

Immersed in Nature

Jason Grangroth

A quiet splash sounded off to my left and then another. I turned quickly, scanning the water's depths; I was just able to pick out the dorsal fin of a fish gliding through the water just below the surface.

Moments before, it had sipped a small insect off the top of the water. Peering through the evening shadows that now lay across the crystal-clear water, I watched as a handful of bugs skittered along the surface. *Those must be the bugs the fish are eating*, I thought to myself. I pulled out my little fly tackle box and began to sort through the imitation flies I had carried along.

It was the summer of 1996, and I had joined my cousin on a backpacking trip to the Rocky Mountains of Idaho. Our adventure was about six days of hiking and camping at a couple of different lakes along the way. The lakes no doubt were full of fish; now we just had to figure out how to catch them.

After tying a small black and gold colored fly to my tippet, my attention quickly went back to the water, scanning for a fish, more than likely a cutthroat trout. It wasn't long before I glimpsed another fish as it broke the water with its nose to sip in its food. I flipped my flyrod in its direction and landed the fly on the water. Now with a little luck I'd catch its attention. Suddenly, as I stared in that direction a fish nose crested the surface and swallowed up the fly. Fish on!

Yes, I have always enjoyed fishing. It has allowed me to take my mind off the busyness of life. Many of the places I have been fishing are remote or well off the beaten path. There it is peaceful and I'm content – an irreplaceable feeling while being fully immersed in the depths of nature. *This must be like heaven*, I would often think! I would marvel, while standing on a lake's shore or on a mountain, at the sheer beauty of God's creation. And at times in nature, a prayer would come to mind: *Thank You, God, for this beautiful place and all that You have provided.*

Oh, Look at the Bird

Maria Wuollet

Oh, look at the bird on the branch of the tree; its singing is always so lovely. It opens its mouth to thank God Almighty; no cares weigh its mind, it sings freely; in singing it thanks its Creator. (SHZ 341)

The familiar song about the “bird on the branch of the tree” resounds in my head and has a special place in my heart. As I look back, I recollect memories of growing up in Ecuador and my present life in Arizona, and from these I can see how my relationship with nature helps me to feel God’s care in so many aspects along my pathway.

I grew up in Ecuador, a small country in South America – right in the middle of the world and a tropical paradise of biodiversity. I loved the lush green leaves everywhere. And my parents’ colorful flowers in the planters alongside of our house were delightful to smell and admire. Most memorable were the fruits of all kinds that would grow quickly in the tropical climate.

As a family, we often travelled to the highlands where it was cold but so colorful as well. One of my most vivid memories is the road leading to Riobamba, the town where my parents were born and raised. The mountains appear covered in giant quilts of all shades of green, yellow and golden colors. My heart would race in excitement just gazing at that pretty landscape of green fields. Often, my dad and mom would stop on the side of the road to contemplate the beauty of the sight. There they would teach me to identify and name the grains and vegetables growing in each field that covered the high and low mountains.

Sometimes we would travel to Baños, the gateway to the jungle or Amazon entrance. The nature there was breathtaking with many waterfalls and lush vegetation. While listening to the chorus of birds in the rainforest, I heard their beautiful song of thanks to God.

I grew up loving my little country of Ecuador, and I even began to dream of becoming a tour guide and traveling around the country, taking tourists all over to show and teach them about the beauty of our country.

Yet, God knows our lives better than we do, and He had different plans for me. He gifted me a believing husband, who took me to a very different land where I would have never imagined living. I moved to Arizona in November and my life changed.

Newly arrived in Arizona, I looked out the car window and saw lots of reddish-brown land. I asked my husband, "Where are the leaves of the trees?" Here, in this desert climate, most plants had thorns, and, to me, looked dead.

But spring came and nature took on a different look. Yellow flowers started to fill the trees; pink, purple, bright red and white flowers bloomed from cacti along the roads and along the path where we went for walks around the desert. I couldn't stop often enough to capture the beauty in pictures. The towering saguaros amazed me, and while living in Tucson, Arizona, we made many picnic trips with our children to explore the desert and watch the giant cacti bloom in the late spring. The picnics and the walks in the desert were full of bird song, bringing me so much peace. They sounded happy and cheerful, which made me smile. This reminded me that if God takes care of them, He will certainly take care of me.

Time has passed and I have learned to love Arizona's desert beauty. One of the summer highlights is the monsoon storms in the desert. Our family loves to watch those and sometimes we even drive towards the rain cloud in the distant desert. Even at home, after every rain as the sun peeks out I tell the kids to go look outside in the sky for a rainbow. It's lovely!

Arizona feels like home. It amazes me how God placed me in such a different place, yet He offers beauty no matter where we might be. We have traveled around this beautiful country and have witnessed God's hand in nature.

He teaches me that we can put our trust in Him, that He will take care of us each and every day of our lives. As a little girl, the song 341 "Oh, Look at the Bird" spoke to my heart. I thought and thought

about how birds handle things. Still today, how I pray to be like that little bird in the song, without worries about what tomorrow will bring, knowing that He will always be caring for us.

I am fortunate to witness God's creation each day; it reminds of the many blessings of beauty and care He bestows to me wherever I may live. Like a bird, I can put my trust in Him, and having my sins forgiven, I can remain in His precious flock.

Back to Nature

Deanna Byman

When I was a kid I was told to go play outside, just like most other kids back then. I spent hours upon hours outside, playing in the long grass in our field, gazing at the clouds, and just being part of nature. These were formative hours spent forgetting the cares of the day and recharging my zest for life.

Recently, I made a decision and a real effort to be more active in nature and to reclaim that childlike appreciation for the outdoors. My adult life had gotten busy and without even realizing it, my days have been increasingly consumed with work and mundane tasks indoors. I have found myself craving those hours in the fresh air where my mind can wander and process the day's events and my body can move and rejuvenate.

Luckily I live in an area where I have many different opportunities within an hour or two, snowcapped mountains and wooded lakes, endless ocean, dry, beautiful high deserts and moist, thick, cool rainforests. One activity that I really am drawn to is hiking. While hiking I am able to get away from modern conveniences, seeing the land stretched out before my eyes, and the hard effort put into hiking make the whole experience rewarding to me.

As a high schooler I summited Mt. St. Helens. This spring I made a goal to summit the mountain again. In preparation for my goal to climb Mt. St. Helen's, I trained by walking hills around my hometown, hoping to make the climb more enjoyable and less challenging. As the date for the hike got

closer some preparations needed to be made, alarms set early, clothes laid out, lunch or snack packed along with plenty of water and a first aid kit.

The Day of the Hike Finally Arrives

“Beep, Beep,” my alarm goes off. With a little anticipation and excitement, I wake up to a dark, early morning, pull on clothes and hiking shoes, eat a warm bowl of oatmeal, blueberries and almonds and hop in my car to drive to the trailhead. “Good Morning, God’s Peace,” rings clear in the mountain air. With dim light glowing on the edges of the horizon, my companions and I start picking our way up the trail, over logs, steps, roots and hills of rocks. While hiking, one has ample time to think, gazing at nature all around, moss growing on logs, huge piles of rocks, sandy steep hills. I often find myself humming various songs and hymns of Zion. A repeat occurrence is SHZ 524, “I’m amazed at God’s creation, when I see the birds in flight, when the clouds above are passing, when I see a star-filled night.” These words voice my amazement at the world around me and how all of nature was created.

While hiking Mt. St. Helens, I ponder about this trail, how it leads through forest, then rocks, then sand and snow. All these natural elements together make the mountain. From a distance, the mountain looks huge and unattainable, but each obstacle is faced, overcome and the top is reached. I find that whenever my trail is steep, I can pray to overcome each obstacle. If I keep faith, I will sometime reach the distant, beautiful mountain top: heaven.

In the Grand Canyon: A Wilderness Journey

Doug Karvonen

Arizona’s Grand Canyon is a wonder of the natural world. Carved by the Colorado River, this steep canyon runs 277 miles long and 18 miles wide, exposing layered bands of red rock – a stunning sight at any time, but incredible at sunrise and sunset. In November of 2012, I, along with nine other believers

spent three days in the Grand Canyon. We hiked eleven miles down into the canyon, enjoyed a day of rest at the bottom, and then hiked back out of the canyon along a six-mile trail.

Throughout the hike into the canyon, even though our leader had hiked the trail years before, we lost our way. The trail was not frequented and therefore was not well marked. Often, our leaders would realize that they had taken a wrong turn. When that happened, they would call back to us asking if we knew where the trail was. Then we would have to search the trail for our wrong turn. At times we would have to send scouts ahead to see where the true trail was. The actual trail was marked with cairns, rockpiles that have been piled by those who have gone before to mark a trail. When they located these, we knew we were on the right trail. There were numerous times that this happened in this eleven-mile trip.

As the day progressed, my feet and knees became sore and tender. I could not go at the same speed that I had earlier in the hike. Some of my travel partners did not want to leave me behind, for fear that I would lose my way. Others went ahead to find a campsite at the river. Darkness descended on us before we got to the river. For the final distance, we relied on our headlamps to light the way, so we would not stumble and fall.

Similar to our wilderness journey in the canyon, our faith life in God's Kingdom needs the support of our fellow brothers and sisters. They can help us stay on the narrow pathway so that we do not become lost and lose this living faith. In the Grand Canyon, we had times when there was a disagreement about which direction to take when the path diverged. When we disagreed, we would send scouts ahead to find the true way. When the scouts located the cairns, we knew which way we would go. In this way, we were following the way that was already traveled, the old pathway. We today in our life of faith need to follow the old way, and we need escorts on this journey to guide us.

Trav'ling in this wilderness I often sigh, for the clouds of darkness hide my home on high. But when Jesus through His Spirit comforts me, then the dark clouds scatter and, behold, I see. (SHZ 575)

Discussion Questions:

1. Discuss the benefits of spending extended time in nature whether in the garden or in a remote outdoor location.
2. What do we learn from hobbies like gardening, animal care or bird-watching?
3. What does God's Word say about caring for the environment?
4. How has science helped us care for the environment in the past?
5. Discuss the perspectives of faith vs. science. Are these perspectives in opposition?