

FOREST SERMONS

BY ERIN JOY SIEMENS
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“I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach...” - Henry David Thoreau. (i)

The sun warms the pine needle strewn ground, and all at once I am home. No house, yet a haven.

The birch trees in their mystical melodies echo canons of divine reverence. No people, yet company.

The falling snow glistening in setting sunshine speaks a message of peace to me. No voice, yet words.



All humans can hear the calling of the divine through the intricacies, and contrasts in nature (ii). Disconnecting education from a life enriched by nature is to wrench a child away from their school Master. There are endless “messages” waiting to be “heard” in nature. The Bible itself used the manifest pictures of nature to relate divine messages regularly, for example, “They (people who meditate on God’s word) are like trees planted along the riverbank, bearing fruit each season. Their leaves never wither, and they prosper in all they do.” (iii) As we walk along the road (iv) or the forest path, we talk about the truths of God.

Have you ever noticed at the end of fall, as the world dies to stark, grey silence, the sermon lingering on the extensions of a tree? Winter resonates in our soul as a reminder of the dying time. It is bleak. It is hollow. It is isolating. Despair calls. Yet, look my student of the Master (v), as hopelessness blankets the earth, we are not left without a pregnant messenger. Look closely, because trees, do NOT in fact bud in spring!



Spring, the chorus of buds shout! Hope all last! Relief oh weary soul, Arise! But look, the buds arrive in autumn. As soon as the leaves fall, the tree fills itself with hefty buds. Hope is always waiting, lingering, preparing to explode upon us! Hope is holding in the dead dark days of winter!

My children watch this cycle every year. Every year I remind them to watch the buds form as messengers of hope, hope that was established BEFORE the trail of winter. These forest sermons will carve the synapses in a child's mind. And as they grow when they need it they will hear the word of God lifting from the pages of the Bible and wafting through the musty smell of fallen poplar leaves. Weaving together solid scripture bites with the multi-sense tools of nature, engages the mind, and teaches the soul.





“Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds” (vi)

The pine cone falls, fire rages, crack, CRACK, POP! The forest lays scorched and yet . . . because of the wildfire’s heat the cone has dropped its seeds.

“Look, my child, see this forest? Look closely, can you see all the charred logs? The forest is ruined right?! But let us take a closer look. THIS, is called secondary succession. It is proof that LIFE is tenacious. Life always wants to overcome death. See here, these little seedlings. Look there at the shrubs emerging. See, my child, when it seems that the end has come, THAT is just the beginning of a new start!”

“Watch my child the caterpillar transform to a butterfly,”
“See how the leaf must be attached to the tree or it will die,”
“Watch how this small stone makes limitless expanding waves on the water” ... there are endless invitations to awaken your child’s sense of wonder. I believe that if we show our children that God’s created world is like a love letter for them to read then they will not need PROOF that God exists. Their faith will be bolstered by the manifestation of God’s goodness through his handiworks, just like how we study the heart of an artist by their works.





Henry David Thoreau famously responded to the call to get connected with nature, by leaving civilization to live on the banks of Walden Pond. We all in some way feel the same call, to live simply, the step away from compulsion, to live intentionally, to HOMESCHOOL intentionally, and to interact with life and nature. We may not actually become hermits in the woods. Yet in some way, we must respond to the call to allow ourselves to be enthralled solely on the gifts of our creator. We must step away, pay attention, be grateful, and let the word of God sink in as we see the scripture's message written in the rhythms and cycles of the natural world.

i Walden Chapter 2 By: Henry David Thoreau

ii "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse" Romans 1:20 NIV

iii Psalm 1:3 NLT

iv Deut 6:7

v Master is another term for a Lord, or THE LORD

vi John 12:24 NIV



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Erin Joy Siemens is a woodsy, handmakin', homebakin' Mama to two petite wild-ones. Her early days were spent in a little house in the big woods, later she moved to a little house on the prairie, and now her family abides in a little house, in a small town near the banks of the North Saskatchewan River. Her homeschooling style melds Charlotte Mason, Unschooling, and Classical . . . you could just call it intentional homeschooling! Weekly nature hikes, time spend learning historical artistry skills, and a priority in connecting and reaching out to the world keep this homeschooling Mama and her family busy . . . but NEVER too busy!

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