

Benefits of Country Living

After a long day of teaching in the city of Jerusalem, Jesus retired to the Garden of Gethsemane to decompress and reconnect with His Father. Likewise, when the disciples returned from a tiring circuit of preaching and healing, Jesus advised them, “Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while” (Mark 6:31).

There’s something restorative about a country environment—physically and spiritually.

Some studies even suggest that people living in rural areas tend to be more religiously inclined than those living in metropolitan areas. And why not? We are all influenced by our environment, and the awesome wonders of nature naturally direct our attention to the One who designed them.

Yet ever since “Cain went out from the presence of the Lord” and built a city (Gen. 4:16, 17), people have been congregating in metropolitan settings, largely because of perceived safety in numbers and convenience. According to the U.N. Population Division, as of 2010, more people were living in urban areas than in rural areas for the first time in history. In 2020, 56 percent of the world’s population was urban. In North America, 83.6 percent of residents now live in cities.

According to Ellen White’s counsel, however, city life is not an ideal environment for experiencing an abundant life. “There is not one family in a hundred who will be improved, physically, mentally, or spiritually, by residing in the city. Faith, hope, love, happiness, can far better be gained in retired places, where there are fields and hills and trees.”

Indeed, God Himself is a gardener. “The Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden” (Gen. 2:8). It’s little wonder, then, that the surroundings of nature would be a more ideal environment for humanity; after making the garden, “there He put the man whom He had formed” (verse 8).

So while you might find several advantages to city living, let’s take a moment to examine some of the practical benefits realized in country living.

1. More Space and Privacy

Did you know that homes in rural areas typically have more square footage and acreage? Country homes are also generally more spread out, so you don’t have to hear everything your neighbor says or does through paper-thin apartment walls.

The prophet Isaiah said, “Woe to those who join house to house; they add field to field, till there is no place where they may dwell alone in the midst of the land” (Isa. 5:8). “It was not God’s purpose that people should be crowded into cities, huddled together in terraces and tenements.”

2. Cleaner Air and Water

Away from congested freeways that foul the air and concrete jungles that taint the water, many country environments still have areas where clear streams and fresh air can be found.

“Because I give waters in the wilderness and rivers in the desert, to give drink to My people, My chosen” (Isa. 43:20), the prophet Isaiah said. And we’re reminded: “The physical surroundings in the cities are often a peril to health. The constant liability to

contact with disease, the prevalence of foul air, impure water, impure food, the crowded, dark, unhealthful dwellings, are some of the many evils to be met.”

3. Safer Environment, Less Vice, Crime

It's really simple math. Because the average person is unconverted, wherever you have a concentration of lost people you will naturally have a concentration of sin and the works of the flesh.

“Destroy, O Lord, and divide their tongues, for I have seen violence and strife in the city” (Ps. 55:9). “The world over, cities are becoming hotbeds of vice. On every hand are the sights and sounds of evil. . . . The tide of corruption and crime is continually swelling. Every day brings the record of violence.”

4. More Direct Exposure to Creation

While cities might contain some engineering marvels and amazing architecture, nothing can compare with the awesome lessons taught through the inspiring grandeur and creatures of the natural world.

“Ask the beasts, and they will teach you; and the birds of the air, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you. . . . Who among all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this . . . ?” (Job 12:7-10).

We are counselled: “The Lord desires His people to move into the country, where they can settle on the land, and raise their own fruit and vegetables, and where their children can be brought in direct contact with the works of God in nature. Take your families away from the cities.”

5. Less Distracting Noise

It's almost always easier to hear the still small voice of the Holy Spirit in a country environment. It was while plowing that Elisha was called to ministry. Moses was leading sheep, Gideon was threshing wheat, and Amos was gathering fruit. It was by a river in the wilderness that John the Baptist introduced Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world:

“The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God’ ” (Isa. 40:3).

“Take your children away from the sights and sounds of the city,” Ellen White urges, “away from the rattle and din of streetcars and teams, and their minds will become more healthy. It will be found easier to bring home to their hearts the truth of the Word of God.”

6. A Lower Cost of Living

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, living in a city costs, on average, 18 percent more than living in a rural area.

“It is no time now for God's people to be fixing their affections or laying up their treasure in the world. The time is not far distant, when, like the early disciples, we shall be forced to seek a refuge in desolate and solitary places. . . . And now, instead of seeking expensive dwellings here, we should be preparing to move to a better country, even a heavenly.”

7. Less Stress

Country living can often provide a more relaxed schedule, one not controlled by an endless round of meetings, gridlock traffic, and phone alerts.

Consider this kind of living situation: “He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul” (Ps. 23:2, 3).

“Instead of dwelling where only the works of men can be seen, where the sights and sounds frequently suggest thoughts of evil, where turmoil and confusion bring weariness and disquietude, go where you can look upon the works of God. Find rest of spirit in the beauty and quietude and peace of nature.”

8. Better Physical Development

The rigors of living in the country generally provide more consistent, natural, and productive exercise options, all without needing an expensive health club membership. God led Moses into the wilderness to prepare him spiritually and physically for the demands of leading a new nation from the bondage of Egypt to the borders of the Promised Land.

“He also brought them out with silver and gold, and there was none feeble among His tribes” (Ps. 105:37).

“In country places abundant useful exercise will be found in doing those things that need to be done, and which will give physical health by developing nerve and muscle. Out of the cities is my message for the education of our children.”

9. A Clearer Comprehension of Scripture

Our understanding of Scripture is enhanced by our familiarity with nature. Many of the songs of David, the allegories of the prophets, and the proverbs of Jesus are drawn from the beautiful imagery better seen by one who lives in rural areas.

“Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving; sing praises on the harp to our God, who covers the heavens with clouds, who prepares rain for the earth, who makes grass to grow on the mountains. He gives to the beast its food, and to the young ravens that cry” (Ps. 147:7-9).

“Let the eye rest on the green fields, the groves, and the hills. Look up to the blue sky, unobscured by the city’s dust and smoke, and breathe the invigorating air of heaven.”

10. Large Cities Will Be the Epicentres of Trouble in the Last Days

During the past few years, we have seen vivid evidence of how social unrest can quickly erupt into violence in the world’s metropolitan centres. In large cities, shortages of fuel and other essentials can leave city dwellers feeling vulnerable and helpless, especially when angry crowds roam the streets and store shelves are bare.

“God said to Noah, ‘The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth’ ” (Gen. 6:13).

“With violence the great city Babylon shall be thrown down, and shall not be found anymore” (Rev. 18:21).

“The time is near when the large cities will be visited by the judgments of God. In a little while, these cities will be terribly shaken.”

Determining God's Will for You

When considering these benefits of country living and the casualties of city life, three things should be kept foremost in our minds.

First, God has not yet called all His people to evacuate the world's cities. When Elijah ran prematurely from the city of Samaria into the wilderness, God asked him, "What are you doing here?" (1 Kings 19:9).

Nor is God calling His people to isolate themselves like hermits or monks in a wilderness monastery to "save themselves." The message of Jesus is not about self-preservation but evangelization. Ministry to the multitudes of lost souls in the cities of the world must continue until probation closes.

"When they persecute you in this city, flee to another. For assuredly, I say to you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes" (Matt. 10:23). "Until it is possible for them to leave [the cities], so long as they remain, they should be most active in doing missionary work."

Second, even if the Lord has impressed your family to move to a rural environment, do so with much prayer, careful thought, and planning. Buying the wrong property or moving too quickly can drain the bank account and strain a marriage. "There may be individuals who will make a rush to do something and enter into some business they know nothing about. This God does not require. . . . To understand the will of God is a great thing."

Finally, there will be a pivotal event that signals when believers should leave cities in preparation for the end: "The time is not far distant when, like the early disciples, we shall be forced to seek a refuge in desolate and solitary places. As the siege of Jerusalem by the Roman armies was the signal for flight to the Judean Christians, so the assumption of power on the part of our nation, in the decree enforcing the papal sabbath, will be a warning to us. It will then be time to leave the large cities, preparatory to leaving the smaller ones for retired homes in secluded places among the mountains."

Wherever you pitch your tent in this world, remember that all Christians are ultimately looking for that "better country" (see Heb. 11:16), which the meek shall inherit, a place where "everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid" (Micah 4:4).