

BEING MINDFUL OF GOD'S PRESENCE

How Nature Can Remind Us of God's Presence

We make our beginning in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.
Dear Lord God, Sanctify us in Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (John 17:17)

Because it's now summertime and we're frequently outdoors, we're going to look at nature from a Biblical viewpoint to see how nature can remind us of God's presence. Being more mindful of God's presence can help us draw near to Him in prayer. Our heavenly Father is constantly mindful of us as His dear children and nature can remind us to be more mindful of Him.

Our desire to talk with God is the result of God's great desire to talk with us. Our desire to pray is one of God's gifts to us. Whenever we feel the urge to pray, that feeling is a response to God who is at work in our heart and in our mind. It's the Holy Spirit who triggers our desire to pray to our Heavenly Father who loves us dearly. We can pray about big things, we can pray about small things, because God cares about all things in our life.

God urges us in **1 Thessalonians 5:17-18** to "pray without ceasing" and to "give thanks in all circumstances". Ongoing prayer, praise and thanksgiving is God's good and gracious will for us. To be in close communion with God, we must be mindful of His constant presence with us.

Speaking of nature, let's start at the top. Let's take a look at the stars in the universe. How many of you have ever been camping, far away from all the bright city lights? Were you awed by the beauty and the multitude of stars that can be seen in the blackness of the night?

We know the stars are God's handiwork. **Genesis 1:16-19** "And God made the two great lights - the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night - and the stars. ¹⁷ And God set them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, ¹⁸ to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. ¹⁹ And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day."

On the fourth day, God created the sun, moon and stars. Notice the phrase 'the expanse of the heavens'. It doesn't say God placed the stars 'in the heavens' it says God placed the sun, the moon and the stars in the 'expanse of the heavens'. Look closely at the picture of the Milky Way. An arrow is pointing to our earth's position in the Milky Way. But in this picture, the 'earth' is so small, it can't even be seen clearly. The arrow is pointing to our entire solar system - our earth, our sun, our moon, and the planets of Jupiter, Mars, Pluto, Neptune, and all the rest. (And each one of us is an even tinier speck on the earth.)

The constellation of Ursa Major, also known as The Great Bear, is approximately 500 million light-years away from our earth. There are single galaxies which are thousands of light years in size. The 'expanse' of the heavens and the number of stars is absolutely unimaginable. The heavens stretch out to infinity, giving us a picture of God's eternity which has no beginning and no end.

Psalm 19:1 The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.

Psalm 103:11-12 For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; ¹² as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.

The expanse of the heavens declares to us how vast and great and everlasting and eternal and forever God's love is for us. East actually can meet West when you just go around the earth's sphere, but when God removes our sin from us as far as the East is from the West, remember that 'outer space East' has no end and 'outer space West' has no end, they can never meet. Our sin is truly forgotten for all eternity. Our sin can never be recovered or brought back into God's mind. **Jeremiah 31:34** For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

Joni Eareckson Tada wrote, "Astronomers are convinced there are more stars in the universe than there are grains of sand on the beaches of the world." Who has been to a beach and tried to count the grains of sand on that beach? Who thinks each grain of sand has value? Compared to the vastness of the universe, each of us is but a speck, a grain of sand. Yet God sees each one of us as extremely valuable, extremely special, and extremely important.

Psalm 8:3-9 When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, ⁴ what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? ⁵ Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. ⁶ You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet, ⁷ all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, ⁸ the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas. ⁹ O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Verse 4 asks the question 'what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?' Verse 5 answers that question by stating how valuable we are to Him: God made mankind a little lower than the heavenly beings (the angels) and crowned him with glory and honor. Verse 6 says God gave mankind dominion over all that He had created. It's been said that mankind is the crown of God's creation.

Here's another passage that uses things in nature to illustrate how very much God values us. **Matthew 6:25-34** Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷ And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? ²⁸ And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹ yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ³⁰ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? ³¹ Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ³² For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. ³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. ³⁴ Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

In these verses, what does nature reveal about God's love for us?

v 26 Birds - God the Father feeds them and provides for them.

v 28-29 Lilies - God clothes them with glorious beauty, showing God's provision and loving care.

v 30 Grass - It's here today, but mowed down tomorrow. Will He not much more provide for your every need?

v 32 We learn that our heavenly Father knows all our needs.

v 33 Seek Him first, give Him first priority. He has promised to provide all our needs.

Especially when he was younger, one of our sons liked Star Wars and outer space. For a recent birthday, we gave him the book [The Heavens Proclaim His Glory](#). It has pictures of stars and galaxies that were taken by the Hubble telescope in outer space. Here's a quote from that book: "I imagine God looking through the artistry of His heavens to this little ball called earth, zooming in and focusing in on my heart. As the vast universe rotates around Him, He has the grace and love to care what happens to me." (Terri Blackstock)

And another quote: "One thing I realize each time I look upon a sunset, is that we are just grains of sand in a massive universe. But yet He knows the hairs on our head." (Austin Gutwein)

Stars reveal another aspect of God. **Genesis 22:17** shows us a promise that God made to Abraham. "I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore."

Deuteronomy 10:22 shows us a promise that God kept. "Your fathers went down to Egypt seventy persons, and now the LORD your God has made you as numerous as the stars of heaven." These two verses remind us that the stars reveal God's faithfulness. The stars in the vast expanse of the heavens remind us that we can always depend on and trust His promises.

The stars reveal even more of God's nature, love, and care. **Psalms 147:4** "He determines the number of the stars; He gives to all of them their names." The stars in space cannot be counted but God knows their exact number. He even knows each star by name. Now put God's knowledge and care about the stars on a personal level. How many people are on the earth now? How many people have lived since God created Adam and Eve? God knows the exact number of all the people who have ever been conceived. He knows each person by name; He knows each one of us by name; He knows your name; He knows my name; He knows you.

Luke 12:7 "Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows." Since God cares about the number of hairs on your head, including eyelashes and eyebrows, how much more does He know and care about your heart, your needs, and everything in your life. Our heavenly Father provides for the birds in the air. How much more does He care for us, for you! He will faithfully provide for all our needs as well.

Here's another promise made and a promise kept which involves stars. **Numbers 24:17** "I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near: a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel; it shall crush the forehead of Moab and break down all the sons of Sheth." (Balaam pronounced a blessing, rather than a curse, upon the nation of Israel as had been requested by Balak, king of Moab - a star shall come from Jacob and crush their enemies.)

Revelation 22:16 "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright Morning Star." The prophecy in Numbers was initially fulfilled in King David who saved the nation of Israel from their enemies, but it was ultimately fulfilled in Jesus. Jesus is the bright Morning Star who brought victory over the enemies of His people, victory over sin, death, and the devil.

Here's one more verse where stars reveal the nature of God, making us mindful of His presence. **Matthew 2:1-2** "Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, 'Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.'" This most significant special star reminds us of the birth of Jesus, our Savior from sin.

Coming down out of the stars, our heads are now in the clouds.

We see in **Nahum 1:3** that “the clouds are the dust of his feet.” When you look at the clouds in the sky, remember that God is very close, watching over you. He is Emmanuel – God with us.

Psalm 108:4 “Your steadfast love is great above the heavens; your faithfulness reaches to the clouds.” And just how far is it to the clouds? Again, as with the stars that can’t be numbered, so God’s faithfulness, mercy, grace and love cannot be measured. His faithfulness reaches to the clouds. Our God is an awesome and glorious God. He is worthy to be praised.

Getting our heads out of the clouds, we now land on the top of a mountain. Who’s been to the Rocky Mountains, or the Smoky Mountains, the Alps or to some foothills or sand dunes? Hills or mountains often symbolize God’s creation, command, and power. **Psalm 121:1-2** “I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? 2 My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.” Hills and mountains of any size can remind us that God, who created all things, is our helper and our source of strength.

And now as we come down from the mountains, we reach the tree line. **Deuteronomy 20:19-20** “When you besiege a city for a long time, making war against it in order to take it, you shall not destroy its trees by wielding an axe against them. You may eat from them, but you shall not cut them down. Are the trees in the field human, that they should be besieged by you? 20 Only the trees that you know are not trees for food you may destroy and cut down, that you may build siegeworks against the city that makes war with you, until it falls.”

In wartime, when Israel was taking the land that God had promised to them, He decreed that only the trees which did not bear fruit could be chopped down to build siegeworks. This proves to us that the protection of trees and conservation is not a recent ‘green’ phenomenon. God taught responsible conservation and ‘being green’ right from the beginning.

Isaiah 55:12 “For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.” This verse refers to the joy of the Israelites when they returned to Jerusalem after their exile in Babylon. This is a poetic device which ascribes human action to inanimate objects. It also shows that all creation testifies to God’s glory. How much more should we give glory to God!

Speaking of praising God, let’s look at **Habakkuk 3:17-19** “Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, 18 yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation. 19 God the Lord, is my strength.”

These verses in Habakkuk are a strong picture of trust in the Lord, even in the midst of severe circumstances. During a time of war, crops may be destroyed; herds and flocks may be lost. Faith can be severely tested. But those who put their trust in God know He is their strength and that He will carry them through all life’s difficulties and setbacks.

Matthew 21:8 “Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!’” This was Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. Tree branches were used in the worship of Jesus just a few days before His death.

Acts 13:29 "And when they had carried out all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb. But God raised him from the dead." Trees can make us mindful that Jesus was crucified on a tree and that can remind us of His great love and sacrifice for us.

Revelation 22:1-2 "Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ² through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations."

Trees here on earth can remind us of the tree of life that will be in heaven. Both the river of the water of life and the tree of life reappear in heaven as they had also been in the Garden of Eden. Trees can help us to see and remember that the end will be like the beginning, only better. The tree of life underscores the abundance of life in heaven – there will be a continuous supply of everything that is needed. God will abundantly furnish all that is necessary for the sustaining of life in the new heaven and the new earth. The leaves of healing indicate the complete absence of physical and spiritual want. The river of the water of life reminds us of the water of life which is Christ. Water is a symbol of eternal life. In heaven, we will have perpetual access to this life-giving water and we will have continual access to Jesus, the water of life.

And now, on our freefall from the starry heavens to the clouds, the mountains, and to the treetops, we make our final landing, safely in the waters of the sea. But if landing in the sea troubles you, remember that Jesus is our lifeboat. He is even our pilot as it says in Hymn 715 – Jesus, Savior, pilot me Over life's tempestuous sea.

These verses in James show us how the waves of the sea can help us to be mindful of God's presence. **James 1:5-8** "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. ⁶ But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷ For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸ he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways."

Who has ever sat by the sea or the lake and watched the waves? They go back and forth, sometimes gently, sometimes fiercely (as we experienced occasionally when canoeing on the lakes in Algonquin Park in Ontario). If doubt is compared to waves that are tossed and driven by the wind, then perhaps faith can be compared to 'flat water' which occurs early in the morning before the wind comes, when the water is still and smooth as glass. Still quiet waters provide easy paddling. If doubt is like turbulent waves that are tossed to and fro, then faith could be likened to 'flat water', the still quiet waters that ease our journey through life.

Let's keep looking at James 1:5-8 to find answers for the following questions: What are we to pray for? Are there any requirements, prerequisites, or qualifications for our prayers?

What are we to pray for? Wisdom, v 5

What requirement is needed for answered prayer? Faith, v 6

What is our faith based on? God's promise and His generosity, v 5

What is doubt compared to? A wave of the sea that is tossed and driven by the wind, v 6

The word 'remember' is used more than 200 times in the Bible. Here are some examples:

I will remember my covenant;

Remember the Sabbath;

Remember the Lord thy God;

Remember His marvelous works;
Remember the name of the Lord our God;
Remember not the sins of my youth;
I will remember their sin no more;
When I remember Thee upon my bed;
Remember thy congregation;
Remember now thy Creator;
"Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

Some of these verses with 'remember' are referring to God's constant remembrance of us and some of these verses refer to our remembrance of Him.

As we spend more time outside this summer, as we enjoy the wonders of God's creation, let's be mindful of His love for us; let's be mindful of His presence as He walks beside us and as He holds us with His hand. Let's remember to talk with Him and pray to Him, for He is our Creator, our Redeemer, and our Sanctifier who keeps us in true faith.

Let's pray **Psalm 148** together:

Praise the LORD!
Praise the LORD from the heavens; praise him in the heights!
2 Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his hosts!
3 Praise him, sun and moon, praise him, all you shining stars!
4 Praise him, you highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens!
5 Let them praise the name of the LORD!
For he commanded and they were created.
6 And he established them forever and ever;
he gave a decree, and it shall not pass away.
7 Praise the LORD from the earth, you great sea creatures and all deeps,
8 fire and hail, snow and mist, stormy wind fulfilling his word!
9 Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars!
10 Beasts and all livestock, creeping things and flying birds!
11 Kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all rulers of the earth!
12 Young men and maidens together, old men and children!
13 Let them praise the name of the LORD, for his name alone is exalted;
his majesty is above earth and heaven.
14 He has raised up a horn for his people, praise for all his saints,
for the people of Israel who are near to him.
Praise the LORD!
Amen!

Here's how to find pictures of the Milky Way on the internet:

workhomeunion.com/universe-gallery/we-live-here.jpg

Next click on: Amazing Universe Image Gallery – Work Home Union

30 smaller pictures will appear from which to choose.

The best pictures to illustrate the size of our earth in the grand scheme of the universe are:

We Live Here (this picture has the arrow pointing to our earth)

Milky Way Location

Milky Way Galaxy