



*Where is God
in creation and
in our lives?*

Answering the Call of the Open Road

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*Afoot and light-hearted, I take to the open road,
Healthy, free, the world before me,
The long brown path before me, leading wherever I choose.
-Walt Whitman, Song of the Open Road*

Summer is the time when most of us try to find a way to leave our ordinary lives behind for at least a few days. The benefits of travel are many: experiencing new places, getting some rest, and spending time with friends and family are probably at the top of most people's lists. Whitman's open road calls to us for all of these reasons and more, but is it possible to take a fun and relaxing vacation and care for God's creation at the same time? As you take to the open road this summer, here are a few things to think about:

Eco- and wallet-friendly destinations. Much has been written in our down economy about families taking "staycations." This is also an eco-friendly option, can teach you new things about your hometown and has the added benefit of supporting your local economy. Are there museums, botanical gardens, zoos or other attractions in your area that you never have time to visit? A staycation allows you to take advantage of all that your community has to offer, including free activities like concerts and readings that you never manage to fit in your schedule.

Or plan a trip within your own state or region—there are probably more vacation-worthy sites than you realize within a few hours drive of your house. How to find them? Your local paper is a good resource, but check out some travel guides for your state or region from the library to get ideas. And don't forget nearby state or [national parks!](#)

Trains, planes and automobiles. If you have transportation options to get to your vacation destination, which should you choose? Planes emit the most carbon dioxide per person and are the least eco-friendly choice, followed by cars, trains and buses. However, if a car is your best option, there are ways to reduce the impact of your trip. If you're renting a car, choose the most fuel efficient model possible (many companies are now offering hybrid vehicles as an option). If you use your own vehicle, you can [increase your car's fuel efficiency](#) by getting a tune up before you travel and making sure that your tires are inflated properly. This last step can improve your gas mileage by

about 3.3 percent! On your trip, try to keep to the posted speed limit as much as possible and avoid aggressive driving—both can be a major drain on fuel economy. And finally, resist the urge to over pack—an overloaded trunk can also decrease fuel economy.

Finding a place to stay. The [Environmentally Friendly Hotels](#) directory can help you find hotels, motels, and bed-and-breakfasts that are working to conserve resources and reduce waste. If your hotel offers the option of reusing towels and sheets, say yes (if you don't need clean towels or sheets every day at home, why do you need them on vacation?). Turn off the lights and turn up the thermostat in your hotel room when you're out during the day. Take along [refillable water bottles](#) and coffee mugs, and bring cloth napkins and silverware instead of using paper napkins and plastic utensils on the road. Pack your own toiletries and bath supplies instead of using multiple tiny bottles of hotel shampoo, conditioner and lotion.

Remembering your trip. Buy sustainable souvenirs that directly benefit the communities you visit: locally produced honey, jams or hot sauce; crafts or jewelry made by local artisans; and goods that support local organizations. And, of course, digital photos are the ultimate sustainable souvenirs!

Prayer for the Journey

O God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

-Evening Prayer, Evangelical Lutheran Worship, p. 316 (Augsburg Fortress 2006)

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