

## LEAVE NO TRACE: A FAITH-BASED LOOK AT PROTECTING NATURE

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Hiking can be a great adventure. Getting out there and doing fun things in the world's wild places is exciting. By "walking" or "hiking," I mean getting outside and moving in whatever way works for you: walking, rolling in a wheelchair, or strolling with a stroller. A family adventure night of stargazing, picnicking by a lake, and exploring a nearby waterfall are examples of enjoying God's handiwork. But with these gifts comes a few responsibilities.



From the beginning, God called us to care for his earth ([Genesis 2:15](#)). It can feel like a big job when God wants us to be stewards, or caretakers, of all creation. Sometimes, because we want too much, we act like we own the world instead of taking care of it. When we treat God's world and everything in it with respect, we honor the One who gave us this job.

How do we help our children develop a deep respect for God's natural world? How do we inspire them to commit to preserving it? Let's teach them that taking care of creation is one way to worship God. Here are three simple things we can do:

1. **Actively care for God's creation.** We need to care for and protect our shrinking pockets of local nature. As a family, learn more about the forests in your region. Visit these places often. Explore the woods, the caves, and the shorelines. Know the names of tree types, flowers, and animals that live near you. You can also ask local nature groups for advice on how to help care for these places.
2. **Love your neighbor.** Share the hiking trails with those who work and live in those areas. Stay on the marked path, especially if it goes across farmland. Be kind and greet fellow hikers in the same spaces. Keep your dog on a leash and well-behaved. Greet landowners with kindness and respect "No Trespassing" signs. Honor God by showing love in these practical ways.
3. **Leave no trace. This isn't hard to understand: if you bring something with you, bring it back out. Even natural items like fruit peels can take years to decompose. Wet wipes, wrappers, and dog poop bags can stay in nature for many years. Take along some extra bags and collect other litter that you find. Leave the hiking trails cleaner than you found them.**

Why should we think about this stuff? Animals should only eat what's natural for them. Human food can make them sick or cause future problems in the winter. Also, no one wants to see garbage on their nature hike.

I once saw a sign that said, "Please take nothing but pictures. Leave nothing but footprints." Those are good rules. Small actions add up. Let's protect God's beautiful spaces together.

*written by Ron VandenBurg*