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## Session: Nature as Sacred Space

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### Description

Poet Wendell Barry wrote, “To go in the dark with a light is to know the light...”. My family lives in a remote area of Washington State. During winter storms we often lose power, so I bought a powerful flashlight. One night, there was a thunder and lightning storm and my husband was at work. It was evening, pitch black outside and our power went out. I grabbed my flashlight, turned it on and nothing happened. I realized that the batteries were dead, and I hadn’t taken the time to replace them.

We can have the brightest flashlight in the world, but if the batteries are depleted it can’t shine. The same is true for us. I can’t be a good parent, friend, workmate nor can I offer someone a cool glass of water on a hot summer day if that cup is empty. We need to take the time to fill our own cup. This can happen by spending time with God in prayer or meditation. We sometimes have rigid ideas about what this must look like - head bowed, eyes closed, maybe on our knees. But really, prayer and meditation are simply about spending time with God. I often do this while walking in the woods or kayaking.

Sometimes our souls can become troubled or distracted. This can impact our health, our happiness, even our sleep, which can be disrupted by worry or unforgiveness because we don’t deal with it during the day.

Author Eugene Peterson says, “The self is the soul minus God”. Without spending time connected to God we can become untethered in a way. Spending time in prayer and meditation can re-tether us, which can provide a sort of navigational system. Our theology shouldn’t be separated from our spirituality. In other words, our faith shouldn’t be purely academic. What we believe, and what we do should align. This life-long practice of seeking God takes discipline and intentionality.

Spending time experiencing nature, art, architecture, music can be one way to foster a spirit of mindfulness and help us become attentive to the ways in which God is present in the world.

In this session you are going outside. First you will learn about one type of prayer called Contemplative Prayer. Then you will experiment with it and share your experience with your family.

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### Materials Needed

No materials needed for this session

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### Handouts

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## What are our family's core values?

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### Read aloud the quote or scripture

"Give yourself a gift of five minutes of contemplation in awe of everything you see around you. Go outside and turn your attention to the many miracles around you. This five-minute-a-day regimen of appreciation and gratitude will help you to focus your life in awe." *Wayne Dyer*

### Questions for discussion (10 minutes)

1. Do you think there are still miracles today? Are there miracles in nature? Explain.
2. Have you ever felt God was trying to tell you something? Explain. Did you respond?
3. Do you think God wants to spend time with you? Why or why not?
4. What does it mean to you to "spend time with God"?
5. Have you ever asked God for anything specifically? What happened? How did you feel?

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### Rule of life activity

Prayer and meditation—nature as sacred space

1. Contemplation is meditation (or prayer) where we focus our awareness on something specific. You might find yourself curious about how it came to be, why it's there or how it works.
2. Today your family is going to go outside for a quiet walk or to simply sit outdoors without talking for 15 -20 minutes.
3. As you do this, see if something captures your attention. Is there anything you see that makes you curious about God or how it came to be?
4. Allow your mind to wonder about it. Give yourself time and space to examine it. As you do this, allow your mind to let God lead your thoughts.
5. Don't rush.
6. Even if you don't feel the Spirit of God, the process of stopping to mindfully experience nature can be healing.
7. Now sit together as a family either outside or back in the house.
8. One at a time, describe the thing that you contemplated and whether it reminded you of God. What did you notice about it? Did you feel God's presence as you wondered about it?

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## Examen

How did it go? Debrief highs and lows

1. Each person shares their favorite part of the conversation / activity and why.
  2. Each person shares their least favorite part and why
  3. Did you do a Serving/Giving activity last week? How did it go?
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Serving /giving ideas for any time this week: Choose one or create your own. These can be done individually or as a group. You will be sharing your serving experience in the next session.

- Offer to do yardwork for a neighbor.
- Offer to do someone in your family's chores.
- Find a smooth rock, paint a beautiful design on it and place it in someone's garden.
- Pick, or purchase flowers and leave them on a bench at a bus stop with a nice note.
- Chop and deliver firewood to someone who uses wood as their heat source.