

[An Outdoor Guided Meditation](#)

Reflection: Spirituality in Nature—A Beginner’s Guide

Restoring Balance

We don’t have to stretch our imaginations to see the imbalance in our relationship to creation. For generations, we’ve walled ourselves off from the rest of the created order, and, increasingly, infrastructure, technology and even our modern culture separate us from the natural world. This separation has not only contributed to growing environmental challenges, but it has also cut us off from an ancient and essential way of knowing God through creation. As we experience the growing consequences of climate change and the widespread challenges of ecological crises, our Episcopal leaders rightly insist that we must restore our relationship *with* creation in order to know and encounter God fully as our ancestors in faith did and to fulfill our vocational call to *care for creation*.¹

Fortunately, the Christian Church boasts a rich tradition of spirituality in nature that can guide us in this repair and restoration and that can inspire and equip us for the work of creation care.

Spirituality in Nature and the Christian Tradition

Relationship with the created world has been part of our story from the beginning. Genesis establishes a connection with nature in the most explicit terms as it traces God’s creative endeavor in shaping the contours of the earth, establishing the structure of day and night, speaking life into creatures of all sorts and kindling humankind into existence from a handful of soil and the loving touch of divine breath. Within the Old and New Testaments and documented throughout the history of our Church, followers of Christ have continuously looked to creation as a vital source of revelation and renewal, a sacred space for ritual and formation.

As modeled by teachers, saints and countless others over the centuries, spirituality in nature has taken many forms. We recognize it in the agrarian parables of Jesus and in Christ’s regular retreats into the wild as a place of prayer, preparation and peace. It is evident in Romans 1 when Paul affirms creation as clear evidence of God and in Saint Augustine’s call to attentiveness to the “Book of Nature” as a vital testament to the Word of God alongside Holy Scripture. We can trace progression of spirituality in nature through the emergence of monastic communities in the deserts of Egypt to the rich interweaving of land-based Christian theology in Celtic practice.

Relationship with the natural world and meaningful engagement with creation has long been an important part of the Christian tradition, a firm and formative thread in our religious practice.

¹ “Bishops close convention with climate emergency statement ahead of Lambeth” Episcopal News Service: www.episcopalnewsservice.org/2022/07/11/bishops-close-convention-with-climate-emergency-statement-ahead-of-lambeth

Spirituality in Nature in Practice

Despite being woven into the roots of our faith, deep, intentional engagement with creation in worship, liturgy, contemplation, formation, ritual and prayer has waned in our modern context, leading to an unbalanced relationship with the natural world.

Renewing attention to this ancient tradition of spirituality in nature moves us closer to restoring our relationship with creation. In doing so, we return to the heart of creation care, reground our faithful work and honor the unique contribution of spiritual communities in responding to environmental degradation and ecological devastation that are, in no small part, also spiritual crises. The late Rabbi Ellen Bernstein reminds us: “Science alone will not move us to care about the earth...In the end, we will only save what we love.”² And we can only love what we first notice, pay attention to, appreciate and delight in.

Intentional time and practice in the natural world can offer renewal, energy, guidance, resilience and inspiration, providing both a salve to our wounded souls and essential lessons that can serve as a blessed spark for our anxious hearts, reinvigorating us as we advocate for change.

To this end, as part of our creation care efforts, regular attention to the presence and movement of the Holy Spirit in and through nature can help us fall back in love with this beautiful world God has created. Intentional time and practice in the natural world can offer renewal, energy, guidance, resilience and inspiration, providing both a salve to our wounded souls and essential lessons that can serve as a blessed spark for our anxious hearts, reinvigorating us as we advocate for change. It can help us see and cultivate hope, nourish our communities and stir our imaginations as we seek ways to minimize waste, implement sustainability solutions, strengthen emergency preparedness and advocate for environmentally conscious legislation.

Many Episcopal congregations and communities are finding creative ways to incorporate spirituality in nature into their regular practice through outdoor worship, rogation rituals, mindful gardening offerings, labyrinth walks and much more. Organizations like [The Center for Spirituality in Nature](#) have resources and offer guidance on ways to regularly practice spirituality in nature individually and in community.

As part of the work of deepening relationships with local ecosystems, God and one another, the Center has built and supports a network of Spirituality in Nature Groups (SINGs). These groups offer creative, contemplative, nature-companioned spiritual formation that inspires and sustains active responses to the urgent challenges facing our world. This network includes several Episcopal communities whose creation-oriented practices enrich traditional prayer, worship, liturgy and ministry, particularly creation care.

We have included a Lectio Divina spirituality in nature practice that you can try for yourself or with your congregation. More practices can be found in the book, [Inside Out: 50 Spiritual Practices for Going Deeper in Nature](#) (Beth Norcross, The Center for Spirituality in Nature, 2018) and at www.centerforspiritualityinnature.org.

2 <https://dayenu.org/media/on-the-passing-of-ellen-bernstein-founding-mother-of-the-jewish-environmental-movement/>