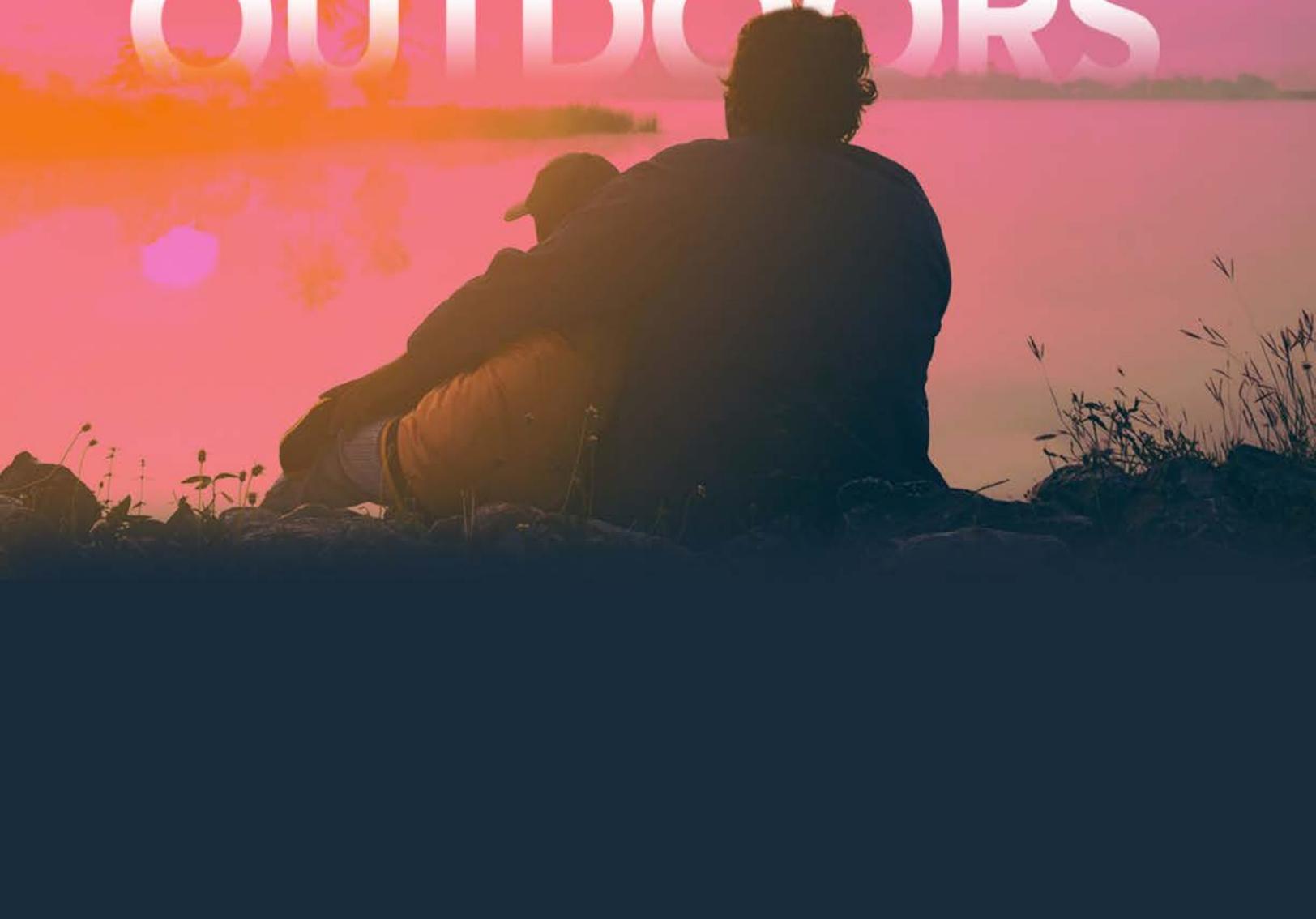


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CHURCH OUTDOORS



CHURCH OUTDOORS PRAYER AND SCRIPTURE REFLECTION IN NATURE

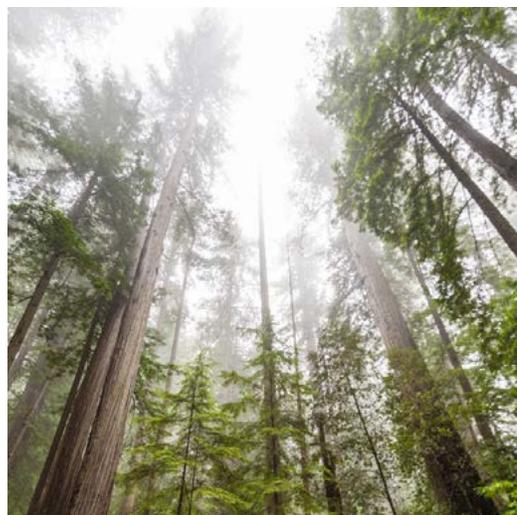
Meditating on Scripture while immersed in God's Creation is a powerful combination! Try some of these ideas to guide this spiritual practice. Don't try to do them all in one day, just pick one or two! You want your nature retreat to be restful and prayerful, not rushed and productive! You may want to bring a journal, camera or Bible with you.

TAKE IT ALL IN

Find a peaceful and quiet place where you can see sky, plants and water. Review the past week with a focus on gratitude, identifying where God was working and creating change in your life.

Exodus 2:8-11: Remember the Sabbath day and treat it as holy (special, set-apart). . . Because the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and everything that is in them in six days, but rested on the seventh day. That is why the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

The Sabbath marks the weekly anniversary of creation. Through prayer we can rest, reflect and redirect our focus toward God, as we seek to reclaim the promise of balance and renewal at the end of another weekly cycle. Thank God for the work of His creation and what is being worked out in your life. Talk to Him about what the different spaces: earth, sea, sky, and all the things they house, might represent in your daily schedule. If you need to, repent and confess of the disconnection or distraction you experienced this week.



TAKE A WALK!

Some of us think and pray better when we are moving. Walking in nature removes us from the human-built structures and reconnects us to the fingerprints of God seen in the elements He created. Start out with a short prayer before you take your first step – inviting God to speak to you as you move, focusing your mind and your spirit on a special time with God, listening as your feet move. Contemplate the wisdom of this proverb: “Seek Him in all you do, and He will direct your steps” Prov 3:6. Is there a decision weighing on your mind? Imagine yourself walking alongside Jesus. Pray about what path you’re to take.

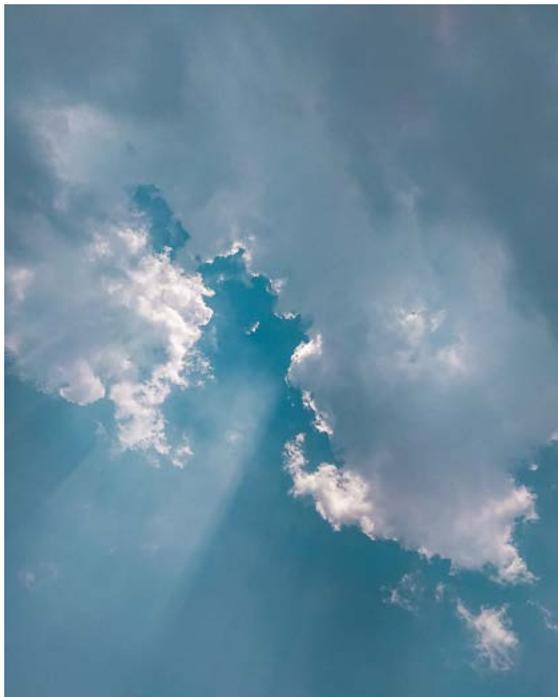
Read Psalm 16 and let it inspire you: “I have set the Lord before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. ... You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand” (verses 8-11). What is Jesus saying to you on your path and how you’re travelling it?



TREE TIME

Sit near a tree as you meditate on Psalm 1. Reflect on what you fill your mind with as you go about your daily life. Perhaps there’s some clutter in your head (e.g., worries, gossip, wishing things were different in your life, self-criticisms, angry conversations, lustful thoughts, lists of things you need to do, diversions). Pray that you’d be like the Psalm 1 person who delights continually in God’s law and his Word and so you can easily and naturally bear much fruit. What is the Lord saying to you through the tree? What

is your source of life-giving water? How deep are your roots and what fruit are you producing? At the base of huge tree like a cedar or palm, read Psalm 92. This is a poem designated “for the Sabbath.” Are you getting enough Sabbath time? If not, why not? In your life today what would it look like for you to flourish in the courts of the Lord? Let verses 12-14 inspire a prayer that you would flourish and grow as you spend time in God’s presence. Express your commitment to remain connected to Him well and serve Him with every year He grants you.



SKY HIGH

Read Psalm 19 then lay back and look up at the sky as you contemplate God's personal message of love for you! "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech... In the heavens he has pitched a tent for the sun, which is like a bridegroom coming forth from his pavilion, like a champion rejoicing to run his course" (verses 1-2, 4-5).

How is Jesus like the sun to you? Your Bridegroom who pursues you in love? Your Champion who sets the way and pace for your life's race? What else do you notice about the sky?

GO WITH THE FLOW

Pray by a flowing river, creek or stream. Perhaps you've been busy or dry lately. Let the sound of the babbling brook speak to your soul. Listen to the Spirit's message in the splashing waters. Do you notice its rhythm? How does it compare or contrast to the current rhythm of your life?

Ask God to use the moving water to help you to meditate on Psalm 36, which includes these words: "You give [us] drink from your river of delights. For with you is the fountain of life (verses 8-9).

What can this fountain of water teach you about where you're at in your relationship with God today? In what ways do you need Christ to be a fountain of life for you?



THE SOLID ROCK

Find a rock – a large one to sit on (or near) or a small one to hold. In his desert trials David often found shelter, safety, rest, and prayer in a cave in the rocks.

Perhaps in some area you're feeling unsure or unstable, anxious and fearful. Open your heart to God and tell him just how you feel. Use the rock to contemplate the message of Psalm 62. Pray these words would be true of you: "My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation" (verses 1-2). Did you have a hope for security that has been dashed recently? How do you need Jesus to be your Rock of refuge today?



BIRDSONG

Look and listen for the birds. Notice the tune and tone of their song! Let the birds lead you to give thanks and praise to God. Try to join this heavenly choir as you whistle along with their calls.

Zephaniah 3:17 tells us God sang His love song over you first! Meditate on the birds and on Psalm 104. Find the verses that mention the birds and add your own observations. "The birds of the air nest by the waters; they sing among the branches... When you open your hand, they are satisfied with good things... When you send your Spirit, they are created,." Have you been appreciating God's goodness and care?

Right now is a good time to smile, sing, and give thanks to God!



CONCLUDE BY CREATING!

If you brought your journal sketch some imagery or draft a poem. If you come across a sandy patch, use a stick to draw or write the words and images that come to mind as you pray. If you there are loose rocks, try stacking them while you ask God to show you how to find a healthy balance for your life.

If you are walking where you can pick the wildflowers, collect a few and make a simple bouquet. Arrange stones, twigs and plant parts, using their shape and colour to create a picture on a flat surface. Whatever you create, use it as a starting point for future prayer and reflection, or you may want to snap a photo and share it with someone who needs something beautiful to remind them how much God loves them.

HAPPY SABBATH