.

The creation calls us to worship God. Psalm 96:11-12 says, "Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; Let the sea roar, and all it contains; Let the field exult, and all that is in it. Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy . . ." How do trees



"sing for joy"? By their very existence and innate beauty. The trees, the mountains, the fields, and the sea tell us about a great God who deserves our worship!

When I think about nature and worshipping God, I am reminded of one of my favorite hymns, “Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee.” The Hymn writer Henry Jackson van Dyke declares:

*All Thy works with joy surround Thee, earth and
heaven reflect Thy rays,
Stars and angels sing around Thee, center of
unbroken praise.
Field and forest, vale and mountain, flowery
meadow, flashing sea,
Singing bird and flowing fountain call us to
rejoice in Thee.*

Taking Time

Spend some time admiring the creation around you. It can be great or small. It doesn't matter. We can find something to admire in all God's creation. Think about the lyrics in the song. Let what you admire in creation call you to worship God. Journal your thoughts.

Hiking Farther with the Father

Read Psalm 96 and Psalm 148.



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The Mystery of Nature's Beauty

*God saw all that He
had made, and behold,
it was very good. And
there was evening and
there was morning,
the sixth day.
(Genesis 1:31)*

Why do people plant flower gardens? Why do we bring plants into our houses and put photos of nature on our walls? Why? Because within the things of nature we find a beauty that cannot be matched by anything humans create. This beauty calls us to find rest and peace.

Not only does this beauty call to us to find rest and peace, but it also testifies about something greater. Apologist Alister McGrath writes, “The beauty of the night sky or a glorious sunset are important pointers to the origins and the ultimate fulfillment of our heart’s deepest desires.” And C.S. Lewis is quoted as



saying, “The beauty that so captures our hearts and is so fleeting draw us towards an eternal reality.” In other words, the beauty of creation points us to the greater beauty of heaven.

The Bible teaches that God originally created us to live in the garden of Eden. God filled that garden with the pure beauty of His perfect creation. So, when we walk in an impure

creation today, we get glimpses of Eden. And for those of us who follow Christ, we will eventually live in the beauty of heaven. The beauty of nature is also the closest thing on earth to the beauty of heaven. The beauty of nature reminds our souls of the greater beauty of Eden and it calls to us about the infinite beauty and majesty of heaven.

Taking Time

Find a bit of nature's beauty. Think about that beauty and why you may be attracted to it. Think about what makes it beautiful. Think about why beauty exists in the first place. Journal your thoughts.

Hiking Farther with the Father

Read Genesis 1 and Revelation 21 and 22:1-5.



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• PHOTO DESCRIPTIONS •

Cover: A walking bridge in Forestville Mystery Cave State Park, Minnesota

Copyright Page: A young girl on the Mill's Lake Trail in Rocky Mountain National Park, Colorado

Introduction: Man on the shore of Turquoise Lake, San Isabel National Forest, Colorado

Day 1 first photo: Mountains in the San Isabel National Forest, Colorado

Day 1 second photo: Chive blossom bud, eastern Nebraska

Day 2: Fall blueberry leaves above snow

Day 3 first photo: Hiker on a driftwood log in Olympic National Park, Washington State

Day 3 second photo: The beach in Olympic National Park, Washington State

Day 4 first photo: Longs Peak, Rocky Mountain National Park, Colorado

Day 4 second photo: Mountain wildflowers, Rocky Mountain National Park, Colorado

Day 5 first and second photos: Fox squirrels, Bellevue, Nebraska

Day 6 first and second photos: Mount Meeker and Longs Peak, Rocky Mountain National Park, Colorado

Day 7 first photo: Sunset, Central Florida

Day 7 second photo: Hoh Rainforest in Olympic National Park, Washington State

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