

## The Love and the Lure of Nature Walking

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Did you know that in the days of your great-grandparents the inclusion of nature instruction in school was a serious concern? Many of you have read a bit of Charlotte Mason's books or *A Girl of the Limberlost* or *Freckles*. Some of you even own Anna Comstock's *Handbook of Nature Study*, though for many of us it is collecting dust daily.

Did you know that in days gone by, students routinely went on nature walks at all times of the year? They learned about the animals, trees, insects, stars, rocks, and weather, and they learned about them in great detail through daily observation, daily lessons, and daily application.

What has happened in the years since? Has nature grown less amazing? Is it less magnificent and less important these days to notice colors, sounds, smells, designs, and all the beauty that is free just for the taking? Is it less important to one's well-being to have times of quiet solitude in beautiful surroundings? Is it less interesting now to be swept away with the beauty of the night sky or go owl watching together? What has happened?

In the classroom, it could be that the topic itself is slowly escaping from many school curricula. In our present culture, the Creator has been removed from the traditional classroom. With His departure, much of the wonder and amazement with which teachers eagerly tied Him to has been left out as well.

Take, for example, the simple adventure of walking outdoors and collecting a few specimens of tree leaves. Careful observation could disclose that there are those with beautiful red stems and others with the palest of greenish-brown ones. For many young students, finding that each of these different, beautiful leaves belongs to a particular kind of tree might be an awesome discovery. Yet, in many traditional classrooms, the entire process has been reduced to "memorize twenty leaf formations and the test is Friday." The students are left wondering, "Why? Why should we study this?" Because appreciation of the beauty and carefulness with which the Creator has made each and every natural thing is left out of the teaching, there no longer seems to be a good reason to learn about such things. Wonder and amazement have just evaporated from most nature lessons.

And all this while everything out there - from the stars in the sky, to the minute worlds inside a single drop of pond water, to the cells in a blade of grass - shouts the praises of the One who spoke it all into being. Yes, perhaps we should break away a while from our televisions, video games, soccer games, and central heating and air conditioning to once again acquaint ourselves with the great outdoors! We have become more and more an indoor-dwelling people, and we've not noticed that so much of what speaks of the

greatness of our God has therefore been closed out of our lives and out of the lives of our children. The very topics that used to be taught enthusiastically to both the tiniest child and the student of higher education are no longer on the agenda or are taught only from textbooks, rarely through personal adventures.

Even in our homeschooling we are hesitant these days to get outside and find safe places to examine what has been made. We just don't take the time, because we've forgotten how vitally important this activity really is!

Many of us don't live on acreage with ponds and meadows to scout out, and it is more difficult for some to find safe parks and places to explore. Yet, if we truly believed that taking time to get out into nature was critically important, wouldn't we have a new desire to pray for and seek out special spots to view the natural wonders that are close at hand? Even in the heart of city life, one can find so many great examples of natural phenomenon, and nature is always as close as our own backyard.

We even know one family who strolled through cemeteries, enjoying lovely trees of all kinds, ponds, flowers, birds, insects, and more with their children.

If you believe in the need, you will find a way, so here are seven extra special reasons to get up and get out!

### Seven Special Reasons to Get Up and Get Out!

1. Nature walks will teach your child to watch everything around him. These outings will greatly increase his observational skills and his outdoor life skills. Take your children walking often, and watch your science lessons become more relevant year after year as your students are able to apply experientially, through this time outside, the concepts you have presented. You see, it is one thing to teach the life cycle of a frog and quite another to find egg masses and tadpoles in a nearby pond! Children are filled with wonder as they use a net to collect specimens or turn over rocks on a lakeshore and find crawdads escaping every which way! This is life! This is the making of memories! This is real learning, not book learning!

2. Take your children out often, and they will find that one thing in nature always leads to another. If they are interested in a frog they see one day, the next day they will wonder and want to find out about the crickets and worms that the frogs eat. Then they may get interested in the condition of the pond water, and so it goes. This is experience-directed learning that is so exciting to your children. By walking outdoors with them on a regular basis, you will set off a chain reaction of learning experiences for your children that will continue for a lifetime, as they find that each discovery is connected to many other parts of nature.

3. Camaraderie - that special intimacy that comes from adventuring and making

discoveries together - is another benefit of a good nature walk. Whether a mother or father walks with all their children or they take their journeys with just one child at a time or they use different combinations over the months, the time spent will reap intimacy as well as nature knowledge. Yes, you all will see and learn together, and that is wonderful. The times of quiet togetherness and the times of deep conversations along the way are special features of nature outings. It is as if the Lord has provided a miraculous setting for you to “be” with your children. Planned nature walks will provide years of the type of environment that enhances rich family ties.

4. At certain times when viewing nature, some quietness, solitude, and patience are necessary. Of course a small child doesn't understand this at first, and the lessons that a parent uses to teach a little one to walk more quietly, sit for a bit, and watch what is around him must be gentle and full of patience. If you model (especially fun when acted out over-dramatically) walking softly and being as quiet as possible for part of your walks, your child will begin to see that it is often in times of quietness that the greatest marvels are seen. Then you will have done your job well. The desire to be quiet in order to see something special will be catching, and in time your child will begin to value quietness and solitude. Nature walks, begun simply and continued over the years - time spent watching and thinking - will develop a “deepness of heart” in a student who learns to quiet himself in these journeys together. Couldn't our world use a few more inhabitants with “deepness of heart”?

5. As your child grows in his awareness of the magnificence of creation, he will grow to love it. What he grows to love, he will want to take care of. Nature walks, begun early and continued throughout your teaching days, will lead your child to an awareness of the necessity of stewardship of our natural resources. We are all called to be the “gentle tenders” of our world. But if we don't even know anything about it, it is difficult to want to preserve it and use our resources wisely.

6. Taking time to walk outdoors will create a lifetime appreciation for what the Lord has made, and that deep love of nature will become a rich field for worship. The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, and those who spend time in the out of doors discovering the wonders and learning that it comes from Him will have a vast and limitless resource for worshipping the One who created it all! Modeling a grateful heart for the beauty of nature all around us will flow out onto our children. Every leaf, each bug, every cell under a microscope is a marvel worthy of all our praise. If we display a heart of praise and worship for such a magnificent Creator, then wonder and worship will come to our children as well.

7. Something else will grow from enjoyable nature walks and seeing the magnificence of nature on a regular basis. A new understanding in the heart of your student will develop: nothing in nature is “common.” In the book *Snowflake Bentley* by Jacqueline Briggs Martin, we read that the people in Bentley's day thought snowflakes were “as common as dirt.” But Mr. Bentley knew, because he had seen them under a microscope, that each

snowflake was utterly and beautifully unique. All of nature is like that! Each stone has its own loveliness; each drop of water has an entire world of creatures swimming in it; each bit of moss or lichen - extraordinary! Everything that the Lord has made is amazing - nothing is common! How wonderful to begin at a young age to teach our children about the amazing natural world around them and the One who made it all.

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### **Biographical Information**

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*Jane Claire Lambert and her husband Steve operate Five in a Row Publishing and are busy speaking at homeschool conferences and creating new products in the Five in a Row tradition. Visit their websites at [www.fiveinarow.com](http://www.fiveinarow.com) and [www.fiardigital.com](http://www.fiardigital.com) for more information, including details about their new four-part nature series: Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter.*