



Metro Lutheran
Positive Parenting
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NO CHILD LEFT INSIDE

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside still waters;
He restores my soul. Psalm 23:1-3

At the Children's Spirituality Conference in June, one keynote presenter announced, "I'd like to change 'No child left behind,' to 'No child left inside.'" He expressed deep concern about the overwhelming number of hours children spend inside versus the paucity of time they spend in nature. This was one of many voices I have heard recently, expressing concern about how little time our children spend out of doors and the price they are paying for being cut off from the creation. Author Richard Louv has dubbed it Nature Deficit Disorder. At a recent conference for parent educators, two University of Minnesota researchers spoke about this topic. It certainly has captured my attention.

What's happened? Growing up in the 1950's, every parent's refrain was, "Go outside and play!" Usually, we came back inside when we were hungry or it was dark, which ever came first. During all seasons, we were in nature, running, playing, hiding, making up games for which no adults had the rules! Imaginations were fed. Exercise was the natural byproduct of play. And it was an exuberant encounter with the Creator.

Why are kids indoors so much of the time today? There are a myriad of reasons: kids are plugged into screens; some neighborhoods are unsafe for kids; some don't have many children at home; parents work long hours and aren't available to join their kids outdoors; parents and kids alike are scheduled for most of their out of school hours; and some parents don't remember what to do outdoors or how to play, unless it is a sport, with coaches, jerseys, referees, and rules.

So, what are these kids missing? Cut off from the creation, they are cut off from the Creator. In the next generation, who will love nature and work to protect our fragile planet? Today's children are missing the wonder, delight, and appreciation of the vastness and variety of the natural world. Being in nature is an invitation to slow down, to really notice the world, and to emerge refreshed. Nature is literally and figuratively an invitation to be grounded. Research and anecdotal evidence tell us that time in nature positively impacts kids' ability to pay attention and to succeed at academic tasks.

The Bible delivers God's perspective. In Genesis 1, after each day of creation, the refrain is "God looked at what God had made, and it was good." Many Psalms sing the praises of the Creator, experienced in the creation. John 3:16 proclaims, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only son." Yes, God loves the world! In Revelation, God reclaims all God has created.

So, how might we reclaim this experience of creation with and for our children? Recreation. Perhaps your child will lead you back into this reverence and wonder, joy and playfulness. Our grandson did just that.

"Dad," Hayden called urgently, "Come quick! God has created such beautiful trees. Do you want to hug them with me?"

Together at Isle O' Dreams Lodge, where our family had vacationed annually for 30 years, our then four-year old grandson barreled in the door and invited his dad to come outside with him. Hayden, his two-year old sister Erica, and their Aunt Kathryn had been out for a pre-dinner walk, looking for God sightings.

Their dad went outside and hugged a tree with Hayden. Moved to tears by his tender little boy, Jonathan remembered that when they were children, he had teased his sister Kathryn about being a tree hugger! Oh, what goes around comes around.

Hayden and Erica's parents had prepared them to be kids who found wonder, delight, and the presence of the Creator in the outdoors. Since both children were babies, Tammie and Jon have taken their kids outside to play, to look at the moon, to identify bugs, to frolic in fall leaves, to stare with wonder at snow falling on a silent night, to watch wildlife. Now the children invite their parents to experience one of God's best gifts.

FAMILY ACTIVITIES

- Play outside with your child, not a sport with rules, just play. If you've forgotten how, let your child re-teach you.
- Go on a walk. Take close up photos of the things that take your breath away. Print a few. Put them on the fridge. Frame them. Have them where you gather as a family, to remind you of the outing, to invite storytelling and remembering.
- Lie on your back in the grass with a child and watch the clouds. Ask your child what he or she sees in the clouds. Share what you see.
- Camp, hike, or go to a park, lake, river, or ocean, and look for God's presence. Name it. Thank God for the created beauty.
- Bring home some natural mementoes of the creation and Creator. Make a display of them, bringing the outdoors inside, making memories. Add a candle and it could well become your home altar.

