

Nature as a Source of Health



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 1:27–2:25; Genesis 3; Jer. 10:12, 13; Ps. 19:1–7; Matt. 6:25–34; Psalm 104.*

Memory Text: “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, NIV*).

God created Adam and Eve in His own image. What could be a more perfect inheritance? He then placed them in the Garden of Eden. What could be a more perfect setting? Both heredity and environment, then, were divinely balanced to produce and preserve perfect mental and physical health.

Sin, however, ruined everything—and by the second generation jealousy, hatred, and violence contaminated the world. The natural environment also underwent the initial results of sin, and when sin became intolerable, the Flood changed forever the portrait of the earth.

Yet, much goodness and beauty remain in the natural world. Nature still supplies sufficient resources to satisfy our basic needs. Nature also can provide joy, happiness, and well-being to compensate partially for the misery caused by sin.

Thus, despite its sometimes violent and deadly convulsions, nature can be a source of mental and physical health. It also can become a means for us to draw ever closer to the Creator, the fount of all goodness: “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights” (*James 1:17*).

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 19.*

A Perfect Environment

Today, living as we do in a world tainted and corrupted by sin, we can only imagine what it must have been like for our first parents in Eden. No sin, no suffering, no death—nothing to bring them the kind of sorrows and pain that we all know so well. In a sense, we’re so used to these realities, they’re so common, that we forget that they all are intruders, things that were not in the original creation, things that were never meant to be, things that we are promised will one day be forever gone.

Read Genesis 1:27–2:25. What picture is presented about what life and the environment were like in Eden? How different is it from what we know today?

The newly created couple was placed in a garden that God Himself had planted (*Gen. 2:8*). Although the biblical account is brief, imagine when we consider the wonderful bounties nature provides for us today, the luxurious mix of produce that must have come from this, the first garden. Their senses were exposed to sights, sounds, tastes, feelings, and aromas that certainly brought much satisfaction and well-being to our first parents. It truly was Paradise.

There is no doubt that the environment was the best to suit the newly created humans. Their physical, emotional, and mental needs were more than met. Mental states such as uncertainty, anxiety, and worry were completely unknown, because there was nothing there to cause them.

“The Creator chose for our first parents the surroundings best adapted for their health and happiness. He did not place them in a palace or surround them with the artificial adornments and luxuries that so many today are struggling to obtain. . . . In the garden that God prepared as a home for His children, graceful shrubs and delicate flowers greeted the eye at every turn. There were trees of every variety, many of them laden with fragrant and delicious fruit. On their branches the birds caroled their songs of praise. Under their shadow the creatures of the earth sported together without a fear.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 261.

Try to envision what Eden must have been like. Think of the sights, the smells, the tastes, everything designed to appeal to our senses. What should that tell us about how, in principle, our physical bodies are good and were made for us to enjoy?

Sin and Nature

Whatever wonder and beauty we can find in nature, it's today a double-edged sword. Beauty and marvel are there, but so are famine, earthquakes, pestilence, and disease. Something has gone terribly wrong.

Read over Genesis 3, the Fall. What immediate changes came to both humans and nature as a result of sin?

Sin brought immediate physical and spiritual consequences to human life. Nature, too, suffered the effects of sin. Sin caused devastating effects upon creation in at least three ways:

- The ground was cursed (*Gen. 3:17*). After departing from the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve encountered immediate obstacles in working the soil. The ground began to produce undesirable thorns and thistles. Pests, most probably, got in the way of healthy growth too. Things got worse after the devastation of the Flood.
- Human beings experienced significant changes. Fatigue and pain became a reality. The relationship between the man and the woman changed. The chapter seems to imply that Eve would have originally not had pain in childbirth. The relationship of Adam to the earth had changed, as well, and work now was going to be much more difficult than it would have been before. We do not know how the awareness of their own impending deaths affected the first couple, but it must have changed their outlook on life completely.
- Sin affected human and animal behavior. Hatred, jealousy, selfishness, arrogance, etc., caused aggression against fellow humans and animals. Other unknown ways of damaging the environment (perhaps comparable to what we are witnessing today) may have taken place. Animals started to kill each other for food and for power. As described in Genesis 3–6, corruption and violence escalated to the point that God was grieved for having made all creatures (*Gen. 6:5–7*).

The true extent of all these transformations is not revealed to us, but we can assume that profound changes took place. Yet, God, in His infinite mercy, preserved a great deal of the magnificent original creation for the benefit of human beings.

Look around at the wonders of nature wherever you are. What echoes of the original creation seem to remain? What hope can you draw from those echoes that point you to the promises of a better world?

God's Gifts Through Nature

The natural world presents a powerful testimony to not only the existence of God but also His power. Sadly, as Paul warned, humans (no doubt inspired by Satan) turned away from the living God and worshiped the creation instead of its Creator (*see Rom. 1:19–25*).

Read Jeremiah 10:12, 13. What picture is presented here of God's creative power and His present involvement in natural phenomena? What can we learn about the character of God through His created works?

Of course, as we all know, nature sometimes turns against us, spreading horror through earthquakes, volcanoes, floods, etc. Why these tragedies happen when and where they do are questions that we don't have answers for now. What we do know, however, is that the first few chapters in the book of Job reveal the reality of the great controversy between God and Satan and that Satan can use the forces of nature for evil purposes. And despite these terrible calamities, the goodness of God still can be seen in the natural world.

Read Psalm 19:1–6, and then in your own words paraphrase its basic message.

Nature traditionally has been seen by Seventh-day Adventists as God's second book. Observation and study of the natural world, if done in humility and openness to the influence of the Holy Spirit, will deepen faith and trust in God. It also will provide additional understanding into God's love for His creatures. This can be a great source of mental and spiritual comfort. Sometimes, when all else fails, the beauty of nature, and what it testifies to us about God, can be a source of great comfort and hope.

If while you are witnessing to someone about God's goodness (especially as revealed in nature) the person brings up the question of tsunamis, earthquakes, famines, and the like, how would you respond? What does the reality of these natural disasters tell us about the limits of what nature can teach us about God?

Communion With God in Nature

“ ‘Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin’ ” (*Matt. 6:28*).

A young man, an atheist his whole life, was converted in his early twenties. Right after his new birth, he lived for a number of months in a country setting, and he would often wander in the woods, marveling at the wonders of the God who had created such beauty. Of course, he had seen wonderful things in the natural world before, but only now was he able to see the character of the Lord who had created it all. It was, he said, “as if my eyes were opened for the first time in my whole life!” It was during that time that this new Christian came to truly know the Lord.

Read Matthew 6:25–34. What is Jesus telling us that we can learn from studying nature?

No question, we indeed can learn many valuable spiritual lessons from the study of the created world. But nature can work to our advantage spiritually in another way, as well. Luke 5:16 says that Jesus “withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed,” something that Ellen White said Jesus did often. Sometimes we, too, need to get away from everything and just be alone with the Lord in a natural environment. The beauty, the comfort, the peace, the serenity that one often finds in the natural world can speak to our hearts and minds in ways that nothing else does. There might not be any sudden revelation of new truth; there might be no new insights on a doctrine or a text. What there can be, instead, is an unspoken recognition of the love and power of the One who created all this. However we might individually experience the Lord this way, there’s no question that time alone in nature, in communion with God, can bring healing and peace to our bodies and souls.

“All who are under the training of God need the quiet hour for communion with their own hearts, with nature, and with God. In them is to be revealed a life that is not in harmony with the world, its customs, or its practices; and they need to have a personal experience in obtaining a knowledge of the will of God. We must individually hear Him speaking to the heart. When every other voice is hushed, and in quietness we wait before Him, the silence of the soul makes more distinct the voice of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 58.

When was the last time you communed with the Lord in nature? If possible, make an effort to do just that. You might be surprised at what a positive spiritual effect it will have.

Psalm 104

In the nineteenth century, a popular belief known as deism stated that God had created the world but then left it alone. In other words, according to this position, God exists but doesn't want to get involved.

That view, however, is not what the Bible teaches. God didn't just set the world like a wind-up watch and then let it go, come what may. According to the Bible, He's intricately involved in all that happens here. After all, what is the Cross if not God intimately and directly involved in human affairs?

Read Psalm 104 prayerfully. What does it tell us about the role of God in creation and in the natural world?

Perhaps the most telling thing about Psalm 104 is the enthusiasm and excitement that exude from the words themselves. The psalmist rejoices in the creative and sustaining power of the Lord. You almost can hear him shouting out these words in praise and adoration. He sees the reality of God in the everyday function of the natural world.

The God presented in this psalm is not the god of the deists either. He's a God who is involved in what happens here. No doubt, whatever the psalmist's personal troubles, he finds comfort and hope in the power of the Lord. Sure, contemplating the birds in their nests or the lions seeking their food isn't going to solve whatever daily struggles he's facing, but he can see in nature things that speak to him of God's goodness and power, and that gives him hope.

Nature also can be a source of healing to the body, mind, and spirit. In many cases fresh air, sunlight, water, and a healthy diet can do wonders for us both physically and mentally. Natural remedies remain a powerful means of health and healing.

Some doctors, too, often will tell people to get away from work and stress and find rest and relaxation in a natural setting somewhere. Some research shows just how good nature and a natural environment can be for us physically and mentally. After all, God put our first parents in a garden, not in a city square. Something in us resonates better with a field of lilies than it does with an asphalt parking lot.

Nature is one of God's great gifts. We should do all that we can to take advantage of it. What are ways you can benefit better from what God has given us in nature?

Further Study: “The home of our first parents was to be a pattern for other homes as their children should go forth to occupy the earth. That home, beautified by the hand of God Himself, was not a gorgeous palace. Men, in their pride, delight in magnificent and costly edifices and glory in the works of their own hands; but God placed Adam in a garden. This was his dwelling. The blue heavens were its dome; the earth, with its delicate flowers and carpet of living green, was its floor; and the leafy branches of the goodly trees were its canopy. Its walls were hung with the most magnificent adornings—the handiwork of the great Master Artist. In the surroundings of the holy pair was a lesson for all time—that true happiness is found, not in the indulgence of pride and luxury, but in communion with God through His created works. If men would give less attention to the artificial, and would cultivate greater simplicity, they would come far nearer to answering the purpose of God in their creation.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 49, 50.

“The constant contact with the mystery of life and the loveliness of nature, as well as the tenderness called forth in ministering to these beautiful objects of God’s creation, tends to quicken the mind and refine and elevate the character.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 143.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ How can we make sure that we don’t cross the line from being a lover of nature to a worshiper of it? How might that not always be an easy distinction to draw? However wonderful nature is, we always must remember that in the end it can’t save us. Only the God who created nature can. Why is it important to always keep that crucial truth in mind?
- ❷ What should we as Seventh-day Adventists have to say in regard to the whole question of the environment? What, if anything in our teaching, could be a helpful and needed component in this important question? At the same time, how should we respond to the following idea: “Well, we know the Lord is coming soon, and this whole world will be destroyed and then made over, so is the environment really that important?”
- ❸ In what ways today should all the incredible advancements in scientific and natural knowledge help increase our love of and appreciation for the power of God? Think of all the things we know about the natural world today that the ancients had no inkling of. Thus, in what ways do we have so many more advantages than they ever did in regard to be able to marvel at the creative power of the Lord?

The Lighthouse in the Darkness

by FRANCIS AHISSON

The delegates from a Protestant church walked out of the Seventh-day Adventist mission office in Benin, West Africa, talking excitedly. They had come to ask the Adventist officials to teach them the Bible, and the mission president agreed to teach them.

On the appointed day many came to hear the Adventist pastor teach them about God. Following the meetings, a congregation was established and a temporary chapel was built to house the worshipers until a more permanent building could be erected.

The church's membership grew to some 60 people as the congregation struggled against the powers of Satan and voodoo worship, which dominates the people of this region. Most of the church members earn a living by fishing or doing unskilled labor, so they don't earn much money. They sacrifice to buy cement blocks for the day when they can build their church.

One woman in the church became seriously ill, and local doctors couldn't help her. Her husband took her to a large city hospital where doctors said she had a tumor and needed surgery. But her husband didn't have the money for the surgery, so he took his wife home, fearful that she would die. He did the only thing he knew to do: he called the church leaders to pray for her.

That night the woman awoke and saw an angel in her room. The angel touched her and said, "God has sent me to heal you." The woman awoke, wondering at her dream. Then she heard a voice tell her, "Stand up and walk." She hadn't been able to stand or walk for several weeks, but she stood and took several steps.

The next day the doctor couldn't find the tumor. He called his colleagues to examine her, and they too could find nothing wrong with her. "Your tumor is gone," he said. The woman told him about the angel's visit.

News spread through the village that the woman had been healed. The church members rejoiced with her. Her healing has increased the faith of many people in her church and throughout the town. Many people visited the church, wanting to see what kind of church is powerful enough to heal people. And the members gladly gave God the credit for this healing.

Your mission offerings will help this little church in Benin shine the light of God across a country saturated with the darkness of voodoo and witchcraft.

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