

Let us keep in our hearts this thought: God created the earth, and if we do not respect the earth and all of its creatures, we disrespect God.

—Serve God, Save the Planet

We may feel like there's a huge mountain standing between us and the greener world we long for. But Jesus had a few words for us about mountains. In Matthew 17:20, he says, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you." With faith in God, nothing is impossible. Living a green life is within the reach of every one of us. I think you can. God thinks you can.

—It's Easy Being Green

Bonus Chapter

Nature

Learning to Love God's Playground

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, so that men are without excuse.

ROMANS 1:20

DURING THE THREE YEARS we lived in New Hampshire, I often went on morning walks up Plains Road, a fairly flat, straight country lane with a few dairy farms and even fewer cars.

The town we lived in was populated by seven hundred people, three thousand cows, and one hundred thousand chickens. As I walked, I usually passed a couple of elderly horses, Ned and Mr. Ed, who met me at the fence of the first dairy farm, eagerly anticipating the handful of fresh grass I offered. A heavy morning mist along our river valley muffled all other signs of the earth awakening, allowing me to focus on the green pastures and still waters emerging from the fog.

For much of my morning journey, I talked with God. Sometimes I aired grievances. Sometimes I asked for help. Always I confessed some wrongdoing, as I have never gotten through a day yet without thinking, saying, or doing something unworthy. Occasionally we argued, though I don't know why I bothered—God always won. I admired the wildflowers along the roadside, a field

of neatly planted rows of corn where Emma often went to read poetry, the sandhill crane that somehow had gotten 1,000 miles off track and stranded in this cold climate. I asked God questions. Sometimes I heard his answers.

One morning, at the far end of the road where it turns to dirt and then abruptly ends at the forest, I was startled by the most wretched screaming imaginable. That scream seemed to embody all the pain and suffering and un-

Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let them say among the nations, "The Lord reigns!" Let the sea resound, and all that is in it; let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them! Then the trees of the forest will sing, they will sing for joy before the Lord, for he comes to judge the earth.

1 CHRONICLES 16:31-33

explained evil of the world throughout all of time. It was loneliness and betrayal. It was sadness and hurt and hopelessness. It was what Christ felt on the cross.

When I heard the scream, I ran back down the road until I saw a neighbor standing in his yard, also listening. He said it was a young animal, probably a fawn, trapped by a pack of "coy dogs"—wild coyote dogs that hunt in packs.

The trapped animal reminded me that human pain is not unique; suffering, even among animals, is an integral part of our fallen world. Although pain can, at times, seem unending, so is God's love.

Without pain, we do not appreciate joy. Without death, we do not value life.

The fields I passed on my journey back home reminded me that the seeds we plant, though hidden, eventually turn into seedlings. The seedlings grow into stalks. The stalks bear ears of corn. And the corn produces new seed.

As I passed the dairy farm and milking barn closest to my house, I felt soothed by the familiar twangy chorus of a Tim McGraw song coming from the barn. Music, this farmer claimed, kept his cows content and helped them produce abundantly. I smiled, imagining

the rows of cows swaying their tails in time to the melody, thanking God for the lifting of the morning mist and for the beauty of his earth.

GETTING STARTED

Watch children paint and you will appreciate how art communicates much about its creator. Nature is God's greatest work of art. Exploring nature is a way of getting to know God. Yet how often do we break free from man-made surroundings and enter into the God-made sanctuary of creation?

The best place to get back to nature is within a one-mile radius of your home: even ordinary neighborhoods contain extraordinary habitats. Make the commitment to surround yourself in nature for at least ten minutes every day and your appreciation will deepen, both for your community and your Creator.

In Genesis 2:15, God commands us to tend and protect the Garden—in Hebrew, *abad* and *shamar*. As you get to know your part of the world, you'll find yourself growing closer to nature, and to the nature of God.

Thinking local—really local!

Start in your own backyard—literally. For many, working in the earth, planting gardens, and creating beauty brings us relaxing exercise and kinship with the Creator. Enjoy your morning cereal while sitting on the back porch or invite your neighbor over for a game of catch. Spread a blanket on the lawn and identify shapes in cloud formations, or marvel at the stars when they come out at night.

If you don't have a backyard of your own, get to know the parks in your neighborhood and other shared spaces. Find out when outdoor concerts are being held. Participate in fun runs, community gardens, and classes offered by the local parks and recreation department or extension service. Expand your interests. Partner with a friend. Make your outdoor time something you look forward to.

On average, U.S. children spend only thirty minutes of unstructured time outdoors each week. Children ages three to twelve spend one percent of their time outdoors, and 27 percent of their time in front of televisions, computers, or other electronic media.

A mind-set of learning

Today many children are overstimulated—obsessed with computer games, Facebook, and texting. These activities are not bad in themselves, but they can be harmful to our relationship with God if they are a primary focus of our time and attention.

In *Last Child in the Woods*, author Richard Louv describes how “green time,” unstructured time outside in nature, has been taken over by “screen time,” time spent in front of an electronic screen. Research has shown that excessive television watching contributes to obesity, violence, and lower intelligence in children. In contrast, children who spend time outside have lower stress levels, have greater respect for themselves, and play more creatively.

How do we get our children outside? Be the change you wish to see in your children. Visit parks in your area. Spend extra time exploring the edges—the edge of the woods, a field, a stream. Keep a nature journal. If your children are too young to write, record

Spend at least five minutes every day seeing only what God has created. If necessary, close off your field of vision to a 6-inch patch of nature, and meditate on his goodness.

Don't have five minutes? Then start by doing it weekly. No matter how hectic our lives, we can eliminate one activity—reading the newspaper, ordering a morning cup of coffee—and devote that time to seeing God's hand in everything, and everything in the hands of God.

their observations and have them draw pictures. Write a story from the point of view of an animal you see. Collect leaves, rocks, and seeds. Plant a garden. Start with pumpkin or squash seeds, which are easy to hold and germinate quickly.

Most of all, share your faith. Use your time outside to teach your children about the traits of God's character seen in his creation.

SAVE GREEN

Looking for inexpensive ways to have fun as a family? Get up early to take a sunrise walk, feed the ducks in your local park, practice skipping stones across a stream, or spread a blanket on the ground at night and look up at the stars. God's gifts are free; we just need to make space for them in our crazy-busy lives.

Planning ahead

Part of enjoying the outdoors involves being prepared. Having the right equipment, knowing about the terrain and wildlife, and researching the weather can make everyone's time more enjoyable.

Ensuring safety should also be a top priority. Keep a first-aid kit with you, and don't attempt dangerous activities without proper training. The idea is not to conquer nature, but to allow the wonders of nature to conquer you.

GETTING OUTSIDE**Hiking**

We can't love what we don't know. The more time we spend enjoying nature, the more called we feel to tend and protect the world that God has created.

One of the most accessible outdoor activities is hiking. Hiking is free and family friendly. It also provides great exercise—lowering blood pressure, preventing osteoporosis, and increasing strength, endurance, and agility. Visit <http://www.localhikes.com> to find hiking trails near you.

The Tree-Hugging Psalmist

The Psalms are full of God's love for creation. For special inspiration, turn to Psalm 104, 147, and 148.

He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.

—PSALM 1:3

The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it. The world and all its people belong to him.

—PSALM 24:1, NLT

Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains, your justice like the great deep. O Lord, you preserve both man and beast.

—PSALM 36:6

You take care of the earth and water it, making it rich and fertile. The river of God has plenty of water; it provides a bountiful harvest of grain, for you have ordered it so.

—PSALM 65:9, NLT

Let heaven and earth praise him, the seas and all that move in them.

—PSALM 69:34

Let the heavens be glad, and the earth rejoice! Let the sea and everything in it shout his praise! Let the fields and their crops burst out with joy! Let the trees of the forest rustle with praise.

—PSALM 96:11-12, NLT

O Lord, what a variety of things you have made! In wisdom you have made them all. The earth is full of your creatures.

—PSALM 104:24, NLT

He counts the stars and calls them all by name. How great is our Lord! His power is absolute!

—PSALM 147:4-5, NLT

Praise him, sun and moon! Praise him, all you twinkling stars! Praise him, skies above! Praise him, vapors high above the clouds! Let every created thing give praise to the Lord, for he issued his command, and they came into being. He set them in place forever and ever. His decree will never be revoked.

—PSALM 148:3-6, NLT

Ask the Animals, and They Will Teach You

But ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds of the air, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you, or let the fish of the sea inform you. Which of all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this? In his hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind. —JOB 12:7-10

It's been a dreadfully hot summer, so I haven't gone on my favorite (strenuous) hike down to the river very often in the last couple of months. But today the temperature, if not the humidity, dropped a bit, so I decided to make the journey. My glasses fogged up repeatedly, and I got dampened by some much-needed rain, but my soul, as always, was lifted by this time in God's creation.

On this hike the easy part comes first; I hike *down* for the view. The view is not some grand vista—just a gently moving river. Always—always!—I find the river to be quietly comforting.

Deep in prayer today, I was startled on my way back up the hill, not by the howl of the coy dogs I once heard in New Hampshire, but by the buzz of a bumblebee darting around my head. In between my footsteps, muffled by leafy carpets, I heard the starlings singing. They seemed to be saying, “This is God's woods; not yours, not mine.”

I recently read a passage by the visionary twentieth-century Jesuit priest, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. Trained as a geologist and paleontologist, Teilhard argued that animals know, but that man knows that he knows. In other words, it's our ability to reflect that makes us more than a successful extension of the squirrels I heard chattering above me in the woods.

And yet, though we are “smarter,” animals have much to teach us. Watching those squirrels jump from branch to branch reminds me that every step I take is no less a leap of faith. The squirrels' seemingly impossible acrobatics are only made possible by the very same hand that holds me up every moment of every day. We, like these forest creatures, must place our ultimate trust in God, in much the same way our sons and daughters rely upon us.

The walk in the woods teaches me what animals—and children—instinctively know: that God is fully present all around us, if only we pause long enough to see.

Biking

Biking is another family activity that costs little, does not harm the environment, and provides tremendous health benefits. Most important, biking is fun!

If your child is still growing, ask neighbors and relatives if they

“Wind in My Hair”

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. —PSALM 19:1-2

This evening I went for a bike ride just before sundown. At the entrance to the park was a long, fairly steep hill. A family was out for a walk. The parents were pushing a stroller, and a set of twins, a boy and a girl about seven years old, rode ahead on their bikes, stopping and waiting every few minutes for Mom and Dad to catch up.

The little girl on the miniature two-wheeler reminded me a lot of my daughter, Emma, at that age. She clearly delighted in all her senses. So when I heard a piercing and prolonged squeal, I quickly realized that nothing was wrong. Quite the contrary, everything was exquisitely right. This little girl was yelling, well . . . because the sun was streaming red ribbons across the sky . . . because the fields surrounding us, with the first fallen leaves, smelled like autumn . . . because she was coasting down a huge hill with her brother at her side. God was smiling on her, and all was right in the world.

After the first unashamed shouts of delight, this little girl added words to her exuberance: “Wind in my hair! Wind in my hair! Wind in my hair!” Her cry reminded me of Psalm 19:1, so full of the earth’s praise and delight.

As the heavens declared God’s glory, I could almost hear the trees and birds shout alongside this little girl: *Wind in my leaves! Wind in my branches! Wind under my wings! Praise God!*

I passed the girl and her brother several times on my loops around the park. Neither her enthusiasm nor her voice ever flagged. When I pedaled back home, I thanked God for screaming little girls and the renewing glory of his creation.

have a bike they'd be willing to lend or sell to you. You can also check on <http://www.craigslist.com> or at local thrift stores and “recycled cycle shops” that salvage used or abandoned bikes. Some cities even provide fleets of bikes for free, or for a small fee, to encourage biking.

Combine biking to a park with a picnic, and you will create a memory your family will long remember.

Parks and playgrounds

Teach your children to share—not every family needs to have their own swing set. You'll save money and use fewer resources if you get to know the parks and playgrounds in your community.

Stargazing

A friend of Emma's recently told me that he rarely looks to see if the stars are visible at night.

“I just don't think about it,” he said. “My dad said he and his friends could find all the constellations and would play late into the night under the stars, but I didn't grow up that way.”

This young man is not alone. When Matthew and I spoke at a college in Texas, we asked how many of the hundreds of students in the audience have seen the Milky Way. Only a few hands went up. We have found this to be true in colleges all over the country: most people in their teens and twenties have never seen the Milky Way.

SAVE GREEN

In many neighborhoods, it's common to see nearly identical wooden play equipment and plastic slides in a dozen backyards on the same street, each costing \$1,000 or more. With fewer children and more scheduled activities, many families only play on that equipment for a short time before it ends up in a landfill. Instead, foster independence and curiosity. Encourage your children to use the local playground and explore nearby pockets of natural habitats.

A Childhood Well Spent

When Clark and Emma were preschoolers, we took them to the town band concert every Wednesday evening. We brought a blanket, a simple picnic, and a couple of lawn chairs. The children ran around and danced, while the “big people” enjoyed the music.

When our kids got a little older, they were able to walk by themselves to the school playground behind our house and the church playground across the street. We chose not to purchase a swing set for our backyard; instead, Clark and Emma enjoyed hundreds of hours playing on our next-door neighbor’s rope swing, which hung from a tall tree branch along the pathway adjoining our yards.

Though our lot was small, a stream flowed along the back border. Beyond the stream was a town-owned forest. Totaling just a few acres, this woodland was not exactly a vast wilderness, but it was big enough to provide unlimited exploration and fun. Clark and Emma played nearly every day in the woods and stream, digging for treasure, building forts, staging sword fights, and leaving morsels of food in fairy houses.

During the summer, they climbed trees. In the fall, they jumped in soft piles of leaves. In the winter, they built snow mazes. And in the spring, they sailed twig-and-leaf boats down the gushing stream.

Whenever I couldn’t find Clark, I knew to look up. More than half the time, he and his best buddy were sitting in the branches of a nearby tree. Yes, they often climbed too high for Mommy’s comfort, but that’s part of the growing up—and letting go—process. Outdoor play helped my apron strings loosen gradually, allowing our kids to grow into independent adults who do not need to be entertained 24-7 or have every moment of their lives scheduled.

Last month, Clark and Matthew went on a road trip to visit our old neighborhood. The rope swing is still there for the next generation of children to enjoy. Clark, now well over 6 feet tall and 190 pounds, could not resist taking a running leap and sailing far out over the neighbor’s lawn. His crash landing into the tree trunk brought back happy memories—along with a few familiar bruises—and the sometimes painful pleasures of a childhood well spent.

Light pollution—and air pollution in general—interfere with stargazing. But the biggest problem is that we are so worn out from our busy schedules that we don't take time to connect with the natural world. With air-conditioned homes and so many entertainment options enticing us inside, fewer people of all ages linger outdoors in the evenings.

Stars still burn beautifully—a romantic alternative for married couples and a great (free!) date option. Spend some time locating constellations and sharing the heavens with family and friends.

Shooting Stars

He counts the stars and calls them all by name. How great is our Lord! His power is absolute! His understanding is beyond comprehension! —PSALM 147:4-5, NLT

It's my parents' fault that Matthew and I moved to New England.

For two weeks every August, my family went camping. One summer when I was about eleven or twelve, we camped at Sebago Lake in Maine. What I remember most from that trip were the shooting stars. Every night, we went down to the docks and stared up at the heavens. No Hollywood movie or concert could compete with the free show we watched on those cool, starry nights.

When Matthew and I were first married, I took him to New England to see "real stars." We stayed at a lakeside cottage that belonged to friends of my parents. The stars were even better than I remembered. Matthew was hooked.

After Matthew's residency, we spent a dozen years living in Maine. Many summer nights, we brought blankets out onto the back deck and watched the comets streak across the sky. Often the kids fell asleep there, tucked into sleeping bags. What could be more pleasant and secure than Daddy carrying you in his arms up to bed, all the while dreaming of God's diamonds in the sky?

Regular date nights are critical to keeping the romance alive in a marriage, but paying for a babysitter, dinner, and a movie can really add up. Instead, put the kids to bed early one night a week, pull out a blanket, go outside, and look up at the stars. There's nothing more conducive to good conversations about the big issues of life than viewing the immensity of God's creation.

Tree planting

Matthew has planted trees everywhere we've lived. Trees are the lungs of our planet. Without them, life is not possible. Trees shade us from the summer sun and provide a relaxing backdrop for outdoor activities. Trees also can provide privacy, help cleanse the air, prevent erosion, and serve as homes to local wildlife.

Whether you buy a tree at a nursery or attain it from a tree-planting organization, you can plant a sapling with little effort. Ask the local nursery for advice on selecting the proper location and the right kind of tree for your habitat. Be sure to keep the sapling adequately watered, especially in the first year.

Last Arbor Day, a friend ordered hundreds of (free!) redbud and ornamental plum tree saplings to give away. We gladly planted about a dozen in our yard—and they are all flourishing. Through another organization, we helped give away a few hundred free evergreen saplings on Earth Day. Visit the Web sites listed below to learn how to plant trees in your neighborhood:

- <http://www.treesftf.org/main.htm>
- <http://www.plant-a-tree-today.org/>
- <http://www.arborday.org/programs/volunteers/states.cfm>

Picnics

Picnics can make an ordinary meal anything but routine. Matthew and I picnicked on some of our first dates, and we've continued to



Luther on Nature

What does Martin Luther, the founding father and theological leader of Protestant Christianity, have to say about God and nature? Plenty!

“God writes the Gospel, not in the Bible alone, but also on trees, and in the flowers and clouds and stars.”

“Now if I believe in God’s Son and remember that He became man, all creatures will appear a hundred times more beautiful to me than before. Then I will properly appreciate the sun, the moon, the stars, trees, apples, as I reflect that He is Lord over all things.”

“The power of God is present at all places, even in the tiniest tree leaf.”

“God is in all creatures, even in the smallest flowers.”

“Animals are footprints of God.”

“In a mouse we admire God’s creation and craft work.”

“In a delightful garden, sowing, planting, or digging are not hardships but are done with a zeal and a certain pleasure.”

“God is entirely and personally present in the wilderness, in the garden, in the field.”

“God wants to be praised for nourishing and cherishing, for God cherishes all creatures. God is not only the creator, but is also the sustainer and nourisher.”

And one of my personal favorites:

“God is wholly present in all creation, in every corner, behind you and before you.”

This last Luther quote gives me pause. If God is “wholly present” in all creation, then shouldn’t I treat his creation with greater respect? When I lend a friend a bike, and he leaves it out in the rain and does not take care of it, I feel disappointed, even angry. How does God feel when I don’t take care of his gifts, including the very earth that sustains us?

dine al fresco regularly for three decades. Most meals have been simple but romantic—a blanket spread in the backyard makes even cucumber and tomato sandwiches taste better.

When we travel, we nearly always pack picnic meals—a cheaper, healthier alternative to fast food. We’ve picnicked at the beach, in the woods, in fields, in cemeteries, at rest stops, in parks, and on playgrounds. For our twentieth anniversary, we cooked locally caught lobster and picnicked with the kids on the docks near our house. It was a lovely night—until Matthew woke up with gout in his toe!

““ The initial step for a soul to come to knowledge of God is contemplation of nature.
—Irenaeus ””

Picnics create a memorable oasis—a time set apart from everyday life—to be in nature and to enjoy God’s sustaining gifts. What can be more holy than saying grace and breaking bread together under the heavens?

Cleaning up

Do you have a park nearby with litter on the ground? a ravine where old items have been dumped for years? a neighborhood (maybe your own) with bottles and cans along the roadside? Anyone can clean up public spaces, including you.

Get in the habit of carrying a bag when you go on a walk and picking up trash along the way. Gather a bunch of kids from your church, school, or neighborhood to clean up a streambed. Ask your church or school to adopt a highway. Work with your neighbors to plant trees along your street. Create beauty: Plant and tend a flower garden at a busy intersection. Make it a goal to leave every place you live more beautiful than you found it.

Redemption, Restoration, and Repair

Yet their Redeemer is strong; the Lord Almighty is his name. He will vigorously defend their cause so that he may bring rest to their land. —JEREMIAH 50:34

This morning I took a walk around the block. The city I am visiting is not considered safe, but I feel comfortable—the modest homes are generally well cared for, and the teens tossing a football before the school bus arrives nod a friendly “good morning” as I pass.

Often when I take a walk, I bring several trash bags along—one for recyclable cans, one for glass or plastic, and one for trash. But I forgot to look for bags in the home where Matthew and I are staying, and it bothers me that I can only pick up a few discarded bottles along the way. When I see two boxes in the road, I wait for traffic to pass, and then I scurry out like a chipmunk retrieving a lost acorn. Now I can pick up some real trash! I fill both boxes, then leave them beside an overflowing trash bin.

Because I do not know the neighborhood well and don’t want to get lost on unfamiliar streets, I loop back around my route a second time. Barely fifteen minutes have passed since I placed the boxes beside the trash bin, but now someone has added a small grocery bag filled with discarded cans and bottles beside my own! If I had time to loop around the block again, would there be a third?

The bag of trash makes me disproportionately happy as I head back to the house. *Perhaps this is how God feels when he watches us replanting his forests or cleaning up his streambeds*, I think, satisfied with my effort. I like to think that these small acts not only make the trees smile but also bring a quiet joy to the creatures that live in the hedgerows and, ultimately, to God the Creator himself.

Lord, teach me not only to care for your creation but also to repair the damage that we continue to unthinkingly impose. Let us encourage one another through simple acts of stewardship—picking up trash at home, school, and work; planting trees along our streets; clearing out abandoned lots and planting gardens. Teach me to do these simple acts in humble servitude, as acts of repentance for the harm all of us individually and collectively inflict on your glorious creation.

Summer camp

Summer camp can be a great way to immerse your children in outdoor fun and community. Be sure to choose a camp that reinforces your family's values—visit <http://www.gocamps.com>, <http://www.ccca.org> (for Christian camps), or your denominational camp association for leads.

While your kids are gone, brainstorm ways to integrate what they are experiencing at camp with their normal activities at home. Then pay close attention to the differences in your children after they return from camp. Are they more physically active? healthier? happier? Encourage your children to continue their connection with the outdoors throughout the year.

Remember: children cannot love what they do not know. Search out a field, forest, stream, or lake, preferably within walking distance from your home. Take your children there until they are old enough to explore it themselves. Go camping, pack picnics, swim—discover the many reflections of God in nature before there's no nature left to discover.

Camping

If you want to do something out of the ordinary with your church group, family, or friends, consider a camping trip. You can camp in your own backyard, or you can find a nearby campground to set up a tent and roast marshmallows. To find accommodations near you, visit <http://www.reserveAmerica.com>, <http://www.campgrounds.com>, or <http://www.KOA.com>. Most campgrounds require a modest camping fee—some are even free.

When you camp, it's important to remember that you are a visitor in someone's home. Not only are you spending a night in a divinely made setting, but you are also sharing space with the wildlife around you. No alterations to the environment should come from your hand.


If you see plants that might look great in your garden, don't be tempted to dig them up. Natural species are part of a larger

ecosystem whose parts rely upon one another. Removing one plant from a habitat and transplanting it to another can have a negative impact on both the original site and your backyard.

No matter what you do outdoors, you should leave the place as clean—or cleaner—than you found it. Going green does not equal going wild; in fact, it means the opposite: putting the welfare of others, including the habitats that God created, before our own desires.

Boating

Getting out on the water can be a relaxing and peaceful experience like no other. Canoes, rowboats, kayaks, and sailboats are quiet, environmentally friendly means of maneuvering through waterways. Often available for rent at campgrounds or lakes, canoes or rowboats are especially easy for beginners to maneuver.

|  Camping Dos and Don'ts | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| INSTEAD OF | DO THIS |
| Disturbing wilderness areas | Camp in established campsites |
| Using traditional flashlight batteries | Use rechargeable batteries or crank flashlights |
| Building unsecured campfires | Only build fires in stone rings or fire pits; douse completely before breaking camp |
| Leaving any waste behind | "Pack in, pack out": if you brought it with you, take it out when you leave |
| Interacting with wildlife | Observe from a distance; never feed wild animals, and store food securely |
| Hosting loud gatherings | Avoid yelling and loud music; keep a low profile in consideration of other visitors |
| Bringing electronics | Leave the iPod and MP3 players at home; instead of wearing headphones, open your eyes and ears to God's symphony |
| Buying new camping equipment | Borrow from others, rent, or purchase used |

According to the American Automobile Association, the average cost of lodging and meals for two adults on vacation in the United States is \$244 per day. You can decrease that cost to under \$30 per day if you camp instead. That's a savings of nearly \$1,500 for a one-week vacation.

If you own a boat, be sure you wash it thoroughly with a biodegradable detergent before bringing it to a new body of water. Algae and other living matter that cling to the bottom of boats can be extremely harmful when introduced to nonnative lakes, rivers, and bays. Whenever possible, share recreational equipment—including boats—with others.

Motorized boats

Motorized boats can be devastating to marine life and our water supplies. According to the EPA, traditional two-stroke boat engines spill as much as 30 percent of their unburned or partially unburned fuel into the water and air. In the water, unburned hydrocarbons increase concentrations of toxic substances that pollute water ecosystems. In the air they form smog, which causes health problems and disrupts visibility in our cities and parks.

If you do purchase a motorboat, look for one with a four-stroke or direct-fuel-injection two-stroke engine. These pollute about 75 percent less than two-stroke engines and use as much as 50 percent less gas and oil. They cost more than two-stroke engines, but you'll soon make up the difference in fuel and oil savings. They also are easier to start and maintain, and are quieter.

A new generation of wooden, sport, and leisure boats are now available with electric engines. They are quiet and can cruise where gas motors are not permitted. Some leading makers include Beckman, Budsin, Cobalt Marine, Elco Electric Launch, Duffy, ElectraCraft, Griffin Leisure, Pender Harbour, and SpinCraft.

Remember, however, that electric does not mean nonpolluting.

The energy that powers the batteries for electric boats most likely comes from coal-burning power plants that expel mercury, carbon dioxide, and other pollutants into our skies and waterways. A handful of manufacturers—such as Australia’s Solar Sailor and Canada’s Tamarack Lake—now make solar-powered or solar-assisted electric boats.

Surfing

Surfing has minimal impact on the environment as long as you stay in designated areas and don’t travel long distances to get to the ocean. The surfboards themselves, however, are often constructed of toxic resins and materials. Look for surfboards made with environmentally friendly materials such as bamboo or Biofoam, a substance that is nearly 50 percent plant based and does not contain toxins. Learn more at <http://www.oceangreen.org> and <http://www.thegreenguide.com/doc/116/surfboards>.

Swimming

I love to swim—especially in natural bodies of water. Swimming is usually free and a welcome relief on hot summer days. A few cautions: Wear sunscreen. Always swim with someone or have a buddy onshore who keeps watch. Never swim in rough waves, and be wary of ocean riptides and river currents.

BRINGING NATURE INDOORS

When you’re not outside, which is 99 percent of the time for most Americans, you can still feel a connection to God’s creation by welcoming nature indoors.



The average American spends five minutes of leisure time per day outdoors; 51 percent of Americans report spending no time outdoors, except going in and out of man-made buildings.

Indoor plants

My husband is the indoor gardener in our family. He tends to plants much like he tends to his medical patients—with love, skill, and compassion. Plants not only help keep our indoor air cleaner but also keep our hearts connected to God’s creation.

You can find indoor plants for all environments and skill levels. Our son, Clark, enjoyed having a couple of plants in his south-facing dorm room. Now that he’s in medical school and living in a less sunny apartment, he’s opted for several ivy and philodendron plants, which don’t require much direct sunlight or attention. Emma, who has a self-described “brown thumb” but still loves plants, keeps an easy-care cactus in her room.

Take plants into work and school. They’ll freshen the air while bringing joy to others.

GO GREEN

According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, bird-watching is the number-one sport in the United States, with more than 51.3 million people participating in some fashion.

Birding

Bird feeders provide more bang for the buck than nearly any other kind of entertainment. You’ll find them in a wide range of shapes and sizes—we have several mounted around our house. If you live in a wooded area, look for one with a squirrel shield. You can also make bird feeders from kits or from plans found online. Fill your bird feeder with specific seed for specific birds, or use black sunflower seed to attract a wide range of birds. Hummingbird feeders require a liquid solution of water and sugar, but the little bit of effort is more than rewarded when you attract these fascinating creatures. What more proof does one need of God’s existence than the hovering, beating wings of a hummingbird?

Mount bird feeders outside a window where you spend a lot of your time—near the kitchen, by the family room sofa, in view of

your home office—so you can enjoy the birds throughout the day. If you add a birdbath, you'll benefit the local fowl population while attracting more wildlife to your yard.

Aquariums

Matthew is fascinated by fish tanks, but he hasn't purchased one because they require a lot of energy to run. A 55 gallon freshwater aquarium uses about 400 kWh per year; saltwater tanks can use 1,000 kWh or more—the equivalent of the average home's entire lighting bill for the year. A medium-sized (55 gallon) coral reef tank uses more than 3,000 kWh per year—about the same amount of energy used for central air-conditioning and lighting in a typical household. If you do decide to have an aquarium, opt for a small freshwater tank.

STANDING UP FOR CREATION

As habitats decline, the natural benefits they provide—such as fresh-water and fertile soil—also become scarce. This scarcity increases



Ten Ways You Can Protect God's Creation

1. Conserve open space (<http://www.nature.org>)
2. Support natural habitats (<http://www.worldwildlife.org>)
3. Protect an endangered species (<http://www.defenders.org>)
4. Save national parks (<http://www.parktrust.org>)
5. Clean up the oceans (<http://www.oceanconservancy.org>)
6. Protect coral reefs (<http://www.globalcoral.org>)
7. Keep freshwater fresh (<http://www.nrdc.org>)
8. End mountaintop removal (<http://www.sierraclub.org>)
9. Protect forests (<http://www.savetheredwoods.org>)
10. Curb urban sprawl (<http://www.conservation.org>)

poverty and disease, costing us billions of dollars. Hardest hit are developing nations, where overexploiting natural resources is often the short-term solution for survival.

We live in an interrelated world. To get our 99-cent burgers at the fast-food drive-through, for example, we cut down South American rainforests so our cattle can graze. But with no tree roots to hold down the topsoil, the land becomes barren in just a few years and

“ The whole earth is a living icon of the face of God.
—St. John of Damascus ”

poverty increases. The air becomes more polluted as the earth lessens its capacity to cleanse the fumes our industrial world spews out. Without clouds forming over South America or rain falling on Africa, droughts worsen, leading to widespread hunger and starvation.

Underlying these problems is a belief that wild lands are of little value. They may seem worthless in an exploitive, money-oriented worldview, but not in a Christian worldview. Christians are instructed to love what God loves. God loves every sparrow, every cedar, and every child in even the most impoverished corners of the world. If we value what God values, then we will learn to care for and preserve all of his creation.

How to Save \$527 This Year

Look for entertainment in God's world instead of the man-made world!

| | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| Spend an evening stargazing instead of going to the movies | \$20 |
| Go hiking or biking instead of purchasing a new MP3 player | \$250 |
| Purchase two indoor plants instead of two new-release movies | \$20 |
| Plant a tree sapling instead of downloading one new album from iTunes | \$9 |
| Purchase a bird feeder and seed instead of a Nintendo Wii | \$228 |
| TOTAL SAVINGS | \$527 |

**\$
SAVE**

How to Share That Savings with Others

A Rocha USA (<http://www.arocha.org>)

A Rocha USA is motivated by a Christian faith in the God who created the earth and called it good and by the biblical mandate to care for God's earth. A Rocha projects are frequently cross cultural in character and share a community emphasis, with a focus on science and research, practical conservation, and environmental education.

Blessed Earth (<http://www.blessed-earth.org>)

Through church, campus, and media outreach, Blessed Earth equips individuals with skills and knowledge to make measurable changes in their stewardship practices. Founded by Matthew and Nancy Sleeth, Blessed Earth shares the creation care message nationwide, teaching people how to become better stewards of God's resources at home, work, church, and school.

The Eden Reforestation Projects (<http://www.edenprojects.org>)

ERP connects local people with their environment by incorporating employment opportunities and conservation education programs into reforestation efforts. Their approach includes agroforestry, local employment, incentives to limit deforestation, and planting species that naturally occur in local areas.

Evangelical Environmental Network (<http://www.creationcare.org>)

The Evangelical Environmental Network (EEN) is a nonprofit organization that seeks to educate, inspire, and mobilize Christians in their efforts to care for God's creation, to be faithful stewards of God's provision, and to advocate for actions and policies that honor God and protect the environment.

**\$
SHARE**



Putting Your Faith into Action

Lord, help me to recognize your hand in the physical world—from the fireball that rises in the east to the stars too numerous to count. Teach me to see your creation as evidence of the unseen hand that guides our every moment. Open my heart to the lessons you inscribe in all living things. Fill my heart with gratitude for the sunsets and moonrises throughout the cosmos that you love so dearly. Fortify me with the wonder of a child and the wisdom of my elders, so that I may serve and preserve the beauty of your earth.

Lord, help me *today* to:

- research local parks and outdoor activities that my family might enjoy
- spend at least five daytime minutes quietly in nature. “Be still, and know that I am God.”
- check the weather forecast and schedule a good night for viewing stars
- take a fifteen-minute walk outdoors
- if I am a parent or grandparent, read a book about nature to my child

Lord, help me *this week* to:

- visit at least one local park
- spend at least ten minutes looking up at the stars
- exercise for fifteen minutes outdoors at least three times
- purchase one or more indoor plants
- accompany a young person or elderly person outdoors
- checkout a nature film from the library
- research a conservation organization I might like to support

Lord, help me *this month* to:

- purchase and mount a bird feeder
- begin actively supporting at least one conservation organization or cause
- learn to identify trees in my neighborhood

- engage in an activity outside that I enjoyed as a child—swinging on a swing set, rolling down a hill, playing catch, climbing a tree, horseback riding
- if I am a parent or grandparent, allow unstructured time for my children to play outdoors
- plan a camping trip or overnight visit to a park

Lord, help me *this year* to:

- sleep outside at least one night under the stars
- go biking or hiking at least once a month
- get out on the water in a nonmotorized boat
- actively support a conservation effort in my neighborhood—cleaning up trash, planting trees, supporting open spaces
- start a new garden at home or church
- plan an outdoor worship service
- spend at least two hours more per week outdoors than I did last year



Summing It Up

Getting Started

I have:

- brought at least one indoor plant into my home, workplace, and school
- hung a bird feeder
- gone on a hike or bike ride
- spent at least ten minutes in nature, quietly observing
- gone stargazing

On the Journey

I have:

- visited nearby parks
- gone on a canoe ride or overnight camping trip
- exercised outside at least three times per week
- learned more about the trees and animal habitats in my neighborhood
- supported at least one conservation organization
- increased the total time I spend outdoors by at least one hour per week

Green Superstar

I have:

- slept under the stars
- helped organize a local effort to clean up a streambed, railroad track, roadside, or park in my community
- hiked or biked at least once a month
- shared outdoor equipment with others
- increased the total time I spend outdoors by at least two hours per week
- donated the money I've saved to a good cause