

DISCOVERY SERIES

# All Creation Sings



**DR. PAUL BRAND**



*introduction*

# All Creation Sings

**D**r. Paul Brand lived through all but the first 14 years of the 20th century. During those years, many of them spent as a missionary doctor in India, he was able to witness the hand of the Creator working to heal the disease-wracked bodies of those who suffer from Hanson's disease. But because he was also fascinated by the natural world, Dr. Brand saw the Creator's hand at work in

the birds and the bees, the flowers and the trees. In this booklet, excerpted from *He Satisfies My Soul: A Celebration of God's Creative Gifts for the Body, Mind, and Spirit*, he draws an analogy between the natural gift of good soil and our spiritual growth and nourishment as followers of Christ.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Mart DeHaan". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of "Mart" and "DeHaan" being capitalized and prominent.

MART DEHAAN

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Managing Editor: J. R. Hudberg  
Cover Design: Terry Bidgood  
Cover Image: iStockPhoto  
Interior Design: Steve Gier  
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*one*

# God's Good Earth

*The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being (GEN. 2:7). Dust you are and to dust you will return (GEN. 3:19).*

**remember sitting** with my mother on the steps of the guesthouse at a leprosy hospital in India. We were facing east and the sun was rising over the mountains, flooding us with early light. I was soon to leave India, and Mother had a prophetic sense that she would not see me

again. At 95, Mother knew she wouldn't live much longer and was giving me instructions about the way she wanted to be buried: "Don't let them make a coffin for me," she pleaded. "Too many trees are being cut down on the hills. There's no sense in making a box for me to be buried in. It is just a waste of wood. Tell them to wrap me in an old sheet—not a new one—and let them scatter flowers over my body before they lower me into the ground."



"I know they will want to cry, because they love me. But tell them to choose joyful hymns to sing, and hymns of victory. It's not me that they will be burying, just my old body. I am going to be with my Lord. I may even be able to see them singing. I shall not be crying, and will not regret that my body returns to the earth. It has been a good body, but it has been getting weak and stiff; it's time to put it away."

I couldn't reply. We just sat together, holding hands, until the sun became too hot. We went indoors and had breakfast, and I left the hospital. Her prophetic sense was correct; we never saw each other again. My fellow worker Dr. Ernest Fritschi had to fulfill the functions of a son by taking my mother's body up to the mountains and making arrangements for her burial.

There is something triumphant about the death of a

*There is something triumphant about the death of a saint. Dust to dust, yes, but it's also the spirit's leaping up to God after the completion of its great adventure.*

saint. Dust to dust, yes, but it's also the spirit's leaping up to God after the completion of its great adventure. Hallelujah! God has done it again! He has allowed a mass of lifeless earth to come to life and live and breathe and think and love for years and years of creative activity.

I have returned to the church my father and mother built on those mountains in India. I have seen the tombstones that mark the places where, side by side, they returned to dust. I cry because I cannot help it, but I thank God that their life goes on. It goes on in me and in my sister, and in our children who inherited their seed. It also goes on in the lives of those who came to know and love God as a result of their ministry.

## **The Wonder Of Soil And Seed**

The soil and the seed. The substance and the spirit. The two go together, yet each has its own cycle. The seed carries life encoded in its nucleus. It must be passed on to the new generation while the old generation is still alive. The flame

must not die. Soil has its own kind of continuity. Soil may rest as mud, inert and lifeless, for centuries. Then, at the arrival of a seed, it becomes something new and life-giving, part of a fruit that is eaten. Later it returns as dust to wait in the ground for the stimulus of a new seed to wake it up so it can share in life again.

Earth and soil are so amazing that it is not surprising that those who live close to the earth, farming it for food, sometimes develop a mystical sense that soil is life. Sometimes, when I begin to feel proud of humanity's accomplishments, I go out into the night and gaze up at the heavens. If it's daytime, I go into the old-growth forests of our Pacific Northwest and look up at the trees. When I tire of bigness, I take a magnifying glass, lie face down, and explore a single square yard of garden soil.

Try it sometime. If you want to open up a new horizon of delight, buy a magnifying glass and a children's guide on soil. Get to know the worms; they are working for you, helping grow your food. Termites are often viewed as the enemy, but for every one that eats the wood in your house, there are a thousand that reduce fallen trees and twigs to new soil. Soil is a living community; billions of organisms, preparing it to grow all the fruits and vegetables we love to eat.



## Against All Odds

My daughter Estelle and her family live on the Big Island of Hawaii. They have a few acres of trees—fruit and macadamia nut trees. Their home is in the shadow of Kilauea, the most continuously active volcano in the world.

The ground is hot and cracks reveal the red glow of molten rock on its way to the sea. You can't get close to the actual meeting point of lava and sea, but the clouds of steam from boiling water and the red glow under the sea at the shore can be seen from a distance.

Estelle's house and garden stand on lava rock, and fruit trees grow in cracks. I was skeptical when I saw the

***However, we know God created the world and makes all things in it harmonize and balance. He gave us a self-sustaining system.***

kind of "soil" in which they planned to grow their fruit and nuts, but no longer. The spongy textured rock holds water, and the roots go deep through cracks, reaching layers of soil from before the last lava flow. Drill-hole samples show that layers of soil and layers of spongy rock lie atop each other like chocolate layer cake. It seems as though everything works together to sustain life.

It's not surprising that those who don't know God often see the earth itself as a living thing, perhaps a god—every aspect working together in harmony. However, we know God created it and makes all things in it harmonize and balance. He gave us a self-sustaining system.

Looking south from Seattle, where we live, I can see Mount Rainier above the clouds. I know that it is standing on the ground, but the base is often shrouded in mist. The 14,000-foot peaks challenge the climber and delight those who commute to work. In my younger days I would have found it hard to resist the challenge to reach its summit. Now I am content to view the floating peaks and explore the lower slopes. I find the mountain most exciting about halfway up, or a little higher. At that elevation, the great trees give way to the smaller scrubby trees of the timberline, and then to flower meadows, and finally a little higher to that battleground where life struggles to maintain a foothold, fighting against winter blizzards and freezing temperatures.

Against all odds, against the chilling frost and wind, when the snow recedes in early summer, there they stand—those exquisite alpine flowers. They had been buried beneath the snow but are ready to delight all who appreciate them.

At such altitudes the cycle of life moves rapidly. There

are not many days of sunshine and warmth for all the business of budding, flowering, fruiting, and seeding that must be completed before the first frosts of winter force the plants to withdraw from the chilling winds.

## **Keepers Of The Field**

So life goes on, the cycle continues. As God's servants, we assist in the care of His good earth. We have an active part in making sure that we—and others—don't interfere with God's plan for sustaining life. I have a vivid childhood memory of someone who did just that. I was playing with a group of Indian boys in one of the rice paddies near our home in the mountains. Rice needs flooded fields for certain stages of its cultivation, and there was no level ground in the mountains. The hill tribes had developed a method of terracing their fields into the course of a stream so that each field was about a foot higher than the field below, and was quite level, being bordered at its lower edge by a grass-covered dam to hold its water. Little channels were cut at intervals along the dams to allow a trickle of the stream into the field below.

Where the valley was steep, the fields were narrow. They were wide where the slope was shallow. The water from the one stream watered each field in turn, and kept the mud moist enough for rice. The constant wetness was

attractive to frogs and small fish and also to herons who came after the frogs.

Small boys also enjoy mud and frogs, so it happened that my friends and I were having a game of who would be the first to catch three frogs. This involved a lot of plunging about in the mud in the corner of one of the fields.

Suddenly the oldest boy called out, "Tata is coming!" and we all scrambled out of the mud. Tata means "grandfather," and is a term of respect for any elderly man. The particular Tata we had seen coming our way was the owner of one of the fields and the keeper of the dams. He was the one who saw to it that nobody got more than his fair share of water when the stream was running dry. We all knew that we had not been careful with the rice seedlings; we deserved and expected a rebuke.

Tata was old and stooped over. He found it difficult to look straight forward. Though he walked slowly and with a cane, none of us thought of running away or of avoiding his stern words. He asked us what we were doing, and the biggest boy, acting as our spokesman, told him we had been catching frogs. Tata looked at the churned-up mud, then scooped up a double handful of it. "What is this?" he asked.

"That is mud, Tata," we replied.

"And whose mud is it?"

"It is your mud, Tata, and we have broken your seedlings. We are very sorry, and we will never do it again."

But Tata had more to say. "There is enough mud in my hands to grow a whole meal of rice for one person. This same mud will grow a meal of rice every year. It has been doing it for my parents and grandparents long before I was born. It will go on growing rice for my grandchildren and their children for many generations."

"Yes, Tata."

Then the old man moved over to the nearest of the water channels across the earthen dam. He pointed to it. "What do you see there?" he asked.

"That is water," replied our spokesman.

For the first time the old man showed his anger. "I'll show you water," he growled, and limped on a few steps to the next channel, where clear water was flowing over the grass. "That is water," he said, and returned to the first channel. "Now tell me what you see there."

"That is mud, Tata," the boy said humbly, "It is muddy water. This is your mud that is running down to the lower field, and it will never grow food for you again, because mud never runs uphill. Once it has gone, it is gone forever."

Tata wanted to make sure we all got the message. Leaning on his staff, he straightened his back as far as he could, so he could look at each one of us. "When you

see mud running in the streams of water you know that life is running out of the mountains. It will never come back." He turned and began to limp away, softly repeating to himself, "It will never come back."



That was seventy years ago, but I never forgot the lesson. It is a universal truth—mud never runs uphill. When erosion takes away our topsoil, life is flowing away. It will never come back . . . never.

## **A Losing Battle?**

I have learned to respect the folk wisdom that is passed from generation to generation in lands that have no schools. One of the boys I was playing with that day is probably called Tata today, patrolling the paddy fields, striking fear into the hearts of small boys, making sure that the mud of life stays in the mountains. We all could use some folk wisdom about how to care for the earth God has given us.

For thousands of years a sturdy, simple people have lived high on slopes of the Himalayan mountain in Nepal. Most of them live in well-watered valleys between mountain ranges. Over the centuries the Nepalese have farmed the valleys and have grown crops on the little

***It is a universal truth—mud never runs uphill. When erosion takes away our topsoil, life is flowing away. It will never come back . . . never.***

ledges where trees have held the soil wherever the slope was shallow enough for their roots to hold.

Today the population has increased, and farming has become more aggressive—more cattle and goats going further afield to graze, and more trees are cut for firewood and for homes. The once wooded slopes are barren. Without the trees, the soil is suddenly free to move, and the rivers that once ran clear are now full of mud.

Bangladesh, a country of fertile plains, has always been subject to flooding when the snows are melting on the Himalayas. The monsoon rains and melted snow fill the great rivers Ganges and Brahmaputra. Some years the flooding reaches a different scale. Not only do the rivers overflow, but the flood is mud, not just water. Homes in Bangladesh fill with mud. That mud was Nepali soil. It had grown crops for generations of mountain people, and now it was gone. It will never come back, and more is being lost every year. And there are more people every year depending on the crops that have less soil to grow in.

Soil is eroding all over the world; much of the problem is man-made and preventable. It is a great tragedy, and little is being done to halt the loss. We who claim to serve the Creator should be asking ourselves whether we are being good stewards of His great gifts.



## **Sower Of Spiritual Seed**

I feel a bit like Tata. I do not have a farm, but I try to pass on the lessons I have learned about soil and water and about our duty to God who left us as stewards of His earth. I see myself as a farmer of spiritual soil, a sower of spiritual seed. Jesus spoke about making His disciples to become fishers of men, but more often He used the picture of sowers of seed and talked about good soil and farmers. In the continuity of spiritual life, the seed and the soil have to come together to create new life, and then to continue life and growth by drawing nourishment from the soil as long as life continues.

To illustrate these truths, Jesus told the parable of "The Sower and the Seed." It could be titled "The Parable of the Seed and the Soil" because the only variable in the parable was the soil. The seed was the same in each example, and the sower was the same. The fruitfulness resulted from

***A good gardener does not trample over the soil he has just planted, and God's gardeners need to be gentle and loving.***

where and into what kind of soil the seed was sown.

A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up (LUKE 8:5).

A pathway is never a good place to plant seed. People's feet beat down the soil, smoothing out any crevices into which the seed can fall and germinate. The soil becomes hardened and any seed that falls there will not find the openness necessary for life and growth. In such situations the Devil is quick to snatch the seed away.

In a physical sense there is a choice that has to be made in the use of the land. It may be used as a farm to grow food or it may become a road and be paved for buildings and travel. The priorities of a community are revealed by the choices it makes. Today in America, prime farmland is being paved over to make way for roads and cities at a record rate. Nearly 3,000 acres of farmland are converted to development purposes each day.

Living seed is not willing to share its space. If the earth

is to be a path, it may as well be paved. If it is to be soil, it must allow the seed to take over and draw nourishment and support from it. To accept the seed, the soil has to be involved.

In a spiritual sense, this path is a picture of a hard heart. The author of Hebrews pleaded with his readers, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion" (HEB. 3:7-8). He was referring to the time when the Israelites were offered a chance to enter the Promised Land but turned back because they did not believe God could or would see them through. The prospect of difficulties and battles ahead made them close their minds and harden their hearts to all God had in store for them.

Perhaps a similar change is taking place in our mental and spiritual outlooks. Spiritual and personal priorities need a softer soil, one that is vulnerable and open to ideas that may require personal involvement.

Jesus desires open hearts and minds in which to sow the seed of His message. He looks to His followers to prepare soil by taking time to plow and hoe and soften it before the seed is planted. A good gardener does not trample over the soil he has just planted, and God's gardeners need to be gentle and loving if we are to see patches of hard earth



*The difference between simply sowing seed and nurturing its growth is the difference between making converts and disciples. Christ calls His followers to make disciples, not just converts.*

transformed into soft soil that allow the seed of the gospel to grow and be fruitful.

## **Used Or Used Up?**

*Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root (MATT. 13:5-6).*

A farm is often described by its size or extent. "For sale: 500-acre farm in southern Iowa. Has been used for corn and soybeans." I would not buy that farm until I knew a lot more about it. The words "has been used" have many implications. Good soil, farmed by good farmers, can grow food for many generations, as Tata knew well. Iowa had deep, rich topsoil when serious farming started in the 19th century. Today, more than 50 percent of that topsoil has been lost. Much of it has been carried down the river into the Gulf of Mexico.

As topsoil becomes thinner, crops become more and more dependent on frequent rainfall and on fertilizers. Many farmers today practice the no-till method, which leaves the roots and stalks behind at harvest. They hold the soil that might be lost by plowing and enrich it as they decay, actually building it up year by year.

Jesus pointed out how plants grown in shallow soil cannot stand much stress. When "shallow soil" means the person has little background knowledge of Scripture or scant experience of Christian fellowship, then we should be careful to follow the planting of the seed with fellowship and instruction in Scripture. It is not responsible "farming" to sow the seed and neglect its continuing care. The difference between simply sowing seed and nurturing its growth is the difference between making converts and disciples. Christ calls His followers to make disciples, not just converts.



## Roots In Competition

*Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. . . . The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful (MATT. 13:7, 22).*

This parable doesn't suggest that the thorny soil was bad soil. It may have been excellent—deep and rich and moist. But it was already occupied. It had been colonized by wild thorn bushes. Their roots had penetrated deep into

***He requires that we uproot the thorns and weeds that have laid claim to the soil of our lives, so that the good soil is available for the new life that is to take over.***

the soil and were consuming the nourishment that the wheat needed. Now they challenged the farmer: "Pull us out at your peril! You will have to grasp us by our thorns. It will be painful!"

In another parable Jesus said, "You cannot serve both God and Money" (MATT. 6:24). The farmer might say to this piece of soil, "Choose you this day what you will grow: thorns or wheat." Jesus is specific about the nature of the thorns; they take over and choke the good seed. Matthew said that wealth is a thorn. Luke added "worries, riches, and pleasures." Note that Jesus didn't say that the good seed couldn't survive with that kind of thorn bush. What He said is that the growth didn't mature and was unfruitful.

I've already pointed out that seed is not passive in soil.

The soil becomes its servant. The roots from the seed take hold of the grains of soil and use them as anchors. They extract chemical elements from the soil; they draw water from the soil to nourish the plant and to produce fruit. These demands are likely to conflict with similar demands from weeds and thorns, and a good farmer sees to it that there is no real competition.

When growing a garden, the removal of weeds is a constant and ongoing process. Weeds do not magically disappear once fruits and vegetables are planted, nor do they stay away once they are pulled, and pulling them sometimes disturbs the soil in the garden. But having a full harvest of good, healthy vegetables requires constant examination of the garden and removal of anything that stands in the way of growing plants.

Jesus is a demanding Lord. His coming into our hearts requires the removal of competition. He requires that we uproot the thorns and weeds that have laid claim to the soil of our lives, so that the good soil is available for the new life that is to take over. Then, and only then, shall we experience the joy of fruitfulness in His service.

## **Rich And Fertile Soil**

*The one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces*

*a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty, or thirty times what was sown (MATT. 13:23).*

When Jesus mentioned the three kinds of soil that were not productive, He told us why. He didn't define the nature of the good soil except to say that it produced bountiful crops. Jesus hinted that some soil was better than others when He told the people that some seed produced a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty. The difference must have been in the soil.

The Bible doesn't give any clues about grading soil. But there is one aspect of soil goodness that has meaning both in farming and in spiritual life. In botany the term *colonize* refers to the way a group of plants or grasses take over a piece of land. A good example is when sand dunes have been built up by the action of tides and winds. They shift and change shape from year to year. Then seeds of some hardy type of grass get blown in and begin to take root. If rain falls at just the right time and roots have a chance to grow, the grasses may form a colony and begin to hold the sand together by their interlocking root systems.

After a few years, the plants change the nature of the sand and turn it into the beginnings of real soil. Soon other plants may come and take root. What was once poor soil has been transformed into good and fertile soil.

Eventually the original pioneer grasses may be forgotten as the new plants and trees thrive.

What changed the sand into soil? What has been added to the original sand? The simplified answer is that it is the life—and then the death—of the pioneer plants. A handful of good, rich soil will reveal numerous tiny creatures. They are busy breaking down fragments of leaves and decaying wood, turning them into still smaller fragments that can provide nitrogen and phosphorus and other good things for new living plants.

My home is near the Olympic National Park and the rain forest that covers the lower slopes of the western mountains. We love taking our grandchildren to see the wonder of the living forest. Near the Hoh River there is a row of trees in a straight line. Each one of those giant trees seems to be standing astride, legs apart. About seven feet above ground the trunk is supported by two huge root systems, like legs, that spread apart and curve down to reach the ground about seven feet apart, leaving a tunnel between them. If one looks through the tunnel in the first tree, you can see through the other tunnels in the other trees because they are in a straight line. That clue explains it all.

A hundred years ago, a giant tree fell in the forest. It lay dead and decaying for years. Seeds, falling from

other giant trees, fell into the cracks of the bark and rooted—the dead tree was rich soil. All the minerals and materials the old tree collected over the years, which formed the basis of its strength and vitality, were now available to the young seedlings growing on what is referred to as a “nursery log.” The dead tree continually weakened and decomposed. So the young trees, needing support for their increasing size, sent out roots around the old trunk. Those roots became the entire support for the young trees, while the old tree disintegrated and finally disappeared, becoming one with the soil around it.

Our children and grandchildren have stood quietly looking through the space where that old tree lay. We cannot see the tree itself, but we can see the way it has helped to shape and give nourishment to the new generation of giant trees, forming a “colonnade” in memory of the nursery log whose substance continues in them.

I look through that space too, but with a different perspective. My life is mostly behind me. Soon I will no longer occupy space. But I pray that my life and the principles that God has helped me to live by will influence young lives. When we die, we leave an effect on the soil in which future children grow and future spiritual seed will be nourished. That’s one reason the psalmist

says, "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints" (PSALM 116:15).

Good soil is the legacy of pioneer grasses and plants now long gone. It has been said that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that it's the soil of the church; the seed is the living Word of God. I am thankful that I grew up surrounded by a godly family who told me stories of Christian pioneers, of those who had given their lives to Christ and the gospel. Thus when the living seed fell into my heart, the soil was well prepared.



*two*

## A Good Fish Story

**T**he evening newspaper in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, has a weekend magazine that ran a feature for several months titled "The Best Meal I Ever Had." Each week the editor asked a Louisiana celebrity to write about the best meal they had ever eaten, concluding with the recipes for the main courses. Eventually he ran out of celebrities and broadened his author pool to include doctors—and picked on me.

This is the story I told: We were in the Kundah mountains of South India on holiday with our four children

and the Webbs, another family with four children. We vacationed together every year. We loved to hike over the hills and along the rivers, even though the youngest often needed to be carried most of the way. Both fathers enjoyed fishing, and the Billitadahalla River was full of trout. The country was wild and desolate; the only other humans were a boy or two keeping an eye on peaceful herds of buffalo. For food we carried only dry bread, and for cooking only a piece of chicken wire and a knife or two.

After a stiff morning walk, we arrived at the river, and the children scattered to collect dry bits of driftwood or dead branches from the forest, while the fathers selected just the right flies to bait their hooks and began to fish. Everyone knew the meal could not begin until eight or nine trout had been caught, but we didn't worry because few knew about the river, and it was full of trout waiting to be caught. Except that day.

The sky was clear and the air still. The sun was high and only the mosquitoes were active. The fish had breakfasted well and were not ready for lunch. We could see them clearly through the unruffled surface of the water, and it was obvious that they could see us. We went to our favorite pools where we usually caught our best and biggest fish. We crouched behind rocks and cast our lines until our muscles were sore. Our hooks got caught

in overhanging branches, and when we reached out to catch the twigs and release the lines, we fell into the river, bruising our shins. We fished a mile or two up-river and then as far down-river.

Hours passed, and the children came to inquire about the probability that lunch might be near, only to be sent back with the appalling news that not a single fish had been caught.

Lunchtime came and went. The fire burned out. The older children tried to comfort the younger ones, and the youngest was crying and chewing on the dry bread. The fathers tried to look confident but knew that their reputation as providers was rapidly being lost. This was *crisis*. Then clouds drifted over the sun. A breeze came up and ruffled the water. Suddenly both our fishing poles bent and lines became taut. We caught fish after fish and landed them on the grass. Excited, our children gathered them up and ran with them to their mothers. Relieved, the mothers split the trout and laid them on the chicken wire over the revived embers of the fire.

Wonderful smells began to drift up the river. Grilled trout were laid on slices of bread, their natural oils serving as butter. The children could scarcely wait to sing grace before biting down on the food they had doubted would ever come.

Finally we fathers arrived, carrying the last trout that would complete the meal. We were sunburned and weary with aching muscles. We were mosquito bitten, bruised, and hungry. But we were welcomed with cheers. We rested beside our families on a great rock under the shade of a twisted old tree and began to eat. We all agreed it was the best meal we had ever tasted. I, for one, still declare that it has never been bettered, not in the most expensive restaurant nor by the most famous chef.



Many times since, when I've been to fine restaurants, I have ordered trout, and I'm almost always disappointed. I've wanted to tell the chef I know trout can be more exciting. I even considered offering to demonstrate how to cook it myself.

It was a while before I realized that my expectations were unrealistic. What my subconscious memory was seeking could never be reproduced in a kitchen. No chef has access to the essential sauce that made my special meal unique: hunger, bruises, sunburn, aching muscles, and a sense of near failure transformed into success. Mix those ingredients with the happy faces of family members enjoying each other and contributing toward the shared ecstasy of grilled trout, and you have a memorable meal!

(I must add that fresh grilled trout on dry bread tastes good beside any river, anywhere.)

I mentioned that the children could hardly wait to sing grace before biting down on their trout on dry bread; but wait they did, and if we parents had forgotten, the little

***God is the source of all we need.  
He is the one who sustains and nourishes us,  
both physically and spiritually.***

ones would have reminded us to sing. We had a series of musical graces that each of our families used to sing before every meal. It seemed to us that they had special meaning on picnics in the open countryside. There we were surrounded with the evidence of God's bounty. On that special day we probably sang Johnny Appleseed's grace:

*The Lord is good to me,  
And so I thank the Lord,  
Who giveth me  
The things I need,  
The sun and the rain  
And the apple seed.  
The Lord is good to me.*

The Lord is good to me. We sometimes substituted our own words in place of "apple seed." We may have sung "The sun and the rain and the fish and the bread."

Whatever the words, the music rang out from 12 voices, across the river, and echoed back from the hills, "and so we thank the Lord." The singing postponed the eating by just a few minutes, but I have no doubt that it enhanced the flavor of what we ate. It brought wholeness into the meal. Our meals were not just an array of wholesome foods for our nourishment; they were a chance to be together. And it was an invitation to our Lord to take His place at the head of the table. My family and I sang another grace before meals:

*Back of the loaf, the snowy flour.*

*Back of the flour, the mill.*

*Back of the mill, the grain and the shower,*

*The sun, and the Father's will.*

This grace gently reminds us that God is the source of all we need. He is the one who sustains and nourishes us, both physically and spiritually.



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