

Naturalists

Loving God through nature
Appreciating the beauty of God's creation

I feel closest to God when...

I am in the beauty of nature.

To be spiritually renewed I need to...

Spend time outside enjoying God's creation.

It's especially helpful for me to connect with God through...

Appreciating the wonders God has created.

I benefit especially from speakers and authors who help me to...

Appreciate God's beauty and the wonders of his creation.

Seeing Naturalists in the Bible - intro discussion

Can you think of Bible characters or incidences which show this pathway.
Can you think of Christians you admire who fit this pathway?

About this Pathway

Three lessons that Naturalists learn:

1. Seeing Spiritual Truths in nature

God will speak to us through creation if we will only listen.

2. Seeing God more clearly

The existence, wonder & worthiness of God are broadcast daily for all to see, if we will simply step outside & open our minds & hearts to the truth.

3. Learning to rest

The outdoors cannot replace fellowship with God but can be used by God in powerful ways. Creation can be a warm blanket that God uses to enwrap our cold hearts.

How to Love God Outdoors

We need to be spiritually awakened to fully appreciate the outdoors. How? We need to make space of time, quiet & isolation before we can truly see God. First we need to believe then learn to perceive then finally receive.

1. Believe – seek the Creator behind the creation.

2. Learn to really look at creation in all it's complexity, beauty & greatness – it is nothing less than a holy place inviting you to prayer.

3. Be open to receive God's message, his blessing.

How can we do these things, what can encourage or help us?

Temptations of Naturalists

1. Individualism – escaping rather than recharging to return into the world.

2. Spiritual Delusion – test what you think you have heard & learned against the Bible

3. Idolising Nature – worship God not his creation.

Consider – perhaps in discussion groups

1. Which aspects of the naturalist's path to connecting with God seem most helpful or intriguing to you? Which aspects seem least interesting?
2. Do you consider the outdoors primarily a place of spiritual wonder, a place 'of recreation, or a place you'd rather escape to from the indoors? Discuss some of your favourite times outside.
3. Read Psalms 8 and 23. How does being out in nature trigger David's awareness of and appreciation for God?
4. Talk about some of the lessons you've learned from spending time outdoors. Was being outside simply a place where you could hear God's voice, or did God use something natural (the shape of a tree, an ant colony's movement, the colour of a rainbow) to inspire or instruct or challenge you? **What might help you become more open to this in the future?**
5. Are there any temptations naturalists may face other than the ones Gary mentioned? If so, what might they be?
6. How would you counsel someone who isn't particularly inclined toward being a naturalist to explore using the outdoors for his or her personal devotions?

If you feel as though your time in front of books or listening to sermons has become stagnant, grab a coat, pick up a walking stick, and step outside into a school that never closes. When you do so, you will also see God more clearly.

Clues to seeing meeting God in nature in the Bible. eg Hagar, Abraham, Jacob, Moses. Jesus taught in the country & he often "escaped" to lonely places to pray. God created a garden at the beginning.

Anthony (born AD 251), an ascetic made famous by the writings of Athanasius, was once asked, "How dost thou content thyself, father, who are denied the comfort of books?" Anthony replied, "My book is the nature of created things things, and as often as I have a mind to read the words of God, it is at my hand."

For everyone:

Consider these Spiritual Disciplines

<https://www.soulshpherd.org/spiritual-disciplines-list/>

Solitude, Silence, Fasting, Sabbath, Secrecy, Submission

Bible reading, Worship, Prayer, Fellowship, Personal reflection, Service

Read (to be challenged, comforted, provoked to argument, helped to grow ...)

Richard Foster's Celebration of Discipline

Brother Lawrence's The Practice of The Presence of God

Joel McKerrow's Woven (an artist remaking the faith he almost lost)

Brian McLaren's Generous Orthodoxy (or for more controversy the more recent A New Kind of Christian)

Henri Nouwen's In the House Of The Lord (an amazing unpacking of a short passage of scripture, you can do a whole term of Home Group studies from this little gem!)

<https://www.follow.org.au> for contemplation in a busy world