

Chapter 1

The Ministry of Nature

IN EDEN there was nothing to obscure nature's lessons. The existence of God, His wonder-working power, and His boundless love were clearly seen in His created objects. The natural world was full of lessons of divine truth. It was God's purpose that man should understand more of His love and power by contact with created things.

God's plan has never changed, even though sin has obscured many of the lessons. Nature still speaks of God, and upon every leaf and flower and tree is written the message of His love. The beauties of earth and sea and sky tell of His matchless glory. Through a diligent study of nature, man may obtain a knowledge of the Father's character.

There are four ways in which nature study contributes to the spiritual life. While they are more or less interwoven, yet they should be considered separately.

1. The Bible is full of the imagery of nature. Frequent references are made to such objects and phenomena as trees, birds, animals, flowers, the sun, moon, stars, rain, hail, snow, and dew. The student of nature will find in the Bible many suggestions regarding the spiritual value of nature study, and he will be able to adapt many of its lessons to his own life and experience.

2. Nature is full of object lessons. The open eye and the listening ear will be quick to detect these. A nature lesson may have one application today and another tomorrow. If we learn how to read nature's language we shall be able to draw spiritual values continually from her wonders.

3. "God is love" is written not only in His word, but on every leaf of the forest and every spear of grass. The marvelous manner in which all living things are able to maintain their existence teaches us God's care. The way in which this earth has been fitted as a habitation for living creatures reveals God's

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omniscience. The beauties of earth, sea, and sky portray His character.

We must learn to recognize these truths and to appreciate their value. It is of more value to draw a lesson from the structure of the leaf and how it adapts itself to changes in the atmosphere, than it is to get a vague, generalized idea from a leaf. From the complex relations in nature great truths can be gained.

4. Nature speaks to the heart that is open to its influences. The unconverted person may see no spiritual truth in nature, because his heart is closed to truth. But anyone who is willing to receive the lessons of nature will find beauty in the sunrise and the sunset, in the changing aspects of the heavens, in the loveliness of the flowers and trees. Here is an unending source of spiritual enlightenment.

Teachers should learn when to teach, when to offer suggestions, and when to keep silent and allow God to speak through His agencies in nature.

In a way not generally recognized, nature offers a solution to the problem of recreation. Instead of devising artificial methods of entertainment, such as parties and indoor games teachers and leaders would do well to organize outdoor activities. Hikes, camping trips, flower collecting, and other activities will afford an outlet for the restless energy of youth, and will not leave the undesirable aftereffects that come from some types of amusement. When an interest has been created in outdoor activities, the spiritual influence of nature will become a powerful factor in character development.