

Dear Class Member,

A 33-year-old man has spent the last three years visiting every National Park Service site, completing the circuit in one continuous trip. "I really got to know the American story," he said. "These places define America," said a fellow National Parks enthusiast. "It's like the soul of our nation." For our next class, we will use this journey to help us consider the role and significance of places in our faith and in our personal lives.

If you wish to start thinking about our topic in advance, below is some introductory material.



## **D.C. Man Hits All 419 National Parks in One Trip**

*The Wired Word* for the Week of May 12, 2019

### **In the News**

Over the past three years, Mikah Meyer has visited all 419 National Park Service sites in one continuous trip, and he believes that he is the first person to ever do this. "I really got to know the American story," said 33-year-old Meyer to *The Washington Post*. "More than just natural wonders, the Park Service sites tell our American story."

Meyer drove to every corner of America, and also hiked, rafted, flew in planes, and rode on trains. He visited battlefields, presidents' homes, forests and canyons, tracing United States history from the American Revolution to the civil rights movement. The D.C. resident started his journey at the Washington Monument, traveled as far as the Pacific National Historical Park in Guam, and then finished his trip at the Lincoln Memorial on Monday, April 29.

"These places define America," said Chris Calvert, a National Parks enthusiast who celebrated Meyer's arrival in D.C. "It's like the soul of our nation. It is our story, our land, our history. It defines who we are as one people." Calvert is one of 61 other people recognized by the National Park Travelers Club for having also visited every Park Service site, although he did not do it in a single continuous trip.

A pastor's kid, Meyer preached in more than 100 churches along the way, which helped him to raise money for the trip. After singing professionally at Washington National Cathedral, Meyer began the three-year journey with about one-fifth of the funds he needed. In addition to being paid to preach, he raised donations through social media fans and corporate sponsors.

Meyer drove 75,000 miles in a van that doubled as his home on the road. Miraculously, he had only one episode of engine trouble the whole way, near Topeka, Kansas. Some of his travel expenses -- such as a free tour or an airplane trip -- were given to him by corporate sponsors in exchange for a post on his blog.

"I didn't have days off," Meyer said to *USA TODAY*. "Every minute was spent sharing the previous park, experiencing the current park, or planning for the next park. I was constantly behind on the work of pulling off this odyssey. ... I spent more time on my computer during this journey than in parks, because of all the work planning the logistics of route planning, fundraising and documenting the experience."

Although he started and ended in D.C., he says that his favorite place on the trip was Dinosaur National Monument, on the border of Utah and Colorado. It had everything that Meyer could want in a national park: rivers, canyons, plateaus, snow-capped mountains and dinosaur bones.

Back home in Washington, D.C., Meyer says he will perform and give speeches about his journey, and will think about writing a book. For now, he is satisfied to have achieved a goal inspired by his father, who died of cancer when Meyer was 19. His father was not able to enjoy the road trips he envisioned for his retirement, and this moved Meyer to act on his dreams sooner rather than later. "The day I lie on my deathbed," he said atop the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, "whether it's 60 years from now or six days from now, I can say I did something."

More on this story can be found at these links:

[The Ultimate American Road Trip: Man Completes Three-Year Quest to Visit All 419 National Park Service Sites. \*The Washington Post\*](#)  
[He Visited All 419 National Park Sites in 3 Years to Honor His Late Father. Here's How. \*USA TODAY\*](#)

### **Applying the News Story**

Reflect on the importance of places in the Bible -- the Promised Land, Jerusalem and Bethlehem. And also in your own life -- your hometown, your church, our nation. Places help to tell our story, and they play a role in our faith, our history, and our personal identity.

### **The Big Questions**

*Here are some of the questions we will discuss in class:*

1. What roles do places play in defining who you are as a person? Describe the significance of your hometown or the place where you now reside.
2. Chris Calvert, a National Parks enthusiast, said that the parks are "like the soul of our nation." Where are the places that connect to the soul of our Christian faith? Why do they matter?
3. For centuries, Christians have made pilgrimages to holy places. Perhaps you have visited the Holy Land, or some particular place connected to your denomination's history. What is experienced in these trips, and what lasting impact do they have, if any?
4. Mikah Meyer visited all 419 National Park Service sites and then said, "Park Service sites tell our American story." How do these particular places tell the American story? What role do places play in the stories of the Old and New Testaments?

5. What is the danger of becoming too attached to a particular place? Where do you see problems arising when people define themselves or other people by places?

**Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope**

*We will look at selected verses from these Scripture texts. You may wish to read these in advance for background:*

[Genesis 35:1-15](#)

[Deuteronomy 6:1-7](#)

[Psalm 137:1-6](#)

[Luke 2:1-7](#)

*In class, we will talk about these passages and look for some insight into the big questions, as well as talk about other questions you may have about this topic. Please join us.*

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