

# Renew Your Life

COVID-19 Version

Session 5: The Energy of the Natural World

Reading: Chapter 5

## Welcome & Opening Questions (10 minutes)

Introduce yourself and share your response to this question:

- What is one of your favorite places in nature in Minnesota?

## Group Prayer Practice (5 minutes)

Spend a few minutes in silence as a group. Sit in a comfortable position and imagine yourself being held by God. Close your eyes and focus on your breath. Gently set aside or release any distracting thoughts during this time. The leader will guide you with these prompts.

- As you think about the past day or week, what did you experience that was life-giving?
- As you think about the past day or week, what was energy depleting for you?
- Silently, release the past day or week over to God in prayer.
- Imagine yourself held in the expansive energies of God's love. Take a minute to breathe deeply of God's presence and peace.

Amen

## Scripture Text (5 minutes)

Psalm 8 (NRSV)

O LORD, our Sovereign,  
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

You have set your glory above the heavens.  
Out of the mouths of babes and infants  
you have founded a bulwark because of your foes,  
to silence the enemy and the avenger.

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,  
the moon and the stars that you have established;  
what are human beings that you are mindful of them,  
mortals that you care for them?

Yet you have made them a little lower than God,  
and crowned them with glory and honor.  
You have given them dominion over the works of your hands;  
you have put all things under their feet,  
all sheep and oxen,

and also the beasts of the field,  
the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,  
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

O LORD, our Sovereign,  
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

### Reading Recap (5 minutes)

God offers us a renewable energy through the natural world. The intimate connection humankind has with creation is inherent in the creation story. Among the many life lessons provided by the natural world are *beauty* (a lesson on how God inspires), *dormancy* (a lesson on how embracing the natural life cycles of creation expands our souls) and *coexistence* (a lesson on the need for interdependence). How can we be more present to the natural world and draw on its renewing energy? How can we love God by loving the earth?

### Questions on Chapter 5 (35 minutes)

Start with these questions, adding in other questions to supplement. Questions are also available in the *Renew Your Life* book, starting on page 141.

- What concepts in the readings and sermon were life-giving for you?
- What concepts or stories were difficult or challenging for you to think about or integrate into your life?

### The Energy of the Natural World

1. What parts of God's creation are most beautiful to you? How often do you get to see or experience them? What do they teach you about God? About yourself?
2. The seasons of the natural world remind us of the hidden beauty in seasons of dormancy. What do seasons of dormancy us about life? About how God works?
3. Seasons of growth and dormancy remind us of the spiritual gift of waiting. Share a time when you had to wait for something. When, if ever, have you experienced waiting as a spiritual gift? What did you learn in those times?
4. In a normal day, in what ways do you attempt to care for the natural world (what you eat, throw away, drive...)? What would you like to rethink or change because of the potential impact on the natural world?

### Update during COVID-19

**Let Beauty Inspire You** – Has your view of the natural world or how you experience it changed in this time of COVID-19? Is it a place to burn off energy and stay physically active? Is it simply a way to escape your house? Is it a place of respite and restoration? The natural world is a gift from God. The beauty of the natural world lifts our spirits, peaks our imagination, and connects us with a beautiful God of love. As we reflect on the

beauty of the natural world, remember that you are part of God's beautiful creation – indeed all people are part of God's amazing creation.

### Questions during COVID-19

1. How has COVID-19 changed how you are experiencing the natural world? What, if anything, have you seen with new eyes or experienced in a new way? How has COVID-19 impacted what you think about nature?
2. The natural world has provided us with a window into God's love for us through God's magnificent creation. Nelson Henderson states "One true meaning of life is to plant trees under whose shade you do not expect to sit." What does that statement mean to you? Where do you see love in this?
3. Is there any part of nature that you have explored during this time of social distancing that you had never seen before? Where or what have you discovered?
4. Richard Rohr says that "loving God by loving God's world has meant different things to different people in different times" In this time of global climate change, how do you feel about the natural world? Share one part of the natural world that you are especially concerned about.
5. What does the beauty of God's creation in the natural world, tell us about God's creation of each of us, as individuals, and of all people, as a community?

### Closing Question & Faith Practice (5 minutes)

Explore how the chapter theme can make a difference in your life by considering this question & trying this faith practice:

- How can I connect more deeply with the beauty and restoring energy of creation?
- Use this breath prayer in the coming week to remind you of God's grace and creative, renewing energy. (see "breath prayer" instructions).

*Inhale: Creator God*

*Exhale: All is Yours*

*Inhale: We are Yours*

*Exhale: I am Yours*

### Closing Prayer (3 minutes)

God, this is a time of challenges beyond what we could have imagined. We each face our own, unique circumstances, and together we share in a time of unforeseen changes, loss, uncertainty, pain, brokenness, fear and disruption.

Yet, God, we know that your steadfast love never ends and your presence never leaves us. We continue to see you in ordinary and extraordinary moments. We thank you for creation's renewal and beauty, for actions of kindness and love, for the blessings of daily life and for

your renewing gift of hope. We are especially grateful for those who are doing self-sacrificing work on behalf of others, the community and the world. Most of all, we thank you for your peace, love and grace.

Guide us to know how to be your blessing in the world today. Open our hearts and imaginations to see how we can create healthy and abundant life for others. Sustain us, comfort us, guide us and enliven us to be your presence in the world. Amen.