

God's Beautiful Earth

Observation tips — ideas to help you notice and nurture wonder

When we observe the delicate structure of a flower, marvel at the magnificent canopy of an old tree, or experience the beauty in a sunset, we are reminded that God is present and that the Creator of heaven and earth is worthy of our praise (see Psalm 104).

The more observant we become regarding the natural environment, the more deeply we can experience God's presence around us. Slowing down and paying greater attention to our natural surroundings is fundamental to noticing and nurturing the wonder that inhabits the earth. What do we mean by that? We can *sense* God's hand in his creation; Romans 1:20 reads "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...."

By intentionally paying attention to and reflecting on the qualities that God, the Creator, imbued in living and non-living material, we can discover something of God himself, something that may be new to our experience, something awesomely mysterious, something 'wonder-full'. As we learn to be more observant about the incredible natural world around us, and to be more thankful to God for all of its diversity, we can take our observations in more deeply, and use our insights in our worship and prayer. We might also be challenged to think about our role in stewarding nature (God's creation).

The tips on basic observation that follow are meant as background information for the weekly 'nature practices' that will be presented each week in the Enews. Use them if they work for you, and feel free to adapt them to your circumstances.

"The material world is the place where we can comfortably worship God just by walking on it, loving it, and respecting it. Everything visible, without exception, is the outpouring of God."

Richard Rohr's Daily Meditation, June 26/20

Basic observation: sit and stay; watch and record

Whether you sit on the bank of a river, up on a tree branch, on a rock overlooking the ocean, or on a bench in your backyard — a 'sit spot' is the most basic way to observe nature. Observing nature is as simple as sitting in a natural setting for 25-30 minutes without doing anything (just relax, sit quietly and enjoy nature with all your senses). The first ten minutes probably will pass quite easily as you watch, listen, and pay deliberate attention to the natural elements around you.

During the next ten minutes your mind may well wander and your body may feel restless, but if you can get past those distractions and remain in your sit spot for the rest of the time, you may be amazed by what is revealed to you in this deeper state of focus and observation.

Afterwards, you can describe or sketch your observations (a 'nature journal' is a good idea). Staying silent during your observing and journaling is a key to keeping your brain focused and engaged. If you visit the same spot over many different conditions and times of day and seasons, and record your observations each time, you'll be able to see differences and track the changes over time in both the site and your perceptions of it.

To begin your nature journal you can start with jotting down the location, date, time, weather, maybe the moon phase, and perhaps the time of sunrise and sunset. Then record what you actually saw: the feather you picked up, or an interesting leaf, or the ducks that landed on the river. You might sketch (or photograph) the ducks; can you identify the species? And you can ask yourself some questions: how are the ducks behaving? why are they all facing the same way?

Don't feel pressured to begin recording everything all at once. You can start by looking at the different colours, shapes and patterns in nature, at the way clouds move and form. Listen to sounds, of the birds, of the breeze in the trees, of the running river. Become aware of odours; the scent of the earth in spring, of various flowers and shrubs, the air before or after a storm. Then you might pick one thing that attracted you and write something about it (a description, an observation, a question, a poem, your feelings about it). You could augment your journal with artwork, or music, or in any other way you feel led. Your journal is not just an intellectual exercise, or an emotional outlet, it is both! Over time, it also might help inspire your worship.