

WEEK SIX • DAY ONE

AWED BY NATURE

OUTDOOR
ADVENTURES

WEEKEND!



KAYLEA HUTSON

experiencing God in nature²³

I love being outside. I grew up on a farm and watched the sun come up as I did my chores. Now, I spend much of my life behind a computer. But the times I spend hiking in the woods or sitting beside a waterfall or a slow-moving stream are some of the best moments in my life.

Outside, I experience the natural world. I also feel especially close to God, as if I were living Psalm 42:1 (NRSV):

**As the deer longs for flowing streams,
so my soul longs for you, O God.**

My soul longs to be in God's presence, and being in nature helps provide the solution. Stepping into nature gives me a chance to unplug—to disconnect from my smartphone, to push away from computer and TV screens, to turn off the music—and allows me to experience God's creation with all of my senses. >>>

july 18–24

JULY>AUG 2011 **25**

WEEK SIX • DAY ONE

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WEEKEND!

>> PRACTICING “FIVE THINGS”

One thing I like to do when spending time outside is what I call “five things.” A friend introduced me to this practice during a difficult period of my life. It helps me to relax, to tune out the noise, and to listen to God who often speaks to me through nature.

The process is simple:

- + I start by identifying five things I can see around me.
- + Then I listen for five things I hear.
- + Finally, I focus on five things I feel.

Stepping outside, I might immediately see rocks, grass, a path, trees, and birds. I might hear birds chirping, water rippling over rocks, or grass blowing in the wind. The last is the hardest, but I may feel anything from a gentle breeze on my face to cool water running over my fingertips.

After completing the cycle of five things, **then I repeat the process by counting backward, identifying four additional things in each step, then three, then two, and finally one.** The entire process takes time and energy, and I don't always find all the things; but often I've seen, felt, or listened to small things in nature that I might otherwise have overlooked.

Being in nature and engaging my senses helps me to recharge my spiritual batteries and gives me energy and strength to face my everyday life. After spending time outside, I often wonder why I don't make it a regular part of my life. I realize that the more time I spend inside, the harder it is to unplug and go outside; yet doing so is what my soul needs to connect with God. <

Kaylea Hutson serves as the minister to families with children at First United Methodist Church in Siloam Springs, Arkansas, and works as a freelance journalist. In her spare time, she loves being outdoors.

24 NEXT DAY STRETCH

Being outside doesn't necessarily mean going on a long hike. Taking a walk around the building or block is a good way to blow the cobwebs out of your brain. Somehow the problems we face seem more manageable after we step away from them and engage in nature even in a small way.

How do you feed your soul through spending time in nature? What can you do to connect with God in a new way?

Why not unplug from everything and go for a walk or sit outside in the backyard and try practicing “five things.” Take a few minutes to see, hear, and feel what God is saying to you in nature. Who knows, it might even inspire you to write a psalm of praise to God.

WEEK SIX • DAY TWO

AWED BY NATURE

MIND=BLOWN

WEEKEND!

what a wonderful world!

How has God our Creator blown your mind?

showing up in chemistry

Going to Catholic school, I had to take a religion class every day. Sometimes we would journal about how we saw God in our lives. I never really took this exercise seriously—until one day in chemistry class. We were studying the complex electron configurations of atoms. Unable to solve some ridiculous equation, I thought, *Who made this so complicated?* Then I realized—God did. God created the atoms that make up our entire existence. God created our planet and placed it the perfect distance from the sun. God created all things to work together in perfect harmony. We only have to look at this beautiful world to see God's love and compassion in every corner of it.

Ali Southard, 20 [High Point, North Carolina]

tucking a bit of extraordinary into the everyday

Powerful roots clutch the wet earth, sucking dirty water out of the soil below. They slurp it upward into the soft wood of the trunk, which grows denser as it expands. The immobile trunk splits into smaller offshoots that stretch into the sky, splitting again and again until they become mere twigs, minuscule versions of their ancestor. What little water arrives at the tips of each twig trickles through green veins beneath the thin skin of the leaves that soak in sunlight from millions of miles away. Then they transform water and light into energy that feeds the entire tree. God's majesty can be seen in the common things.

Harrison Pennell, 18 [Eden Prairie, Minnesota]

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december 16-22

WEEK SIX • DAY TWO

AWED BY NATURE

MIND=BLOWN

WEEKEND!

loving us more than all the stars

The Milky Way contains about 300 billion stars. Multiply that by billions of galaxies—can all those stars possibly be counted? The sheer magnitude of space is staggering. How can we possibly comprehend the God who created it? Remember that the God who holds the universe together cares for us. God's love for each of us far exceeds the power required to set the galaxies in place.

Hannah Meyer, 22 [Coeur d'Alene, Idaho]

encoding a message in the majestic

When I visited Niagara Falls, the sheer amount of water that surrounded me was mind-boggling. I gazed at the falls, wondering what prompted God to create such a marvelous site. Perhaps God wanted to say, "You think I'm not real? You think I can't handle any situation you face? Look at these falls—how powerful and majestic they are. I created them using only my words. Have no fear. I can take care of you." The power and beauty of Niagara Falls remind me that we are created in God's image. We too are beautiful, created to reflect God's love and beauty to the world. <

Emily Baer, 22 [Purcellville, Virginia]

22 NEXT DAY STRETCH

meeting us in prayer

Creator God,
you who lit the fires of the Big Bang,
who set the galaxies spinning,
who exploded great stars to form the complex molecules
that formed our solar system and our bodies,
you who guided creation toward greater consciousness
and who are actively creating still:
Open us to the awe and wonder
of the abundance and beauty and diversity of life
on this, our home planet.
Open us to the valuing of all species,
that we may come to understand their part in your purpose.
Open us to see all things as holy
and to listen to the ways you communicate with us—
through people, events of nature, and your creatures.
We pray in the name of Jesus,
who used parables from the natural world
to teach us of the kingdom of God. Amen.

Hope Harle-Mould [Kenmore, New York]

www.devozine.org

NOVEMBER>DECEMBER 2019 55

WEEK SIX • DAY THREE
AWED BY NATURE

WONDER

WEEKEND!

CRAIG MITCHELL

IN AWE AND WONDER

Our Lord and Ruler, your name is wonderful everywhere on earth!
You let your glory be seen in the heavens above.

— Scripture verses taken from Psalm 8 (CEV).

32 NOVEMBER>DECEMBER 2018

november 26–december 2

WEEK SIX • DAY THREE

AWED BY NATURE

WONDER

WEEKEND!



to wonder is
to make time
to watch
to wait
to hold
to hear
to laugh
to cry
to breathe
to sigh

Some moments in time are burned into my memory like the impression after a blinding flash of light . . .

Standing at the end of the hospital bed as my wife gave birth to our twin daughters. Small, fragile, precious miracles of grace. An overwhelming sense of helpless dependence on the goodness of God. Awe, wonder, and tears.

**With praises from children and from tiny infants,
you have built a fortress.**

Stepping silently among the ancient sentinels at Muir Woods. Giant redwoods stretching from earth to heaven, spanning generation upon generation. People gazing, spellbound, in hushed reverence for creation's majesty.

Sitting on a beach at midnight on the Australian coast, amazed by the spangled indigo spread above me. Infinite twinkling splendor. The words of Psalm 8 ringing in my soul, offering lifelong allegiance to my Maker.

**I often think of the heavens your hands have made,
and of the moon and stars you put in place.
Then I ask, "Why do you care about us humans?"**

Time stands still at moments like these. Seconds stretch into minutes. Experiencing such sheer joy, I forget about myself. The mystery at the heart of Creation is laid bare: God's beauty, goodness, and power are on display; and I can only marvel, breathless. As a photographer, I love to capture these moments; yet nine times out of ten, the image doesn't do justice to what my eyes can see.

We can't manufacture wonder. It can overwhelm us like Niagara Falls or creep upon us like a tiny ladybug. But we can slow down and pay attention to the everyday ecstasy of God's creation. Breathe deeply. Surrender our plans for a time. Be late. Just wait.

**Our Lord and Ruler,
your name is wonderful everywhere on earth!**

WEEK SIX • DAY THREE

AWED BY NATURE

WONDER

WEEKEND!

2 NEXT DAY STRETCH

The Psalms are rich with description of God's world. We cannot see God. Yet God's fingerprints leave their mark, impressing; God's voice echoes, ringing; God's light streams, glowing. Even the imperfections in our world can reveal to us something of who God is.

Yet God is not out to impress us—trying to be the greatest showman, putting on a spectacle for our benefit. God is who God is. Creative. Powerful. Artistic. Gentle. Intricate. Majestic. Good. God delights in creation because it is good. God delights in us! But don't imagine God sitting in the clouds thinking, *Nice sunset!* Imagine God alongside you, sharing your joy and awe. For God creates not to impress but to invite—to draw us into a living relationship.

Wonder turns perception into praise and appreciation into adoration. Gratitude recognizes grace. So let wondering become a habit. Cultivate your curiosity in God's world. With eyes and heart wide open, you can discover that God is giving birth to goodness every day.

Craig Mitchell has been an educator, youth worker, pastor, multimedia author, writer and occasional songwriter. He lives in the Adelaide Hills, South Australia. His photos are at www.flickr.com/photos/craigmitchell.

34 NOVEMBER>DECEMBER 2018

november 26–december 2

WEEK SIX • DAY FOUR

AWED BY NATURE

AMAZED

WEEKEND!

you take our breath away!

When has the beauty of creation taken your breath away? Our God didn't have to make the world such a beautiful place. God chose to create amazing things for us to enjoy and to display his glory in all of creation. Thank you, God, for all you have made!

Emily Acker [Plover, Wisconsin]

A MOUNTAIN REFUGE

In the Blue Ridge Mountains, I am surrounded by God's grandeur. The mountains are my refuge. If classes are getting me down, I go out and watch the sunset. If I need to burn off extra energy, I go for a walk and connect to the world around me. If I need something more powerful than a sermon, I hike to an absolutely terrifying elevation and meditate with God. The higher I am on the mountain, the closer I feel to God. What part of God's world inspires you?

Morgan Brewster, 19 [Eagle Springs, North Carolina]



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MARCH>APRIL 2018 **55**

WEEK SIX • DAY FOUR

AWED BY NATURE

AMAZED

WEEKEND!

JOY IN A ROAD CLOSURE

During a heavy snowfall last winter, I had to spend the night at my workplace. The next morning after the roads were clear, I headed home only to find my street still closed. The required several-mile detour was the last thing I wanted to experience at that moment. But as I drove past historic homes and country farms that I rarely see, I noticed how the fresh snow decorated them beautifully. What started out as a frustrating experience turned into appreciation for God's handiwork—an unexpected moment of joy.

Jessica Lippe [Central Point, Oregon]

22 NEXT DAY STRETCH

BREATHLESS WITH AWE

Sunbeams ascend,
clouds blaze orange as the sun sets,
Orion and the Hallelujah Chorus,
a friend's embrace, a couple's "I do,"
a child's face saying, "I love you."
Feeling inspired, chills running up and down my spine,
I'm lifted high, seeing with mountaintop's sight,
breathless with awe at all life means,
seeing through tears why I believe.
Music I hear sounds like the heartbeat of God.
Heaven rips open; I dance and sing along.
Notice the new words I speak.
Notice how each day I live life so deep.
I feel power that grips me and launches me out,
so energized, can't walk—must run and shout.
Alive with the freshness after springtime rain,
aching to begin—it's like New Year's today!
Feeling the call to go and be all I can be,
something propels me, sparks me, moves me, burns inside of me:
the wind that calls me to care, the fire that drives me to dare.
Sunbeams ascend . . .
Let it be so. Amen.

Hope Harle-Mould [Kenmore, New York]

56 MARCH→APRIL 2018

april 16–22

WEEK SIX • DAY FIVE

PRAYER WALK

SAY YOUR PRAYERS

**In the morning, O Lord, you hear my voice;
in the morning I lay my requests before you
and wait in expectation.**

Psalm 5:3 (NIV)

4 WALKING MY PRAYERS

Richard Lawton [Adelaide, Australia]

I have trouble sitting still to pray. My mind works better when my body is active. Every morning, I walk for an hour. For about forty-five minutes of that hour, I pray. I like to walk the same route. Otherwise, I would be too busy looking at new scenery to concentrate on praying.

I start by focusing on what I know will happen during the day; and I commit those times, events, and people to God. Then I pray for my extended family, the people in my church, and my colleagues. I name each person and commit him or her to God. Then I look around and give thanks for what I see: the birds, the people in the houses I pass, the beauty of the plants, the drama of the weather.

I pray at other times too—quick prayers during the day, prayers of review and thanksgiving at night.

Without this discipline, I easily get distracted. With a routine for prayer, I feel closer to and more comfortable with God. <



WHEN AND WHERE DO GOD'S PEOPLE PRAY?

Read 2 Kings 19:9–19;
Isaiah 56:4–7; Daniel
6:10–16; Mark 1:35; Mark
14:22–23, 32–42; Acts
1:12–14, 2:42–47, 10:9,
10:30–33, and 16:13–15.



WEEK SIX • DAY SIX

TECH FAST

Unplugging

Gerrit Scott Dawson

Have you participated in a 24-Hour Famine where you had nothing to eat or drink except for a little water or juice? Many youth groups host this event to help raise money for and awareness of the problem of hunger in the world. If you don't kill each other during the night, you often begin to feel a deep connection with those who passed the long, hungry night with you. Besides the 24-Hour Famine, I've fasted from food at other times. It's amazing how much my prayer life improves when I substitute prayer for food!

Media Fast

Fasting from food was not nearly as hard as the day I fasted from media. For twenty-four hours, there was to be no TV, no radio, no CDs, no DVDs, no magazines or newspapers, no video games, no texting, no email, no social media, no Internet or computer at all. I probably should have added my cell phone too.

So, I thought as the morning began, *what am I supposed to do?* I never realized how addicted I was to screens, music, and noise in general. The silence of that morning was unnerving. I got to eat, but I had to force my mind away from media and onto God. I read my Bible at the time I normally would have read the sports section.

Driving to work, I reached for the radio out of habit but pulled back. Instead, I prayed my way through the traffic and thought about other people and their needs. At the office, I couldn't work on the computer, so I did some reading and took notes by hand. (Wow! My handwriting had gotten bad!) I spent the afternoon visiting people who needed pastoral care.

The night of the fast was the hardest. I really wanted to watch television, but I lingered over dinner and talked with my family. Then we took a walk down the street. When we returned, I read a Christian book. Several times I had to pull my hand away from the TV remote. I went to bed early, thinking about the times I had stayed up late watching or listening to media.

The next morning the fast was over, and I gobbled up the sports section and turned on the radio with the same gusto that I had scarfed down a pizza after the 24-Hour Famine. But I realized, too, what a great day the media fast had been. During those 24 hours, I was less distracted; and it seemed easier for God to get through to me. I was also more aware of others and their needs. And as much as I hated to admit it, my life seemed to be more peaceful in general.

WEEK SIX • DAY SIX

TECH FAST

The media fast was difficult. But in that short time, I gained a brand-new perspective on life. I believe we all would feel God’s presence more often if we didn’t jam our minds with so much info-clutter. In the silence, the Spirit does speak; and the words of scripture satisfy much more than the chatter of all our media.

Dig Deeper

What did Jesus mean when he said that we do “not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4b, NRSV)?

Consider what things you could substitute for the word bread in this passage—text messages, Facebook, Instagram, Netflix, video games, and so on. What do Jesus’ words mean for our world today?

Try A Media Fast

For one day, give up media. Instead of info-clutter, fill your mind with God’s word and with prayers for others. Become more aware of God’s presence, and listen for the Spirit’s voice.

WEEK SIX • DAY SEVEN

TECH FAST

COME AWAY

“After the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence.”

I Kings 19:12 (NRSV)

A SILENT RETREAT **3**

Sarah Martindell [Durham, North Carolina]

The chaplain held up a basket. “Drop your cell phones here. You’ll get them back at the end of the retreat.”

My classmates groaned, but I gleefully tossed my phone in the basket. I was glad to be rid of it. I had looked forward to my first silent retreat—to sleeping, waking, and eating in silence. How did we spend the time if we couldn’t access the Internet, text our friends, or play interactive games? I wrote in my journal, watched leaves rustling by, took walks, swung on a swing, prayed, read, made artwork, and felt the light of God all around me.

As a peaceful silence settled over the group, I began to see my peers in a completely different way. They seemed bathed in the glow of God’s holiness. No longer distracted by surface chatter or by keeping up appearances, I could see each of them as God’s precious creation. No longer consumed with technology, I could remain in the moment and embrace what was right in front of me.

Take a silent retreat. Sit through the initial discomfort, because finally, in the silence, you will find peace. <

PRAYER: God, liberate us from distractions. Open our eyes and ears to your gifts that surround us. Help us to enter your holy silence and to trust that you will meet us there. Amen.

