

Turning of Days beckons you to a world of tree frogs and peach blossoms, mountain springs and dark winter nights—all in search of nature’s God, all in harmony with Scripture. Join Hannah Anderson, author of *Humble Roots*, as she journeys through the four seasons in this collection of devotional essays and illustrations. Take a look, and see His glory everywhere.

Interested in the whole book?
Select your preferred book seller:

MOODY PUBLISHERS 

APPLE BOOKS



AMAZON



WALMART



GOOGLE PLAY



CHRISTIANBOOK.COM 

BARNES & NOBLE



Contents

From the Author 9

Venturing Out 13

Spring 19

Summer 53

Fall 89

Winter 123

Learning to Listen: A Field Guide 159

Acknowledgments 165

Notes 167

Spring



I.

*"See! The winter is past; the rains are over and gone.
Flowers appear on the earth; the season of singing has come. . . .
Arise, come, my darling; my beautiful one, come with me."*

SONG OF SOLOMON 2:11-13

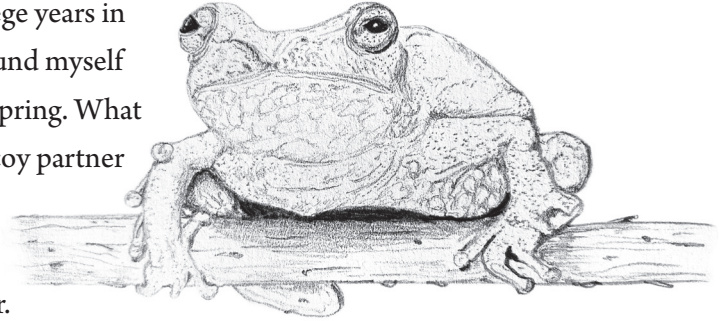
SPRING IN APPALACHIA is a strange mix of hope and persistence. The dark, dreary days of winter do not go easily, and spring comes in on a dance of two steps forward and one back. But soon enough, the mud and slog and slosh are replaced by bits of green and yellow. The crocuses and forsythia bloom, and the trees bud with those at the base of the mountains coming into color first. And slowly, steadily, spring works its way up the ridges and crests in the same hues that, come autumn, will cause the hills to burst into full flame.

But like any lover, an Appalachian spring will flirt with you, testing and trying your commitment. One moment all will be heat and light with a cloudy chill descending the next. We only know spring is serious in its affections when we hear the faint, sweet mating calls of the tree frogs that make their home in our waterways. Weighing just over a one-tenth of an ounce and only an inch long, these "spring peepers" (*Pseudacris*

crucifer) fill the evenings with an ever expanding chorus of hope. Spring is not yet here, but there's no stopping it now.

And yet, as I've come to learn, an Appalachian spring is a particular thing, and the call of spring peepers is not universally understood.

I grew up in the mountains of southwest Pennsylvania, just over the border from West Virginia, but I spent my college years in the southern United States and found myself particularly homesick during the spring. What I knew to be a lilting waltz with a coy partner was, there, a quick step and one headlong plunge into the arms of the sweat and humidity of summer.



The spring of my sophomore year, my homesickness was compounded by a larger sense of alienation. My new friends and classmates had no reference for gray skies that give way to blue, frozen ground that gradually softens, or streams that run heavy with snow melt. And any mention of spring peepers was met with quizzical looks and the assumption that I was talking about baby chicks. Or worse, Easter candy. I was young enough to regard this as more than sufficient proof of my uniqueness, undeniable confirmation that I was alone in the world.

Until one evening.

I'd just finished dinner with a boy I'd recently met, and we were walking to the library where I worked. We were still getting to know each other, but in my current mood, I wasn't interested in much more. He told me he'd been raised in the mountains

of southwest Virginia, further south than where I'd grown up, but not so far south as to not know what spring should look like. Being testy, I decided to test him.

"You know what I miss most about spring?" I baited, "I miss spring peepers."

His answer was immediate and sure, this slightly-awkward religion major dressed in mismatched hand-me-downs.

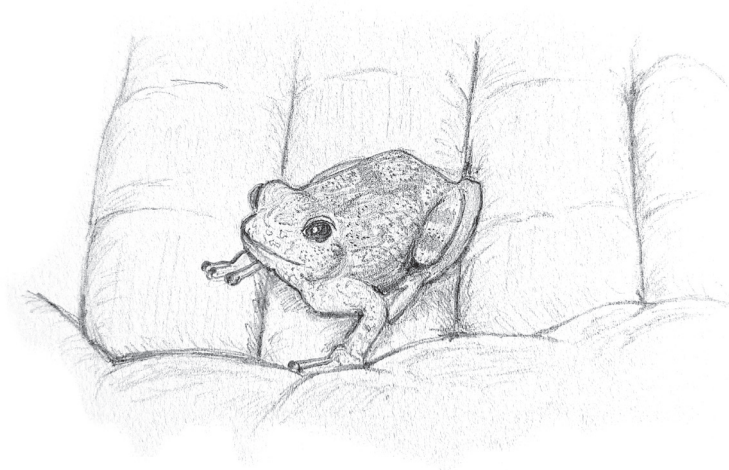
"Me too. Especially this time of night when they're just starting to sing."

Not too long ago, I drove this boy's truck along a winding mountain road on my way home from church. It was already dark, and I could trace my headlights in the fog that hovers and crawls "on little cat feet"² across the mountains. Approaching a narrow bridge that straddles a creek, I slowed, and I heard them. I heard those tiny warblers singing their chorus of hope and desire. I heard the sound of love in Appalachia.

If I'm honest, I never expected to live in these mountains. For that matter, I really never expected to marry. And never once did I guess that my first step toward my present life would include spring peepers.

Whenever I'm tempted to doubt God's providence, whenever I'm tempted to think that I somehow missed the life I was supposed to have, when the hard times come and the pain bears down, I remember spring peepers. And I think of how God reveals Himself and His will. He doesn't shout His plans from the mountains so much as He repeats them over and over in low, quiet songs that only make sense to those who know the significance of them. Like spring in Appalachia, His plans unfold in gentle, persistent ways—sometimes two steps forward and one back—but always in rhythm and always in time.

And I think of ancient Eliezer, looking for a bride, and how being in the way, the Lord led him. I think of how we all plan our steps, but God cuts the path. How He



intermingles all the things that we consider inconsequential, all the things that have shaped and molded us, all our pain and all our delight, to bring about our good and make us the same.

So I idle the truck for a moment, there on the bridge, and roll down my windows to listen to the sound of an Appalachian spring. I listen to those tiny frogs sing of providence and goodness and drawing love. I listen, and for this moment at least, all my questions and all my doubts are silenced in the chorus. I listen, and then I make my way home.

SCRIPTURE

Genesis 24; 50:20 | Proverbs 3:5–6; 16:9; 20:24 | Romans 8:28–29

II.

*“Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden;
and there he put the man he had formed.”*

GENESIS 2:8

WE’VE JUST TURNED OVER the garden and started talking about what will go in and when. We don’t have a large plot—not by most people’s imaginations anyway—but it’s enough to grow in, and I’m always amazed by how little land is needed. At least according to the magazine I get that tells me how to produce a year’s worth of food on an acre. Obviously, some crops, like corn or wheat, require more space, and heaven help you if you don’t stake your tomatoes. But with good planning and better tending, a garden requires less land than you might think. In fact, one of nature’s private jokes is that we generally only use 6–12 inches of soil to garden. We literally scratch the surface of this planet to grow our beans, carrots, and cucumbers. And while I love the biology of it, I love the geometry more: the layering of crops and reclaiming soil in raised beds and containers. I love how good stewardship can bring abundance from little.

So I’m out in our little patch this afternoon thinking that dirt is a wondrous thing. Because if I wanted to, I could take a pot, fill it with soil, and stick a plant in it. I could take part of this garden and create a smaller garden somewhere else. I could even take

that smaller garden *inside*, and with proper care, it would still grow. “Potted plant” seems too domesticated a term for miracle.

I spot a bit of green in the upturned soil. It’s chickweed, a seed carried by wind and bird, and it’s already put down roots in my garden. I dislodge it with the tip of my boot, but I know this is a temporary measure. Kick the plant to the side, but wherever it lands, it will just put its roots down again, as if some force is drawing it toward the earth. I also know that it’s just a matter of time before this entire plot erupts with life, whether I plant it or not. In many ways, gardening is a race to see who stakes claim to the soil first—whose plants get to grow and where. Mine or nature’s?

Because even though I can’t see it, the ground is right now teeming with life and the potential for life. And perhaps the best way to understand the soil under my feet is to think of it as an ecosystem painstakingly designed to support flourishing. It regulates moisture and provides a home for microbes. It filters pollutants and reserves nutrients. And if that’s not enough, it literally roots plants to the surface of the earth.

Don’t let the ubiquity of dirt fool you. It is a wonder.

Which gives me pause when I think that God, when He wanted to make a creature in His own likeness, stooped down, and took a handful of dirt. I once had someone object to my choice to describe human beings this way because she felt that it devalued us. I thought (but did not say) that she did not understand soil. To be marked as soil is no slight. To be marked as soil is to speak of potential and life and vitality.

This does not mean that all soil is healthy. In fact, the very ground from which we were taken was eventually cursed, so that today, poor soil quality is a primary cause of poor yield, especially if the soil’s been mismanaged, abused, or stripped of its

biodiversity. This is, after all, the point of the parable that Jesus tells about the farmer whose seed falls on different types of soil.

If soil is hard and compact, like a footpath, a seed cannot penetrate it and is quickly eaten by surrounding wildlife. If soil is stony, a seed might initially sprout, but it won't have sufficient room for its roots. If soil is already full of other plants (like my garden threatens to be), a seed can't get enough nutrients and suffocates. But if a seed finds good soil—the kind that's been carefully tended, that's been prepared, that's had the stones and weeds plucked out—it will bring forth a harvest a hundred times itself.

I continue through our plot, kicking aside clumps of dirt as I do. The earth underneath is darker, owing to the moisture it's holding, while the top layer, already dry, is a lighter, rusty brown. This soil is not refined like that in the raised bed of my herb garden; this is working soil, rugged and gritty. But I also see the bits of eggshell and vegetable scraps that we've composted and worked into it. I remember that we'll add a load of manure and work that in too.

The good news about soil—even poor soil—is that it can be cultivated. You may not be able to control the kind of ground you inherit, but you can control what you do with it. The good news about those who've been made from earth is that we too can be cultivated.

Because there's another story Jesus tells His disciples: A landowner has a fig tree that isn't producing fruit, so he decides to cut it down. "Why should it use up the soil?" he reasons. But a wise servant steps in and says, "Sir, leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down."³

So often we focus on poor quality fruit or lack of yield and throw our hands up in defeat. In reality, the real questions are more fundamental: *Do you want a good crop? Do you want to see the fruit of goodness in your life and in those you love? Do you want to see a harvest of righteousness?*

Don't cut the tree down; cultivate the soil. See what happens.

And I can't help but think of all the ways I've been worked over—how many ways and how many times my heart has been broken open, the weeds stripped out, and the rocks dislodged. I can see how the Father's working His soil like any faithful gardener would. I see how He's tending His bit of earth, how He's cultivating the ground until it's honest and good and ready to receive His Word. And I'm confident that, just as He did in Eden, He will cause even the smallest of gardens to flourish with life.

SCRIPTURE

Genesis 2:7–9; 3:17–19 | Luke 8:4–15; 13:6–9 | Philippians 1:6

III.

*"They go out to their work, searching for food.
The wilderness yields food for them and for their children."*

J O B 24 : 5 N K J V

WHEN I WAS YOUNG, I was deathly afraid of toadstools for the simple reason that I'd been told they would cause my death.

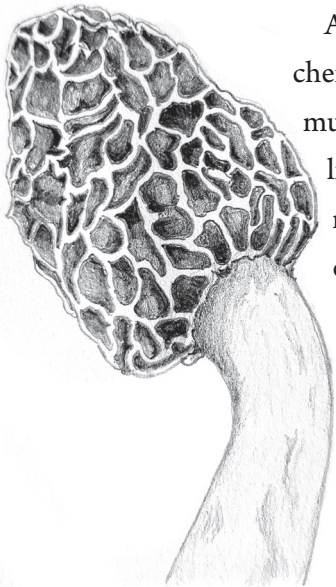
My grandmother was the first to tell me this, and looking back, I find it odd because I know no child who voluntarily eats mushrooms, let alone ones that grow in the wild. Even still, my grandmother felt compelled to warn me of nature's toxicity and to regularly remind me to not eat toadstools. Of course, the warning existed precisely because she did.

Raised in the mountains, my grandmother spent more time outside than inside, the woods and fields more home to her than her house. She kept a large garden and taught me to plant squash among the corn. In summer, she'd pick blackberries and elderberries, and in fall, she'd gather apples and black walnuts. And every spring, she'd forage the woods for a "mess" of young poke greens or other edibles. Knowing children's propensity to mimic behavior, she made sure to tell me to not eat toadstools.

(What's the difference between a toadstool and a mushroom, you wonder? As I remember it, the difference between a toadstool and a mushroom is that a toadstool would kill you and a mushroom would not. But on further inquiry, the word *toadstool* seems to signify the shape of wild fungus most likely to be toxic. If it looks like a stool that a toad could sit on, don't eat it.)

There's more to it than this, of course, as any naturalist can tell you; but with a little knowledge, a spring forest is a wonderful thing. Long before our cultivated plots come into bloom, or even before we've cultivated them, the forest comes to life with enough vegetation to give you hope—but not so much as to make you forget winter's scarcity. The trees will begin to bud even as the ground beneath them lies blanketed with last season's leaves. They'll crunch under your feet as you walk, but you'll also see bits of green poking through them and clusters of wildflowers here and there. The air will hold a slight chill, but the springs and creeks will run with snow melt. If you crane your head back and look up to the sky, you'll be able to see blue between the bare branches, the leafy canopy still a few weeks off; and if you bend your head down and look to the earth, you'll find the earliest wild edibles: pokeweed, ramps, fiddlehead ferns, wild onions and garlic, dandelions, and if you're lucky enough, morels.

As mushrooms go, morels are something of a celebrity sighting, highly prized by chefs and locals alike. Because they're difficult to cultivate, morels have become a multimillion dollar industry with demand met by harvesting them in the wild. But like other wild mushrooms, they require just the right conditions to emerge. They need damp days and rising temperatures; the soil must be moist and reach 50–52 degrees Fahrenheit. And then, as if overnight, they'll burst from the earth.



But you'll need to watch more than the weather to *find* morels. For this, you'll need to know both how to look for them and how to *see* them. Some morel hunters claim that you can find morels near dead and decaying elm, tulip poplar, and ash trees. Others stake out land to hunt year after year. You'll have to search through underbrush, fallen leaves, and new vegetation. You'll have to be patient and thorough. And if all else fails, you can use a "search image" technique in which you hold a picture of a morel in your mind while scanning the ground for a similar shape.

Still, my grandmother's warning was not without cause. Because the same spring forest that offers up morels and other wild edibles, also offers up plants and fungus that are toxic. To make matters worse, some plants are edible only at certain stages; or some parts of the plant are edible, while other parts of the same plant are not. Some toxic plants even masquerade as edible plants, luring the ignorant and inexperienced. For example, not all young ferns can be eaten, despite their coiling heads. Pokeweed that is too old or improperly prepared can leave you with stomach pain. And a false morel is not the same as the true one, so please don't eat the toadstools.

Here are the stakes: The same ground that is blessed is also cursed. The same ground that gives us plants for food also gives us thorns and thistles. It brings forth both life and death. Eat the right thing, and you will live; eat the wrong thing, and you will die.

Given the dangers associated with the earth, it could be easy to skip foraging altogether. And I suppose in a modern context, we have that luxury. Who would take the risk when you can simply buy food at the grocery store? Because despite the growing interest in foraging, I know that we don't do it for the same reasons my

grandmother did or her grandmother or her grandmother before that. Foraging is peasant's work, the gifts of the earth to those who most need it. But I also wonder if we're missing out, if we're missing out on morels and ramps and fiddleheads. I wonder if our search for safety means that we're not searching for goodness.

So what are we to do? In foraging circles, the solution is simple: you learn. You learn what is good and what is bad so you can enjoy the good.

Like many such skills, foraging is primarily passed down from person to person; and in the absence of a grandmother to tell you not to eat the toadstools, you can opt for guided walks, classes, and even books. But mostly, you have to put the time in. You have to learn by doing. Because as any seasoned forager can attest, goodness does not grow in neat clumps or carefully tended rows. It is wild, and you have to work for it. You'll have to go out in the chilly spring rain and tramp for miles. You'll have to keep a keen eye, and even then, you'll likely miss what's right in front of your face. You'll have to admit what you don't know, and in humility and patience, learn from others.

Likewise, the psalmist tells us that the earth is full of the Lord's goodness, and in Philippians 4:8, the apostle Paul invites us to forage for this goodness, neither fully accepting nor rejecting what the world offers. Instead, he invites us to search out "whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable." Because if you do—if you're humble enough to learn the difference between life and death, if you seek whatever is excellent and worthy of praise, if you look for it in the underbrush and around trees and hidden in the hillsides, if you take the time and make the effort—you're sure to find it.

And when you do, you'll realize that you've been surrounded by the Lord's goodness all along.

SCRIPTURE

Genesis 1:11–12, 29–30 | Psalm 27:13; 33:5; 136:25; 145:15 | Matthew 6:31–33
Romans 12:2 | 1 Thessalonians 5:21 | Philippians 4:8–9

Interested in the whole book?
Select your preferred book seller:

MOODY PUBLISHERS 

AMAZON 

APPLE BOOKS 

WALMART 

GOOGLE PLAY 

BARNES & NOBLE 

CHRISTIANBOOK.COM 