

# **A Sustainable Environment: Our Obligation to Protect God's Gift**

by

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## **Biophilia is Good for Your Health**

Have you ever stopped to think what life was like when Homo sapiens first started living on this earth, say 100,000 or so years ago? Accepting for now that this timeline is correct, during the first 99,800 years man has lived in open spaces, in the mountains, in the savannahs, next to and on lakes, along rivers, in the forests, and the open lands. Basically, man has lived with nature including birds, animals and other species. This kind of living was considered normal and has been imbedded in the human genes over these many, many years as being normal. This is called biophilia from the Greek words meaning love of nature.

In the last 200 or so years, man has been living among steel, glass, concrete, brick and mortar, and plastic. Based on the history of human mankind, this is not normal. So when people go on vacations, they want to go to places that make them feel good. Where is that? They go to lakes, mountains, open spaces, and rivers in order to get away from the unnatural living. Looking out into open spaces or looking out into a lake or river makes people feel good. Why are lakefront properties more expensive than inland property? Because they are in greater demand by people wanting to feel good. For the same reason, properties bordering golf courses are more desirable because the owners can look out into an open field, view nature and feel real good.

You might also consider what kind of art work you will find in most homes. It is probably pictures of landscape or sea scenes. Why? Because it makes the people feel good when looking at them – looking at nature. You may also note that when you walk through a hospital, almost all of the pictures on the walls are that of landscape scenes. This is for the same reason – to help the patients, and visitor, feel better when looking at them.

People visit their doctors to be examined and usually given a prescription in order to feel better. This is something that everyone relies on when they might be ill and need to feel better. Health prescriptions don't have to be obtained only in a bottle or a pill pack. There are doctors today that write "nature prescriptions" to spend an hour each week playing tennis, for instance, or explore all the baseball or soccer fields near your home. This is actually happening. Dr. Robert Zarr, a pediatrician in Washington, D.C. writes up to 10 "park prescriptions" per day requiring his patients to go to a park to improve their health.

Going to a park provides numerous benefits. Studies have shown that relaxation outdoors can lower blood pressure and reduce other markers of stress. Going outside also encourages people to get moving by hiking, biking, gardening or strolling. Parks also provide a great place for interacting with others and guard against loneliness while fostering community. Research has shown that spending time in green space can reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety.

And chances are the air you breathe in a park will be better for your health than the air in the big city. As already indicated above, parks are a great example of biophilia and you will feel good.

In 2017, Dr. Zarr founded Park RX America to make it easier for more health professionals to write “park prescriptions” for patients of all ages. This has become so important and popular that Park RX is now in 33 states and Washington, D.C. One of the added benefits of these prescriptions is that they are free and can be refilled very easily.

Another example of how biophilia, as a form of sustainability, can improve human life is Dubai’s planned Sustainable City. This is a city that should be completed by the end of 2019 and is expected to be truly sustainable meaning it will provide environmental, social and economic benefits. It will go that extra step beyond LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) building certification to provide also social and economic benefits. It will consist of 500 villas and 89 apartments laid out in a grid pattern providing a buffer zone. This buffer zone will include an equestrian track and a bike track lined with tall trees for sequestering carbon dioxide and providing a line of defense against air contaminants. The narrow streets will have no cars and will be traveled only by pedestrians and communal GPS-tracked electric buggies. This environment is very much designed to draw people outdoors.

The Sustainable City also will have a string of greenhouses through its center which will grow many of the fruits and vegetables needed by the citizens. This city is combining the benefits of sustainability as well as biophilia. In other words, it will provide for the planet as well as the health of its people.

So make some time in your schedule in find a place to visit in order to enjoy nature and improve your health.