Earth Psalms

Reflections on how God speaks through nature

Francine Rivers
with Karin Stock Buursma
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FRANCINE RIVERS
WITH KARIN STOCK BUURSMA

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Contents

Introduction IX

1 FAITHFULNESS DAY AND NIGHT • Sunrises and Sunsets 1
2 PRAYER LEADS TO PEACE • The Woodpecker 5
3 VARIETY IN CREATION • Apples 9
4 PROTECTIVE FATHER • Quail 13
5 SPREADING THE GOOD NEWS • Dandelions and Tumbleweeds 17
6 HARD WORK • Ants 21
7 COMMUNITY MATTERS • Redwoods 25
8 WATER IN THE DESERT • Stenocara Beetle 29
9 A LIGHT FOR OUR PATH • Fog 33
10 CALL TO CONFESSION • A Hobbled Seagull 37
11 AN OPPORTUNITY FOR JOY • Lilacs 41
12 SEEKING SECURITY • Squirrels 45
13 PRAYERS LIKE INCENSE • Enchanting Sweet Peas 49
14 LEARNING GENEROSITY • Hercules and the Mouse 53
15 GOD’S THOUGHTFUL CREATION • Irises and Geraniums 57
16 LESSONS IN RISK TAKING • The Turtle 61
17 PLANTING SEEDS OF FAITH • Pansies 65
18 RESPONDING WITH THANKS • Crows and a Hawk 69
19 SLOW AND STEADY TRANSFORMATION • Glaciers 73
20 SOMETHING SMALL IN GOD’S HANDS • Earthworms 77
21 FOLLOWING THE GOOD SHEPHERD • Sheep 81
22 TESTING THE BOUNDARIES  Goats 85
23 GLORIOUS CREATION  Tulips 89
24 GODLY PROTECTION  Umbrella Pines 93
25 STAYING CLOSE TO THE MASTER  Cats and Dogs 97
26 PRUNING BRINGS GROWTH  Trees 101
27 HEEDING GOD’S WARNINGS  Riptides and Undertows 105
28 FAITHFUL TO THE END  Geese 109
29 WAITING ON GOD  The Sleepy Dogwood 113
30 UNENDING FAITHFULNESS  Storks 117
31 THE MIRACLE OF PRAYER  Inside Passage 121
32 SEEKING THE TRUE LIGHT  Moths 125
33 UPROOTING SIN  Scotch Broom 129
34 ENCOURAGED TO FLY  Hawks 133
35 LIVING BY FAITH  Sprouts 137
36 TRUE FRIENDSHIP  Crab Spiders and Honeybees 141
37 LIVING WATER  God Green 145
38 REJECTING EVIL, EMBRACING GOOD  Gophers 149
39 ANCHORED IN CHRIST  Roots 153
40 FED BY GOD’S WORD  Flamingos 157
41 DESIGNED BY GOD  Potatoes 161
42 THE POWER OF TWO  Horses 165
43 LETTING GOD BE THE JUDGE  Icebergs 169
44 LAYING ASIDE WORRY  Swifts and Swallows 173
45 STRENGTH THROUGH STRUGGLE  Butterflies 177
46 TRUSTING GOD’S PROVISION  Blue Jays 181
47 RESCUED FROM SIN  Venus Flytrap 185
48 SEEKING HUMILITY  Turkey Walk 189
49 PURSUING PEACE  Doves 193
50 GODLY DIVERSITY  Beetles 197
51 A FIRM FOUNDATION  Sand 201
52 BELIEVING IN THE UNSEEN  Autumn Colors 205

About the Authors 209
Image Credits 211
SHOUT JOYFUL PRAISES TO GOD,
ALL THE EARTH!
SING ABOUT THE GLORY
OF HIS NAME!
TELL THE WORLD
HOW GLORIOUS HE IS.

PSALM 66:1-2
SCRIPTURES SAY, “For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, [we] can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So [we] have no excuse for not knowing God” (Romans 1:20). Everything God has created is a wonder to behold. If we look closely, we find lessons in our observations.

Writers of the Bible taught lessons through all aspects of the natural world, including plants and animals, reptiles and insects. King David used metaphors of sheep and pastures. Solomon wrote proverbs about sparrows and dogs, pigs and vipers, ants, hyraxes, locusts, and lizards. The prophets warned of how God could stop the rain and bring climate change. When Jesus walked the earth, He spoke about wheat and tares, the mustard seed, a pearl, seeds and soil.

God is an artist, and the earth and the universe are His canvas. From the microscopic complexities of an atom to the immense, expanding universe with nebulae, black holes, and galaxies, God shows His power and majesty, His attention to detail, and His great and unfailing love for us. Jesus said if people did not praise Him, “The stones will cry out!” (Luke 19:40, NIV).

When I was a girl, my family traveled, camped, and explored God’s creation. I tried to do the same with my children. It’s in my DNA,
so the idea of writing earth psalms as worship to the Lord sprang from my heart. Once I started, I couldn’t help but praise Him for the diversity and beauty of His handiwork. I sought lessons and hidden messages in the myriad animals, plants, reptiles, and insects God has made. Now I have the privilege of sharing with you some of my observations.

Before now, I’d often considered writing a devotional, but I knew I wanted more than my limited view and personal insights. Tyndale graciously connected me with Karin Buursma, who has enriched my offering with hymns, quotes, reflections, and applications for connecting with God.

A painting is not the painter, but the passion of the artist’s heart is revealed through his work. Karin and I hope this book will encourage
you to look at the world God created and search for the subtle messages that will expand your love for Him and your desire for a closer relationship with Him. So lean in, look more closely at the treasure trove, and seek Him. What lessons might God have embedded in the plants, animals, life cycles, and characteristics of His immense, complex, and marvelous creation? From the depths of the sea to the far reaches of space are countless blessings the Lord offers you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your eyes, ears, and heart to receive what God has for you.

Enjoy!

[Signature]
Faithfulness
Day & Night

The faithful love of the Lord never ends!
His mercies never cease.
Great is his faithfulness;
his mercies begin afresh each morning.
LAMENTATIONS 3:22-23

Rick and I get up early, and we’re often treated to a sunrise casting its glow along the horizon. Early evening brings the sunset. Each winter, winds strip our oak of its broad leaves, so we can see the full blaze of glory from our deck.

Colors, so many colors. Sunrise often brings pinks, lavenders, and pale yellows that give way to pale blue above a sea of white cotton clouds. By five o’clock, the sun is going down. One night, the sky was molten hot red with streaks of fiery orange and gold. Another night, the clouds turned lavender and pink, then purple. When the sun disappeared, the sky turned indigo, then black with diamond dust tossed onto heavenly canvas.

Sunrise, sunset. Both amaze us. Each day is different, unique, rich
in variant hues, with swirls of gauzy cloud designs that change shape and color by the minute—all painted by the Artist as we watch in awe.

I have come to see these times of incredible beauty as God’s daily greetings, a reminder that He loves us and is ever present. We are never alone. We can speak with Him anytime, day or night. Sunrise is God’s “Good morning.” I can look forward to the day, knowing He will guide and protect me. As Scripture tells us, “His mercies begin afresh each morning.” What a wonderful promise! Yesterday’s mistakes don’t carry over. Today is a new beginning, and God can open my eyes to new friends, possibilities, opportunities. And then, in the
evening as the sun goes down in all its glory, God’s “Good night” reassures me that I am in His hand and on His heart, and He watches over me as I sleep. Morning, evening, or in the darkest stretches of the night, He is never off duty.

Through many dangers, toils, and snares,
I have already come;
’Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home.

“AMAZING GRACE”
REFLECT

What does it mean that God’s mercies are new, or fresh, every day? How can remembering God’s faithful presence and protection give you peace as you go about your daily activities?

APPLY

This week, make an effort to view at least one sunrise and one sunset, observing the incredible beauty of our Creator. Choose one Scripture passage to read every morning and another every evening (perhaps Lamentations 3:22-23 in the morning and Psalm 121 at night). Let these truths about God’s presence, mercy, and loving protection fill your mind and influence your thoughts through the day and the night.

CONNECT WITH GOD

Lord God, I am grateful for Your amazing sunrises and sunsets, which remind me of Your love and Your presence. Thank You that Your mercies begin afresh each day. Your forgiveness allows me to begin every morning anew, ready to see what You have for me. In the evening, when I lie down to sleep, may I rest in the knowledge that You have been with me all day and will continue to watch over me.

---

Satisfy us each morning with your unfailing love, so we may sing for joy to the end of our lives.

PSALM 90:14
Prayer Leads to Peace

Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

PHILIPPIANS 4:6-7

In the words of Winston Churchill, “Never give in. Never give in. Never, never, never, never.” That must be the rallying call of the woodpeckers in our neighborhood, some of whom have decided the vent holes beneath our eaves are the perfect location for a new house. We’ve had one pesky fellow trying to widen the access to our attic. He managed to get through the wire mesh and pull out some insulation.

We wouldn’t have known he was at work if he hadn’t decided to put his machine-gun beak into our bedroom wall. I leapt off the Exercycle, ran to the wall, and pounded—with both fists. Silence. For one whole minute. I had no sooner returned to cycling than he was back at work. This time I ran out of the room, down the stairs, and out through the back door. He fluttered calmly away and took a break.
on the oak down the hill. I know he was smirking; I could feel it. I went back inside. By the time I reached the bedroom, he was back at the wall, probably laughing.

Such persistence!

He reminds me of the worries that can come rat-a-tatting at my mind, usually late at night. The doubts and fears flutter in, and I try to rat-a-tat some kind of solution. Then I remember: God is God, and I’m not. Which means I have a decision to make: keep rat-a-tatting, or let go and let God work.

We called Stan, our contractor, and he sent out Alan to cover the woodpecker’s holes with metal vents. When we find ourselves drilling our own holes through constant worry, we can cover those vulnerable places with prayer, which redirects our thought processes and keeps us focused on Jesus. And in Philippians 4, God promises that when we release our worries and turn instead to prayer, He will give us His peace—peace that’s beyond anything we can understand. His peace will guard our hearts and minds from the anxieties that can be as persistent as a woodpecker.

Not to be discouraged, the woodpecker has started drilling his way into the telephone pole across the street. It’s a good reminder to be diligent in prayer and not let worries flutter back and nest in my head.

“Worry is like a rocking chair: it gives you something to do, but it gets you nowhere.”

Erma Bombeck
Woodpeckers can peck up to twenty times per second.

The Lord blesses them with peace.

PSALM 29:11
REFLECT

What worries are keeping you from resting in God’s peace? Spend a few minutes outside (or, if it’s too wet or cold, look out a window). Look for evidence of God’s presence and His loving care in nature, and remember that it extends to you, too.

APPLY

This week, reread Philippians 4:6-7. When you’re anxious, choose to turn away from worry and toward prayer, away from anxiety and toward God’s peace.

CONNECT WITH GOD

Lord, it’s so easy to fall into worry. When my fears are reverberating in my mind, help me to stop trying to fix everything myself. Teach me to turn to You in prayer, trust You to be in charge, and let Your peace reign over me.

The LORD gives his people strength.
The LORD blesses them with peace.

PSALM 29:11
Variety in Creation

Then God said, “Let the land sprout with vegetation—every sort of seed-bearing plant, and trees that grow seed-bearing fruit. These seeds will then produce the kinds of plants and trees from which they came.” And that is what happened. The land produced vegetation—all sorts of seed-bearing plants, and trees with seed-bearing fruit. Their seeds produced plants and trees of the same kind. And God saw that it was good. 

**GENESIS 1:11-12**

I love walking through the produce section of our local grocery store and looking at all the apples—Golden Delicious, Red Delicious, Granny Smith, Gala, Braeburn, Fuji—all different colors and all beautiful. Did you know there are 7,500 kinds of apples in the world?

Apples are very interesting.

Every seed in an apple contains genetic instructions for a completely new and different apple tree. Though it seems counterintuitive, if you plant seeds from a Honeycrisp apple, the resulting tree will not produce Honeycrisp apples. The fruit could be large or small, tart or sweet, crisp or soft. The only way to reproduce one particular variety is to graft its branch onto another tree. This extreme variability is called heterozygosity, and this aspect of apples gives these trees
Romans first brought apple trees to England. Centuries later, colonists brought them to the United States. John Chapman, better known as Johnny Appleseed, is credited with spreading apple trees westward in the US.
the ability to make their home everywhere—from California to New Zealand or Kazakhstan. Every human being is unique, because we are heterozygous too.

Not only do apples smell and taste good, they are one of the many miracles of God’s creation. Every single apple tree grown from a seed produces apples different in color, smell, and taste from those on any other tree. Over time, people have picked a few favorites out of God’s vast crop and grafted the trees to reproduce them. Now we know what we’re getting. No surprises.

That’s not God’s way. He loves variety in apples and in people. In Psalm 104, the psalmist exclaims, “O Lord, what a variety of things you have made!” (v. 24). The Creation account in Genesis 1 details the array of plants and creatures God made—“all sorts” of vegetation and animals, not to mention birds of the air and creatures of the sea. He could have created a much simpler natural world, but instead He made one that overflows with color, variety, and original design. And He has created humans with the same variety as well. While our culture might tell us that we have to look a certain way to be attractive, act a certain way to be well-liked, or own certain things to be successful, that boring sameness doesn’t reflect God’s ideal. We can revel in being part of His wonderfully varied creation.

“Whenever I am afield or outdoors, there steals over me the acute consciousness that I am confronted on every hand by the superb workmanship of my Father. It is as if every tree, rock, river, flower, mountain, bird, or blade of grass had stamped upon it the indelible label, ‘Made by God.’”

PHILLIP KELLER
REFLECT

In what ways do you think our culture encourages sameness? Why? How does variety in appearance, attitudes, talents, and personality reflect God’s character?

APPLY

This week, observe the differences in the people around you. Do you find it difficult to appreciate any of their characteristics—or any of your own? Ask God to help you value the amazing variety of His creation.

CONNECT WITH GOD

Lord, at times I feel pressure to fit in with those around me. It can seem like there’s only one right way to look or act. I’m so grateful that You created the world with remarkable variety—far beyond what was functional or needed, but solely for Your own pleasure and ours! Help me to value that variety in myself and others, marveling in the richness of Your creativity.

O LORD, what a variety of things you have made!
In wisdom you have made them all.
The earth is full of your creatures.
Here is the ocean, vast and wide,
teeming with life of every kind,
both large and small.

PSALM 104:24-25
Some years ago, while working at our warehouse, Rick called me on the intercom and said a mother quail was out back with her chicks. I came running, and we watched from the delivery doorway as the quail pecked for seeds and bugs among the grass behind our building. The chicks scurried around their mother like little puffs of tan cotton, unaware of us—or of danger lurking close by.

We spotted a cat crouched and sneaking toward them. Rick was about to grab an airplane gear to heave at the predator when we both heard a high-pitched chirrup from somewhere above us. The mother quail immediately spread her wings, the chicks fled beneath, and she flattened to the ground—motionless, protecting her babies with her body, and perfectly camouflaged in the grass. We stared, amazed. Then, out of nowhere, the father quail appeared. He had...
Hide me in the shadow of your wings.

Psalm 17:8
been perched on the edge of the roof next door, watching and ready to signal any danger. Down he came, right at that cat. Bam! Startled, the cat jumped back. Again the male defended his family, and the frightened cat took off.

We had just witnessed a living example of what God our Father is like. Like the father quail, He watches from a high place and sees everything going on around us. He warns us when danger approaches and knows how to fight the battle to protect us from the evil one, just as He did for the Israelites entering the Promised Land. God is also our shelter, like the mother quail spreading her wings over her chicks. We can run to Him, knowing that we are safe in His presence.

God loves us with an everlasting love, and He is worthy of our complete trust. So when we hear Him warning us of danger, we need to act quickly in obedience. As Psalm 17:8 says, He will hide us in the shelter of His wings. We can rest there without fear, knowing that He is in control.

> Under His wings I am safely abiding;  
Though the night deepens and tempests are wild,  
Still I can trust Him—I know He will keep me;  
He has redeemed me and I am His child.

“Under His wings I am safely abiding”

**REFLECT**

How have you seen God protect you or others in the past? What dangers might He be warning you about? How can you turn to Him when trouble comes?
**APPLY**

This week, when you face a challenging situation, remember that you live in God’s protection. Let your first reaction be to run to Him for security.

**CONNECT WITH GOD**

*Lord God, thank You for watching over me, for warning me when danger is near, and for protecting me. Help me never to forget how much You care for me. I trust You, Lord. I want to run to You when trouble comes.*

---

*Show me your unfailing love in wonderful ways.*

*By your mighty power you rescue those who seek refuge from their enemies.*

*Guard me as you would guard your own eyes.*

*Hide me in the shadow of your wings.*

**PSALM 17:7-8**