

Sacred Spaces: Nature-based Devotionals by Mark Burrows

As I'm currently writing this, we are in our sixth month of the COVID-19 global pandemic. A pandemic is not a good thing. It's just not. And it doesn't make your faith weak to not see it as "a blessing." And yet...

As children of God we have a sacred ability to hear whispers of blessing and find moments of meaning, even in the hardest times. One of the unforeseen side effects of our shelter-in-place/safer-at-home time is how people have been connecting more with nature. I hear from so many families who say that what is bringing them peace and comfort right now is a walk in the park, a family bike ride, a picnic in the yard, the simple joy of being outdoors! In a time when we're forced to spend so much time interacting *virtually*, reconnecting with nature reminds us all that **WE ARE REAL**.

Included in this collection are **14 Simple Devotions**, each based around a treasure of nature. Here's what you will need for each person:

- Acorn
- Candle (a single candle will suffice for the whole family/group)
- Driftwood
- Feather
- Leaf
- Magnifying glass/Thumbprint
- Myrrh
- Natural sponge
- Pinecone
- Sand dollar
- Sea glass
- Seashell
- Stone
- Vial (for collecting dirt)
- Wood disc

You may need to purchase one or more of these items from an online craft store, especially the feathers, which you will want to be clean. Other items will be fun to look for around the yard or while out on a walk.

Also included in *Sacred Spaces* are **Three Prayer Experiences** to share together:

- A Hug Prayer
- A Human Prayer
- A Prayer Walk

Experiencing the Devotions

Each devotional time works the same way. Most will take 3-5 minutes.
This is slow time, breathable time. No need to rush.

To start, hand your child one Treasures of Nature object.
Before you say anything, encourage the children to simply hold each object... examine it.
What does it look like? What does it feel like? Does it feel the way you expected?
Remind the children to handle each object gently and carefully.

Next, read the short devotion and Bible passage for that particular Treasure of Nature.

Afterwards, allow a few moments of quiet reflection while your child holds the object in wonder.

Finally, close with a short echo prayer. Then invite your child to put their Treasure of Nature in a special place – a bedside table, windowsill, or even in a Treasures of Nature box or jar they can make and decorate.

Creating Your Sacred Space

When I ask children and families what they love the most about their faith community, the number one thing they cherish is people – their friends, their teachers, their choir directors – their *church family*.

Something else they truly value is the *place* where we all gather together. We know God is with us everywhere. And yet our places of worship are special. They are sacred spaces – set apart for a special purpose. Great care is taken (through art, architecture, lighting, symbolism, music, and more) to curate an environment where we can feel genuinely close to God.

Consider creating a special sacred space in your home (or wherever you may be) to share the Treasures of Nature devotions. A place that's *set apart*. It could be:

- a corner of a room
- tucked under a table
- a place near a window that overlooks nature (though preferably not a window that overlooks a noisy, highly-trafficked street)
- an outdoor sacred space

You might mark this space with a big blanket where your family sits together. You could also keep a children's Bible nearby.

Other optional items used in your sacred space might include:

- A nature item (stone, plant, etc.) to represent God the Creator.
- A cross to represent God the Son. (A simple cross can be made from sticks fastened with yarn.)
- An LED (or wax) candle to represent God the Holy Spirit.

A more playful option, though no less prayerful, could be to use a very large, overturned cardboard box. The "ceiling" of the box could be decorated with different Bible stories, *a la* the Sistine Chapel.

Your sacred space can be a place where you always go for family prayers, to explore new Bible stories, or where individuals can go for some "alone time" with God. (Jesus did that a LOT.)



Stone

Hand your child the stone.

Hold the stone in your hand. Notice how solid it is. There will be times in our lives when we are scared, or sad, or nervous. That's okay. God put all those feelings in us, and we get to feel them all. And it's important to remember that no matter what we're going through, God's love is solid. God is with us every step of the way.

Listen to this passage from Psalm 18, verses 1-2:

"I love you, O LORD, my strength.
The LORD is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer,
my God, my rock in whom I take refuge,
my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold."

Now let's sit in silence. Hold the stone and feel how solid God's love is.

After a few moments of silence, pray:

Loving God,
Your love is solid.
We know that you are constant.
You will never leave us.
Amen.

The stone can now go in the box or another special place.



Prayer Walk

All you need is some sidewalk chalk, some sidewalk or driveway space, and a little imagination. You can even use a stick or branch to sketch designs into dirt or sand.

Start by drawing the path. This can be as simple as one long line, or two parallel lines that mimic a path to walk along. The path can be straight or winding, short or long. It's all up to you.

Along the path you can write names of people, or pets, you'd like to pray for. You can draw pictures of sacred symbols, such as a cross, rainbow, dove, star, etc. You can draw pictures or write names of things that worry you. You can pray *Thank You* prayers, *Help* prayers, and *Wow* prayers. You can add to your prayer walk each day. And if the rain comes and washes away your prayer walk, start a new one!

Spend as much time on your prayer walk as you'd like. And don't forget that creating the prayer walk is only part of the experience. Make sure to set aside time to actually walk the prayer walk, to talk to God, and to listen to what God has to say.

