

How Children Are Missing Life's Meaning

I escaped a few weeks ago.

I left my job, the city, and – glory, hallelujah! – the internet behind and spent several days at a cabin up north. It was nothing but trees, country roads, a rocky shoreline, and a vast lake. And books. Lots of books.

Until the disconnect comes, it's hard to know just how necessary and restful such a time is.

I thought of these glorious few days spent away from it all while reading a recent *Guardian* [article](#) about a children's camp in Great Britain. There the little ones get away from the hectic pace of life and spend time playing, imagining, and getting outside.

Such camps give a “boost to confidence, social skills, wellbeing and happiness.” Summer Camps Trust coordinator Chris Green explains:

‘By giving children back some ‘real childhood’, so they spend more time playing in green fields, listening to stories and exercising their imagination, and less time posting messages on social media or sweating over quadratic equations, we might see fewer reports and articles on how miserable our children are.’

This is natural. Spend a few days outside, away from the cares of life and in the sunshine and fresh air and it's easy to expect miserableness to fade. Vitamin D tends to have that uplifting effect.

But what if it's more than Vitamin D? Is there something about the quiet, relaxed beauty of the outdoors that does something

to refresh not only our bodies, but our souls as well?

The main book I read while on my vacation – Whittaker Chambers' [*Witness*](#) – hints that this is quite probable.

Describing incidents from boyhood that affected his later life, Chambers writes:

One day I wandered off alone and found myself before a high hedge that I had never seen before. It was so tall that I could not see over it and so thick that I could not see through it. But by lying flat against the ground, I wriggled between the privet stems.

I stood up, on the other side, in a field covered from end to end, as high as my head, with thistles in full bloom. Clinging to the purple flowers, hovering over them, or twittering and dipping in flight, were dozens of goldfinches—little golden yellow birds with black, contrasting wings and caps. They did not pay the slightest attention to me, as if they had never seen a boy before.

Chambers goes on to say:

*The sight was so unexpected, the beauty was so absolute, that I thought I could not stand it and held to the hedge for support. Out loud, I said: 'God.' It was a simple statement, not an exclamation, of which I would then have been incapable. **At that moment, which I remembered through all the years of my life as one of its highest moments,** I was closer than I would be again for almost forty years to the intuition that alone could give meaning to my life—the intuition that God and beauty are one. [Emphasis added.]*

Chambers was alone. He was out in nature. He caught a glimpse of beauty that took his breath away. And in the process, he sensed that there was a deeper meaning to life – a spiritual, supernatural, Divine meaning.

I wonder how often today's children are denied that same opportunity. Are they surrounded by beauty – the beauty that points them to life's deeper meanings?

Sometimes, yes. But many other times, no. Architecture and artwork are more abstract. Technological gizmos and graphics dance before children's eyes – polished, but sterile. Wandering outdoors, soaking in the summer sun, and simply spending time alone marveling at the beauties of nature are a thing of the past thanks to our bubble-wrapped, over-protective society.

But in denying children opportunities to experience the beauties of life, are we also denying them a chance to ponder the meaning of it and their own purpose in it? And when we do so, are we preparing them for a life of discontent, confusion, and disillusion?

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