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Finding God in Nature
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Psalm 23, 19:1-6

Today, we are starting a new four-week series entitled “*Encountering God in Creation.*” For the next three weeks, we have some outstanding speakers lined up who will speak about God and His Creation. This morning, my sermon title is “***Finding God in Nature.***”

Let’s begin by asking a simple question: ***How many of you enjoy being outside in nature?***
There is just something awesome about being outside and enjoying all that God has made in creation.

Christy and I have been married for 25 years. One of the first things I learned quickly in our marriage was that Christy loves camping and being in nature. Her family loved going away for weeks at a time, setting up a tent, and enjoying God’s nature. They loved being outdoors where they enjoyed activities like hiking, fishing, identifying birds and their calls, making smores, and so much more. They found it relaxing and enjoyable.

Guess what happens when you marry a girl who has wonderful memories about being in nature with her family? You guessed it, I learned to enjoy nature in a new way. Christy and I have enjoyed many vacations where we went tent camping, not to be confused with “glamping” in an RV. There is definitely a difference. Having your family in a tent (and now three tents) is an experience. As a family, we have really enjoyed God’s creation.

One of our favorite places to vacation as a family is Acadia National Park. We have been there several times. In fact, last year our kids wanted to go for our last summer adventure before three of them left for college.

There is a lot that we love about going to Acadia National Park. We enjoy hiking the trails, the breathtaking views from the mountains, walking along the peaceful ponds, seeing millions of stars in the sky, and watching a stunning sunrise from Cadillac Mountain.

One of reason I enjoy going to Acadia National Park and experiencing the beautiful scenery, is that it reminds me how big God really is. God is so much bigger and complex than I can even imagine. When I hike up a mountain and see beautiful scenery, it’s visual reminder of how incredible God is and of the world He has created.

Let me ask: Do you find God in creation? Do you ever feel close to God by being in nature? I think the answers to both of these questions are yes and yes!

God has made the mountains, stars in the sky, the ocean waves, the beautiful beaches, and so many varieties of birds, animals, and flowers. The list could go on and on. For many of us when we are outside in nature, we feel close to God. We can feel that God is right there with us. That is how many people draw closer to God.

I am reminded of Romans 1:20: ***“For since the creation of the world, God’s invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made.”***

Being in nature and seeing everything God has created is one way that God can speak to us. The beauty of nature helps many of us to feel close to Him. This is just one way we can find God in nature. Many of us have experienced this connection and we realize how great it is.

One way we can find God in creation is seeing the beauty that He has created here on earth. A second way is to go on walks in nature. When Christy or my kids are not with me, I will often start a conversation with God while I am walking.

I will tell you that quite often, God and I will talk with each other on our walks. When I have a great day, I will share that with God and I will praise and thank Him. My spirit is one of thankfulness.

There are some days that are difficult. I know this may be hard for you to believe, but there are times where I leave work frustrated; there are times when something happens in my day that just bugs me. It might be a relationship issue, or a work issue, or family issues.

When I get frustrated, I take a walk with our dog, Rugby. He just loves walking. We start walking in the direction of Nickerson State Park. It takes us less than five minutes to be in the park. I will begin talking with God as if he is on the walking the trail with Rugby and myself.

When I am frustrated or angry about a situation, I share those things with God as if He were walking right with me. I will share the situation or what is upsetting me at that moment. I will share with God why I am correct in my thinking or the way I handled the situation, because I am only thinking from my limited viewpoint.

There are times where I speak out loud and other times, I pour out my concerns to God in my head. If I am honest, my ranting and complaining may go on for 15 minutes, 30 minutes, one hour or longer. I just tell God, how I am feeling and share my frustrations. I truly believe God is listening to me. I wouldn't call it a prayer; it's more of a discussion I am having with God.

There are times on my walk with God where I will say, "*Ok God, what should I do?*" There are times where I simply say to God, "*I just need your help on this one.*" Or "*I cannot do it on my own.*"

Sometimes I will offer God a prayer as Rugby and I keep walking around Higgins Pond or Little Cliff Pond. I feel better by talking with God. There is a change that happens in my heart; I cannot explain it. I feel God's peace in my spirit. I just trust Him that things will work out and I make my way home.

There are times though, when I really believe God does speak to me. It's not an audible voice. I will be walking along and God puts a thought or words in my mind. These thoughts that come to me are truly from Him. Often when God speaks to me, I just know that it's from God. It happens enough that I know it's from Him.

In some cases, God will convict me of my part in the situation, telling what I could have done better and how I could have handled it differently. Sometimes God shows me what I did wrong or He helps me see things from the other person's perspective. Sometimes God tells me I need to apologize to the person that I hurt. Sometimes God just reminds me that this is a first-world problem and I just need to let it go. To be honest, it is often really hard for me to just let it go.

There are times when I am walking with God in silence that God reminds me that He is faithful. God reminds me of my past and how He has helped me and our family through a difficult time, and lets me know He will be there to help in this situation as well.

There is an old hymn that comes to my mind. "***In the Garden.***" The main verse is "***And He walks with me and talks with me, and he tells me I am His own. And the joy we share, as we tarry there, none other has ever known.***"

I truly believe God can communicate with us in nature. He desires a relationship with His people. God loves it when we share with him our struggles, our needs, our joys, and our praises. I believe God desires for us to have two-way communications with Him.

One-way communication is when I communicate to God. We are all pretty good at this. It's when we pray about work, family, problems we are going through, our health issues, finances or anything that comes to our minds. The sad thing is, we often end things abruptly, with an Amen. I believe that many of us have one-sided conversations with God.

Regrettably, I believe many of us stop right there and we fail to do the second part of communication. We need to practice the art of being quiet, listening with the expectation that God will say something to us. It might be a thought or word or even a Bible verse that comes to our mind. I believe many times these are messages from the Lord.

I believe to hear God, there are some things we need to do. First, we need to humble ourselves and look to God for help. Second, we need to have an expectation that God will speak to us. I believe that God can and will speak to us. Lastly, we need to be quiet and wait for Him to give us a word, thought, even a Bible verse. We just need to be open to God speaking to us.

The question you and I may need to ask ourselves is this, “***Are we willing to listen and meditate and be silent before God?***” Do we come with an attitude that God will speak to us today? I really believe that God does speak to us. We just need to be open to listening to what He has to say.

Someday, I would enjoy doing a sermon on “*How God speaks to us today*” God speaks to us through his scripture, the Bible. For some of us we need to blow the dust off our Bibles and begin to read them. Hear what God has for us. I also believe God does speak to us in conversation and prayer with Him.

When I go walking with God in nature I will sometimes read a verse or passage and meditate on it.

One of my favorites is Psalms 23, one of the most famous passages in the entire Bible. Many of you have heard it read at a funeral. The passage has brought comfort and encouragement to countless people over the centuries. This Psalm unveils a beautiful picture of how God wants to guide and bless us throughout our lives.

Psalm 23:1-4

**The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing.
He makes me lie down in green pastures,
He leads me beside quiet waters,**

**He refreshes my soul.
He guides me along the right paths
for His name's sake.
Even though I walk
through the darkest valley,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.**

Take your left hand and point your index finger and imagine that index finger is you. I want you to place that finger in your right hand. The right hand is representing God. When you place it in your left hand, you are placing your life in God's hand. Imagine yourself in the palm of God's hand. I believe God wraps his fingers around you and He won't let you go.

When I am walking in God's nature, I am reminded often that God has me in the palm of His hand. I believe when you place your life in God's hands, you are trusting in Him. When we put our trust in God, He will not let go of us. God has our best interest in mind. God is full of love.

In Psalm 23:1 we see the Lord as a shepherd. ***Read this verse and emphasize the underlined word:***

“THE Lord is my shepherd.”

“The LORD is my shepherd.”

“The Lord IS my shepherd.”

“The Lord is MY shepherd.”

“The Lord is my SHEPHERD.”

When I read this verse over and over again, it reminds me how much God loves each of us. For God is the good shepherd and we are His sheep. When you walk with God in nature, I want to encourage you to pick a favorite Psalm or verse and meditate upon it.

Here's a homework assignment for you this week. Go out for a walk and meditate on Psalms 23:1-4.

Verse 1, **“The Lord is my shepherd; I should not want.”**

The same Lord created the galaxies and knows the name of every star and knows the location of every grain of sand on the beach. God is sovereign over all of history.

Yet the Lord knows every detail about me. He knows every single cell in my body and how they function together. This simple verse reminds me the Lord who created everything in the universe is also MY SHEPHERD!

Psalms 139:13-14

“For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.”

God saw and loved me before I was ever born. I believe that God wants a relationship with us because He made us from the beginning.

For those of us who believe in Jesus and the good news of all He has done for us, then Jesus is your personal shepherd. As a shepherd over his sheep, God will watch over us each day. He will make sure our needs are taken care of. That is the reason, the shepherd says, *“I should not want.”*

Jesus will meet every genuine need of His sheep that we will have. Jesus as our shepherd does not want His sheep or us as His children to be in need in any way. The Lord has the power to fulfill every genuine need that we have. We can trust God in the essentials of our life.

For me this verse gives me encouragement and gives me hope for my life. I hope it gives you hope and encouragement as well.

Palms 23:2: “He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me besides quiet waters.”

Green pastures are a picture of abundance, rest, and refreshment. A sheep lying down in green pasture does not have a care in the world. The sheep is surrounded by rich food and he is provided for. The quiet water reminds us of the peace that only God can give.

This verse gives each of us as His sheep and children both comfort and rest. God promises to provide for us with food, water, and the peace we need. There are times in our lives where we just need rest and peace in our lives. I believe God wants to give that to us.

Psalms 23:3: “He restores my soul. He leads me in the right paths for his name’s sake.

David in this Psalm paints a picture of the sheep being nourished with food and water. In the same way, God nourishes us spiritually and emotionally as well. I believe God realizes the hardships and challenges that we all face. Everyday life can be very draining and exhausting.

Jesus is there to restore our souls. His loving care as our shepherd can put our minds at ease, so we can rest peacefully, be refreshed, and be strengthened.

I love that the Shepherd gives us a promise to guide our path. God does not say he is going to give every detail of his plan to us. God will guide me in the right way to go. I love that God promises to lead and help the sheep in moving forward. As we continue to draw near to Him, He will make our paths straight. I firmly believe the shepherd does all of this for His sheep.

Psalms 23:4: “Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they will comfort me.”

This is one of those verses that provides me with hope. God knows the darkness in life we are going through. At times in our lives, it may seem really, really dark. The valley may seem like it lasts forever.

The good news according to the shepherd is that Jesus is with us. The verse tells us that we are not to live in fear. Why? For God is with us. If God is with us, what more can we ask for? We know the shepherd will care for us because He loves us.

The shepherd goes even a step further. The shepherd will use His rod and His staff to comfort and protect us. Once again, we see the good shepherd using his tools to guide us and direct us in the way we should go. The good shepherd also understands that we as sheep need boundaries. He is there to protect us from ourselves. God uses His rod and staff as comfort for His sheep. These four verses remind me how much God loves me.

I want you to remember that we can “**Find God in Nature.**” God is the Creator of all that we see in nature, and He speaks to us through His creation. It’s also the perfect place to have a conversation with Him.

God desires a two-way relationship with us today. A two-way relationship is a conversation where we talk with God and share our lives with Him. We share the good, bad, and the things we are losing sleep over. Remember there is a second step. I believe it is important to humble ourselves and seek after God anticipating that God will speak to us. We need to practice being quiet and waiting for God to speak to us.

Lastly, I want you to remember Psalms 23:1-4. Remember “*God is our shepherd.*” God desires a relationship with you. Just as the shepherd has a relationship with his sheep. The shepherd is there to provide, care for, give us direction, refresh our souls, and comfort his sheep. We need to remember that God has us in the palm of his hand. That is how God loves us. Amen.