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7-8-2015

Re-Creating in Nature

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Recommended Citation

Holtrop, Steve, "Re-Creating in Nature" (2015). *Faculty Work: Comprehensive List*. Paper 286.

http://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/faculty_work/286

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Re-Creating in Nature

Abstract

"Recreation is re-creation - an opportunity to return to or realign with the whole person I was created to be."

Posting about sensing God's presence in nature from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/re-creating-in-nature/>

Keywords

In All Things, God, nature, recreation

Disciplines

Christianity

Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service at Dordt College](#).

Re-Creating in Nature

 [all in allthings.org/re-creating-in-nature/](https://allthings.org/re-creating-in-nature/)

Steve Holtrop

I love to be out in nature – hiking, canoeing, observing the seasons, and taking pictures. Every week of the year, I visit one of the local state parks like Oak Grove or Newton Hills, and I regularly look for new county parks and other nature preserves in our region.

When I'm in the woods or next to a beautiful lake or gazing out at a valley, I often think of my mother breaking into song: "This Is My Father's World." Or sometimes driving across the verdant, hilly prairie, I think of the camp song – "He Owns the Cattle on a Thousand Hills."

It seems natural to feel "closer to God" in these settings. I know many people have favorite places like the Rocky Mountains or the Great Lakes where they feel that way. Similarly, a cup of coffee at a deep-woods cabin or the pitter-patter of rain on a tarp can suggest this same closeness with creation and the Creator. And I think the sunset rituals in Key West, Florida, every night are another attempt to connect the natural with the spiritual.

But theologically – since God is involved intimately "in all things" – I don't *really* think I'm closer to God at Oak Grove or Newton Hills than when I'm working in my office, teaching my classes, or walking my dog around the neighborhood. The whole world in all its facets is my father's world. And God is close to me in all these places and also in the most *unnatural* places, like a traffic jam or a long check-out line.

So what is it about these recreational activities and places that somehow bring out an extra sense of God's presence? Do I pray while hiking? Sometimes. But sometimes I just count steps until my next self-appointed breather on a steep climb. Do I figure out or discern answers to my spiritual questions? Sometimes. But sometimes my questions grow branches. Do I feel less anxious? Sometimes. But sometimes I add worries about a blister, critter bites, or overheating (or frostbite).

So, what is it? I'm going to try out the idea that doing recreational activities in a God-glorifying way in a fertile or awe-inspiring place is perhaps one of the ways we are most unified, cohesive, or put-together. This is because we're not using *just* our minds or *just* our aesthetic sensibilities or *just* calming down our emotions by "vegging" out in a quiet, dark space.

Our callings may ask us to use our minds extensively, or our emotions, or our aesthetic capabilities. Therefore, it may be good stewardship of our mental and physical health to take time to do relaxation exercises in a calm place every day. But in my mind, recreation is different from relaxing.

Recreation is re-creation – an opportunity to return to or realign with the whole person I was created to be. Perhaps it could be said that in recreation, I am *most* in tune with the whole person God created me to be and created in his image.

That means that when I'm doing a recreational activity, my mind is active and sharp. I'm identifying flora and fauna, and even tracking and photographing some of the fauna. At the same time, I'm using my phone apps to track my calories and chart a course, sometimes where there is no existing trail. I'm also looking for camera angles – new perspectives on sky, water, flowers, and trees. Plus, I'm watching out for animals that are bigger than my little dog – most animals are! So, recreation is mentally stimulating – not turning off my 9-5 brain.

Of course, recreation is also physical. Re-creating involves rejuvenating my muscles and oxygen transport system. It means using up calories I took in earlier in the day. It's about using the full self that God gave me. I usually feel kind of positive about sore muscles made sore from doing something physical. They don't hurt like sickness aches and headaches do. And I love the idea that when I'm huffing and puffing up a wooded trail in these awesome local Loess Hills, I'm taking in air that is rich in the oxygen I need because the thousands of trees surrounding me are producing oxygen to get the carbon dioxide *they* need! This is just so cool! Further, my senses are attuned. I'm seeing and smelling. My feet are perceiving the slipperiness of the grass or mud, or even snow. Everywhere I turn, I'm experiencing the cycle of life, and I get to be physically present right in the middle of it.

So, recreation is mental and physical. And it's also emotional. I got kind of emotional just writing about animals and trees each supplying the air the other needs! This is so creatively nurturing of God to balance things so symbiotically! I get emotional seeing a sunset mirrored upside down on a lake, pond, or river—so stimulatingly serene! I get peacefully excited at the glinting of sunlight off any body of water, whether it's a vast ocean or a woodland rivulet. I'm daringly amused to share a field with a family of deer or wild turkeys or to share a woody path with a raccoon, possum, or skunk. I'm enthusiastically awestruck to see six bald eagles flying in formation right at my eye-level as they look for fish along a river in early spring. "O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder consider all the works thy hand hath made...."

These emotional experiences are not always peaches and cream – I can feel inadequate, overwhelmed, confused, and guilty out in the woods, too – but not too often! And *whatever* emotions I'm feeling, they're resetting and realigning and putting into perspective all the other, mixed emotions of my day. It's just harder to think poorly about someone or something from your day after clapping, stomping, and yelling at an obtuse skunk that you intend to pass peacefully on the other side of the road. Frustration, pride, apathy, embarrassment, anxiety – all in perspective. After all, you *didn't* get sprayed by the skunk!

So recreation, I think, is a way to get an adjustment, to rebalance our facets of personhood, to allow ourselves to be totally physical, totally mental, and totally emotional all at once. It's body and soul and mind and strength. It's emotions and aesthetics. It's reconnecting with God, creation, hiking partners, the dog, wild animals, and even the rocks and trees – in a way that we usually don't when we're sitting at a desk, reading a book, watching TV, having a drink with a friend, listening to a concert, touring an art gallery, or running on a treadmill. These can all be God-glorifying activities. But recreation is a chance to put our facets of ourselves back together, to exercise our pieces of personhood simultaneously, and to return home with a renewed spirit of wholeness.