

July 26, 2020

## **Forgiving, Merciful, Compassionate**

**Nehemiah 9:9-17; 32-33**

Over the years, people have not always been kind to national parks. Increased automobile traffic led to more air and noise pollution. Millions of bathroom breaks increased the demand for water. Regardless of how many signs warn people not to interact with wildlife, every year, we read stories of bears or other animals having to be put down because people wandered too close to their habitats. In wanting to be closer to nature, humans drove that nature back into remote parts of the wilderness.

In late December 2018, the United States government shut down. The closure lasted for more than a month. During that time, government buildings closed, employees were furloughed, and the national parks system shuttered. But we found out that, even if you lock the bathrooms and visitor centers, even if there are no concessionaires or park rangers, people will come to national parks. Tourists continued to pour into the parks by the thousands, leaving trash and human waste with no one to clean it up. Irreparable damage was done to many natural areas because there were no safety officers there to monitor the parks.

Now, in mid-2020, when parks should be chock full of tourists, campers, and employees, many national parks are quiet. The coronavirus pandemic has not only closed parks, but kept visitors away. Wildlife is coming out of the shadows. Pronghorn antelope returned to Death Valley, a coyote was seen lounging in a parking lot in Yosemite, and parks from Yellowstone to Rocky Mountain have shared similar sightings.<sup>1</sup> “There have even been anecdotal reports of reduced human pressures on wild species. In protected areas, declines in visitor numbers caused by travel restrictions and park closures have reduced stresses on sensitive animals and trampling pressure on popular trails.”<sup>2</sup>

Nature, like God, is patient. Nature, like God, is faithful. Though people have acted arrogantly and treated these national lands with disrespect, nature carries on. The student book author writes, “The awesomeness of God reminds us that in the midst of our most pressing needs, we stand before the Creator and Supreme Ruler of the universe.”<sup>3</sup> There is nothing damaged that God cannot heal. There is no sin God cannot forgive. “We must never minimize the gift of forgiveness. God’s forgiveness grows out of divine love toward us. It is God’s free gift to us. We can neither earn nor manufacture it.”<sup>4</sup>

1. What do you think will happen in national parks once the coronavirus pandemic is over?
2. What are ways that we can change our behavior to better protect wildlife and nature once the pandemic has ended?
3. Are there areas of your life that need to be “closed off from others” so they can heal? What are they?

Rachel Mullen is the Features and Acquisitions Editor for *Christian Living in the Mature Years Magazine*.

<sup>1</sup>From [theguardian.com/environment/2020/may/21/wildlife-national-parks-covid-19-shutdown-death-valley](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/may/21/wildlife-national-parks-covid-19-shutdown-death-valley).

<sup>2</sup>From [sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S000632072030495X#s0045](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S000632072030495X#s0045).

<sup>3</sup>From *Adult Bible Studies*, Summer 2020, by Robert Gardner (Cokesbury, 2020); page 81.

<sup>4</sup>From *Adult Bible Studies*; page 84.