

The background image is a photograph of a wooden bridge crossing a river in a lush, green forest. Sunlight filters through the trees, creating dappled light on the bridge and the water. On the left side of the bridge, there is a wooden post with a sign that reads "GO SLOW". The title "THE GIFT OF A Sacred SUMMER" is overlaid on the top half of the image. "THE GIFT OF A" is in a small, white, sans-serif font. "Sacred" is in a large, white, cursive script font. "SUMMER" is in a large, white, sans-serif font.

# THE GIFT OF A *Sacred* SUMMER

**8 WEEKS OF GROWING CLOSER TO JESUS**

Sample  
Week

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**INCLUDES: INTERACTIVE PRACTICES, JOURNALING PROMPTS,  
AND REFLECTIONS DESIGNED FOR ALL AGES**

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CREATED BY LILLY LEWIN, JOANNA CUMMINGS AND EDWARD GOODE



# ABOUT THE GIFT OF A SACRED SUMMER

Think about your summer and how you'd like it to look. Often, we feel as though summer goes by too quickly, and it's time for school and the rhythms of fall before we feel ready or rested. The Gift of a Sacred Summer is an opportunity to slow down, rest, and take a long walk with Jesus.

Consider where you and your community could be in a relationship with Jesus between now and September. The Gift of a Sacred Summer is 8 + weeks of practices for you personally, for your family, roommates, youth group, small group, and/or your entire church community. It's about prayer, spiritual practices, and following the ways of Jesus in our daily lives.

## HOW TO USE THE GIFT OF A SACRED SUMMER (*or "Sacred Summer" for short*)

The Gift of a Sacred Summer is designed to be used as a whole series or as stand-alone units. You might engage with them in the order we have listed or move them around to suit your needs or the needs of your community.

You can use Sacred Summer on your own, with your family or a small group of friends, or with your entire church community. We have designed engaging activities for all ages to grow deeper in their faith. Allow these practices to spark your creativity, and we invite you to add your own ideas to ours.

### IDEAS:

- Develop a sermon series or lesson series on these practices.
- Include a practice in your weekly newsletter.
- Post a practice on your social media platforms, like Facebook or Instagram. We've designed the graphics just for you!
- Use to encourage families, small groups, or age groups (e.g., youth group, Vacation Bible School, Over 50+) to try these practices this summer.
- Use Sacred Summer for a summer retreat or week-long camp program.
- Use for your personal practice or with your family or roommates.

### THE GIFTS OF A SACRED SUMMER:

1. The Gift of Rest
2. The Gift of Silence
3. The Gift of Nature
4. The Gift of Gratitude
5. The Gift of Justice
6. The Gift of Love
7. The Gift of Play
8. The Gift to Create
9. The Gift of Grief (A bonus week to help us process the pandemic.)

## **Each Gift in A Sacred Summer includes the following:**

### **Story**

A brief story from the author of how she/he started with this gift. When leading a group, you could add your experience or your story. Another option is to have people in your group tell their stories or their experiences with this gift.

### **Practices**

These are ways to put each gift into practice in increments of 5 or 15 minutes. There is also "Going Deeper," which is a more intensive practice for those who want an expanded challenge.

### **Scripture**

Each gift has various scriptures which can be used for personal devotional reading or for teaching or preaching.

### **Questions for Journaling and Discussion**

Each gift has a series of questions to consider while you're journaling, or to use in a time of discussion.

If you're choosing to journal, you may want to purchase a memorable journal for yourself or everyone in your group. Personalize it by printing out a sticker with your ministry name and/or logo and put it on a notebook from a dollar-type store.

### **Experiences**

This section includes creative ways to engage this gift. There are ideas you can use with all ages, including a book or two that you could read to take the practice deeper.

### **Pushback**

We all come to these gifts with some baggage. You may have problems with or blocks against a practice, and that's a gift too! It's an opportunity to look deeper at these problems/pushbacks and process them with Jesus.

### **Prayer**

A short prayer to pray as you experience each gift.

## EXTRAS (These are in additional pdf files)

- Coloring sheets for each gift
- A Parable Walk practice
- A "Permission to Rest" permission slip to print out
- Liturgies for each gift (available in the Small Group and Church Kits)
- Social media graphics for each gift (available in Small Group and Church Kits)

## FROM THE CREATORS

The team at FreeRange Worship is thrilled to bring you this resource. With three unique authors collaborating on this project, you might notice our different styles. We come from different life experiences and Christian faith traditions. It's our hope and passion that people of all ages might enjoy this resource, learn, and grow closer to the God who loves us through it.

We would love to hear from you! If you have any questions or need more help, just ask! Email [freerangeworship@gmail.com](mailto:freerangeworship@gmail.com) We pray that you have a Sacred Summer!

### LILLY LEWIN

For over twenty years, Lilly has created and curated experiential worship experiences around the world. She's designed worship experiences for conferences, like Youth Specialties' National Youth Workers Convention, the Greenbelt Festival in the UK, national Methodist, and Episcopal gatherings, as well as for local churches. She is a speaker, worship curator, workshop leader, and co-author of the book *Sacred Space*, along with Dan Kimball. Read her FreeRangeFriday blog at [Godspacelight.com](http://Godspacelight.com) and find more Sacred Space resources at [freerangeworship.com](http://freerangeworship.com). She and her husband Rob lead thinplaceNASHVILLE, an in-person and online house church community.

### JOANNA CUMMINGS

Joanna is a writer, innovator, ordained Methodist pastor, and a new mom. She's been leading children's, youth, and family ministry for over 15 years. She is also the creator of [ASacredHome.com](http://ASacredHome.com), where she develops seasonally themed worship boxes for families and churches.

### EDWARD GOODE

Edward is a husband, father, Jesus guy, pastor, and photographer. He grew up in Colorado and still longs for his mountains while he lives in Ohio and serves a church in northern Kentucky. In addition to his many other roles, he regularly teaches classes on contemplative photography. He signs off most of his emails with four words, "Grace, peace, love, and joy." Those four words are at the center of his work as he seeks to share those things while also lifting up where beauty is found all around. Edward also blogs in image and word at [imagoscriptura.com](http://imagoscriptura.com)

# Nature

## *A Sacred Summer*

### STORY

"I think your soul is starving."

Those were the words of my counselor to me as I wrestled with past history and mental health issues. We talked about all that I was doing in my life and in ministry and how overwhelmed I felt about it all. At one point, she asked me about how much time I had spent in certain places up to that point in my life. For my first 22 years, I lived in Colorado and then in Arizona - two places where I could easily get away from cities and into nature. Then after seminary, I lived for nine years in South Dakota. Again, a place where it was easy to simply drive out of the city where we lived and be out in open country with the big sky and big horizons. After moving to Ohio, I found it much more difficult to find those spaces. My counselor wisely asked me whether open spaces were important to me (they were/are). She then made that statement... "I think your soul is starving."

In the years since I have tried to be super intentional to be outside in nature every day at some point. Maybe it is simply walking a nearby golf course with my dog or going to a nature center or a park or getting away for a few days and into nature. It is in those spaces where I have grown to truly hear the Spirit speak in ways that I don't in other settings.

I believe God has wired us to not only live in the natural world but to be refreshed by it. For it is in the natural world where we see some of the most obvious examples of God's creative and transforming power. It is in nature that we witness the cycles and rhythms of life - that of birth, life, death, and resurrection.

\*Written by Edward Goode.

## PRACTICES

*Each day of the week, take time to do the 5 or the 15 minute practice.*

*Plan a time to do the Going Deeper practice sometime during the week.*

- **5 minute practice** - Whenever you are right now, stop and look out a window. If you aren't near a window, go somewhere where there is one. If the weather is cooperative, open the window and feel whatever comes through to you. A breeze, the temperature, the sounds, the smells. Take it all in. Breathe deep and slow. Simply let the space you are in speak to you.
- **15 minute practice** - Go for a walk, get outdoors wherever you are. Wherever you are, look for something beautiful in the natural world around you. A tree planted along the street. A flower in a window. The face of a person who walks by you. The color of the sky at that time of the day. The feel of the weather upon you. Set a timer for 7.5 minutes, and when it reaches 7.5, turn around and walk back.
- **Going Deeper** - Same as the 15 minutes, but don't set a timer. Just go until you are ready to turn around and come back. Can you go somewhere that takes you away from where you usually are? Can you go to a park? A nature center? Somewhere you can see the horizon?

With each of these, write down one thing in the natural world that spoke to you. Maybe even draw it as you remember it in your memory. Why did that speak to you?

## SCRIPTURE

Psalm 19:1-3, Isaiah 55:12-13, Psalm 8, Luke 12:22-32

## QUESTIONS for Journaling and Discussion

- How have you experienced God when out in nature?
- Talk about a favorite place you've been or visited where you felt close to Jesus.
- How do the Stars, Sunsets, Clouds, Mountains, Storms, the Desert, Rolling Hills, Vistas, etc. speak to you of God's glory?
- Use the scripture above to reflect on how the natural world declares God's glory.

What do you notice? How can you plan time in nature this week?

- How did Jesus use the beauty of nature in his teachings?

## EXPERIENCES

*Choose one or several to try.*

- **For Communities, Small Groups, and Families:** Plan a day or an afternoon outside. Go to a place of beauty, a park, someplace you can experience being in God's creation. Bring a journal and pen and take time to notice. Use the questions below.

**With time in nature, we often just rely on what we see. Take time to be intentional about what you:**

- Hear - what birds do you hear? How does the wind sound? What sounds does the rain make when it falls? How do you hear the wind? What other animals do you hear? Can you focus on one natural sound and see how you can hear that above all the other "noises" of life?
  - Smell - What are the smells of where you are? What immediately arises for you? What about really getting close to something and taking in the scent? Smell a flower or a tree from close up. How does grass smell? What does sand or dirt smell like?
  - Touch - What does that leaf feel like? What about the bark on the tree? What about taking your shoes off and walking barefoot in the grass or the dirt. How does that change your experience?
  - Taste - this one is a bit trickier because we don't want to eat something that will hurt us. But what about the foods that you eat? How does each taste speak to you of where it came from?
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- **For all ages and entire church communities:** Take a PARABLE WALK [see the handout]. Listen to a passage of scripture (like the ones above). Then go for a timed walk and let God speak to you through what you see and hear. See the handout for more details.
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- **For all ages, individuals, and groups:** Go on a Nature Scavenger Hunt and collect items. Look for things that represent God's love, like a heart-shaped rock or leaf. Or something that represents peace or freedom like a feather or a flower. You can also do this process with your camera, taking pictures of things that represent



various attributes of God. Love, Joy, Peace, Hope, etc. Create a slide show or Instagram hashtag with the various photos and have people share about the photos.

- **All ages:** Use magazines to create a collage of beauty and nature. Use this as a creative prayer practice and as a visual reminder of our Creator.
- **For families and kids and youth:** Plant some seeds and watch them grow. How is God growing good things in you? What do you know about seeds? What do they need for growth? What do you need to grow closer to Jesus?
- **LISTEN:** check out the song "Everywhere" by David Wilcox. How does this song connect you with Jesus?
- **WATCH:** What place or part of the world would you like to visit? Find a show on the Nature channel, YouTube, or Netflix, etc. and watch it with a prayerful heart and notice our world's beauty and wonder. Spend some time thanking Jesus for his creation.
- **Read:**
  - ***The Wisdom of Wilderness*** by Gerald May
  - ***Afoot and Lighthearted: A Journal for Mindful Walking*** by Bonnie Smith Whitehouse

## PUSHBACK

Perhaps you find yourself pushing back on this practice. That is perfectly normal. You might be considering...

- I don't like being in nature - I don't like getting dirty, sweaty, etc. Yup, totally understandable. But maybe it is just 5 minutes to experience something that you don't typically.
- I am physically unable to get out and walk. Do a search on YouTube for nature videos and just watch one of those for 5, 15, or 60 minutes - turn off all other windows and sounds and simply try to focus on that. What does that "window" into nature do for you?
- I don't have time. We're all busy. But I believe that we all make time for the things that we feel are necessary. Maybe just start with the 5 Minute Practice and see what happens.

No matter where your soul is today, remember that God sits with you in your questions.

## PRAYER:

Close your eyes.

Breathe deep.

Listen.

Breathe deep.

Sense.

Breathe deep.

Open your eyes - what do you see?

Pray for what you experience of the holy in what you hear, feel, see.

For more worship resources, visit us at [www.freerangeworship.com](http://www.freerangeworship.com)