

The Great Outdoors... By Mary J. Ferrill



Who does not love the great outdoors, especially a beautiful forest full of all types of trees? Well, me... literally. I have had horrible (that is putting it mildly) allergies since I was a little girl. I sum it up by telling people I am allergic to "life," such as dust, pollen and grass, which are at the top of an exceedingly long list. I had hoped my allergies would improve as I got older, but they have only gotten worse – to the point of triggering symptoms of asthma. I tried to hide the condition from my parents when I was young. I tried allergy shots as an adult, but they did not help much. I now take just about every oral, nasal, eye and inhalation OTC and prescription medication available for allergies and asthma. They help to a certain degree, but every time I go for a walk where there are trees, I have to take enough Kleenex to outfit the entire Brady Bunch. My eyes and nose start to weep and itch, making for a less-than-pleasant experience in the woods.

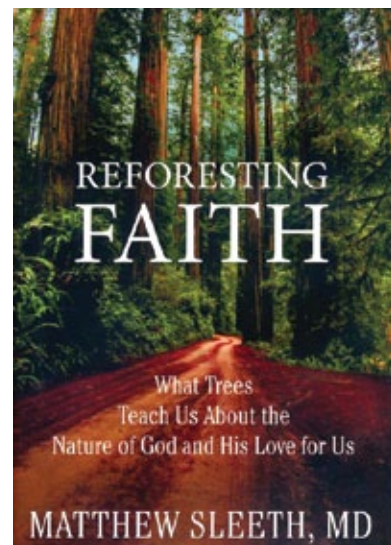
As a child, my allergies worsened because my father was (what I called) a "Tree Doctor." He had a PhD in forestry and taught courses at a university during the fall and spring semesters. Every summer our family would pile in an un-airconditioned

pickup camper and travel the country to visit state and national forests in the continental US, Canada, and Mexico. My dad especially loved the forests out west. We hiked the Grand Canyon, the Sequoia and Big Trees, Yosemite, and Yellowstone parks, just to name a few. I adored my father, so I wanted to spend as much time with him as possible – even though I was miserable for 3 months out of the year, visiting and loving nature that did not love me back. And I was not off the hook the rest of the year because we lived on a certified "Tree Farm," which meant we had over 100 different species of trees on our property. I loved spending time with my dad, so I was out there with him every day, always trying to hide my severe allergies. He would have been devastated if he knew how much I suffered. I never quite understood his fascination with trees, but I went along just to be near him. I lost my father many years ago, so I am very thankful that I endured the outdoors and spent that precious time with him as he told me about his love for Jesus and trees. He always said that when you go for a walk in the woods, you truly see the essence of God. My father loved and served Jesus. He was a great role model for me of how to live a life worthy of the Lord.

I recently came across a book that I intuitively know my father would have enjoyed. The book is titled, *Reforesting Faith: What Trees Teach Us About the Nature of God and His Love for Us*, by Matthew Sleeth, MD. The book helped me to appreciate my dad's love and fascination for trees and how they are essential to our understanding of God, although I was too young to understand this perspective when my father was alive. Did you know that the King James Bible contains almost 1000 references to trees, parts of trees, and items made from trees? (Other translations contain slightly fewer references.)

How could I have missed something so obvious during the many times I have read through the Bible? In his book, Dr. Sleeth explains that trees are found at the start of the Bible (Genesis 1:12), in the first book of Psalms (Psalm 1:3), in the first book of the New Testament (Matthew 3:10 and 11 other appearances), and the last section of Revelation (the tree of life in Revelation 22:20). Dr. Sleeth states that the wisdom found in the Bible represents itself as the "tree of life" (Psalm 3:18) and that "every important Bible character and every major event has [some part of] a tree marking the spot" to serve as blueprints for living a Godly life. Dr. Sleeth notes that when you read about a tree or its derivative in the Bible, "you can be confident that heaven is on the way" and we should look for God.

Throughout the Bible, trees are used to illustrate spiritual truths about humanity and God. Humans are instructed to be "trees of righteousness" (Isaiah 61:3, NKJV); Jesus is the true vine (John 15:1), and Jesus used the analogy that the kingdom of heaven is like a tree (Matthew 13:31-31; Luke 13:18-19). Dr. Sleeth notes that "a tree was the only thing that could kill Jesus [the cross was often referred to as a tree, Galatians





3:13 KJV]—and the only thing Jesus ever harmed” [Jesus cursed a fig tree and it died, Mark 11:12-14, 20-21]. Dr. Sleeth also points out that a tree is part of the symbolism of the Trinity: the dove (Holy Spirit), rainbow (God) and olive leaf (Jesus). And lastly, trees represent the promise of life after death since they continue to grow new shoots even if they are cut down (Job 14:7). I highly recommend this book to help us see the Bible from a fresh, new perspective.

Despite concerns about COVID-19 prompting people to avoid exposure by remaining indoors, I hope that everyone can make time to go outside (while maintaining a safe distance if you are hiking with others) and walk among the trees, reflecting on how they represent our Heavenly Father. As Dr. Sleeth states: “the hidden language of trees” is expressed throughout the Bible. Now, when I go for a hike in the woods with my massive supply of Flonase and Kleenex, I smile and think about my earthly father and my Heavenly Father, and how much they both love me and trees.

Christianity and Healing: Asclepius, Hygeia, and the Christian Pharmacist

By Rachel Senn, Dwight Davis, and Daniel Spadaro

“To the angel of the church in Pergamum write: These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword. I know where you live—where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, not even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city—where Satan lives. Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: There are some among you who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin so that they ate food sacrificed to idols and committed sexual immorality. Likewise, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. Whoever has

ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it.” (Revelation 2:12-17, NIV)

This strongly worded letter to the Pergamum Church warns them to hold fast to the truth and repent from their sin of tolerating society’s idolatry. What idolatry was being tolerated by the Christians in Pergamum, and are we as Christian pharmacists tolerating similar idolatry today?

First-century Pergamum

The ancient city of Pergamum (also

known as Pergamon) was a hub of learning and business as well as religious activities. Pergamum had a library that was second only to the one in Alexandria. Their invention of parchment as an alternative to papyrus allowed documents to be kept for long periods of time, increasing the amount of information stored in the city.¹

Pergamum also held a large Asklepeion, or healing center, that drew people from all over the ancient world. Asclepius, the Greek demi-god of healing, was symbolized by a man with a snake wrapped around his staff, known as the Rod of Asclepius (see figure 1).² This healing center was also a temple and place of worship for this pagan god. The physician Galen (129-199 A.D.) was born in Pergamum