

## **A Walk in the Woods**

Get close to nature—and each other—on a simple family hike  
by Cindy Crosby

There's no better way to help your children learn to pay attention to the beauty of nature and cultivate awe for God's creation than taking them for a walk in the woods. Here are some tips to make the most of the experience:

1. Bring provisions. Take water bottles and a light bag of munchies, even on a short walk. If the weather is cold, tote along a thermos of hot chocolate. This lends itself to an impromptu picnic when you stop for a rest break, and keeps little ones (and big ones!) from whining.
2. Bundle up. Layer clothing—you can always take things off if you get hot. An extra scarf, toasty stocking cap, and a few inexpensive handwarmers—little bags that heat up when you open the package (available at hardware and outdoor stores)—also keep the trip from getting shortened.
3. Take a magnifying lens. Look for the cheap version at the drugstore on the bifocals rack. Kids will enjoy seeing everything from insects to snowflakes up close and personal, and they'll marvel at the amazing beauty of God's designs.
4. Look up. Discover contrails—vapor lines made by jets—and interesting cloud formations. Imagine what each cloud resembles: a ship, a frog, a plane. Learn the names of the different types of clouds together (cirrus clouds are wispy and look like they've been combed; cumulous clouds look like fluffy popcorn; stratus clouds look like a blanket).
5. Look down. Notice what's under your feet—crunchy fall leaves, acorn caps, sticks, oddly colored rocks, and plants with interesting seedheads. Before you leave home, make a list of items to find and then enjoy a nature scavenger hunt.

6. Follow animal tracks. Get a good pocket guide such as Track Finder available for \$3.50 from the Nature Study Guild ([www.naturestudy.com](http://www.naturestudy.com)), or you can check one out at the library. Even the youngest children will enjoy matching prints with animals, and making tracks of their own in the mud or the snow.

7. Listen. See how many sounds you can identify. Something tapping on a tree? Maybe it's a woodpecker. A rustling in the underbrush? Guess whether it's a squirrel, chipmunk, or snake. Help kids be aware of the sounds around them and nurture their imagination.

8. Offer applause for God. Jot down this version of Psalm 96 from Eugene Peterson's *The Message* and read it together in the woods: "Bravo, God, Bravo! Everyone join in the great shout: Encore! In awe before the beauty, in awe before the might. Bring gifts and celebrate, Bow before the beauty of God, Then to your knees—everyone worship! ... Let Wilderness turn cartwheels, Animals come dance, Put every tree of the forest in the choir—An extravaganza before God as he comes, As he comes to set everything right on earth. "

9. Remember: Leave only footprints, take only photographs.

—Cindy Crosby writes about finding God outdoors in *Waiting for Morning: Hearing God's Voice in the Darkness* (Baker). Her new books, *We've Got a Latté in Common* (Harvest House) and *By Willoway Brook: Exploring the Landscape of Prayer* (Paraclete) release in early 2003.

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