

Breathe Easier

by Julie Mickler

Having grown up in a family that spent a lot of time outdoors, I always find that time in nature refreshes my soul. Whether at the beach, the mountains, or in my own backyard, I breathe easier outdoors.

Although I see and experience God everywhere, I find I'm especially drawn to trees. Their majesty, strength, and beauty are such perfect qualities to help me understand myself, the world, and God.

Looking at the branches of a tree, I notice that some grow straight, others grow unevenly, and still others bow and bend in unlikely ways. They don't fight for space; they just move and adjust, allowing for each branch to reach just enough sun. Each one is beautiful and unique on its own, but together they create a canopy that is breathtaking.

As I pray and ponder, I realize this tree is a lot like our human family. We are not all the same. You might bend one way; I might bend another. We both flourish when we allow for our differences. **We are stronger when our branches conjoin.** We live in harmony when all branches are seen as equal, beautiful, and, indeed, holy.

The wisdom of this tree inspires me to reach out to all the other different and uneven branches around me. I may not understand why their branches bend the way they do, but I'm anxious to learn.

Whenever I pause to reflect on the world as a part of God's creation, I am reminded that there is enough love and light for all. And I breathe a little easier. ■

