

Loving God in All of Life - Contemplation

Consecration leads to a second way of turning all of life into love for God - contemplation.

Much of life is not doing; it is seeing, hearing, tasting, touching, and thinking. In those moments of just observing, experiencing, watching, and listening, where should our thoughts go? What should you do as you look at a flower, watch crowds of people pass you by, listen to a piece of music, watch a documentary, try to understand a lecture, look up at the stars?

If consecration is doing all things for God, then contemplation is seeing life in light of God.

You live in a world made by an Intelligent Designer, which is filled with meaningful design. Everywhere we see God's handiwork.

Psalm 19:1-3 *The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork. ² Day unto day utters speech, And night unto night reveals knowledge. ³ There is no speech nor language Where their voice is not heard.*

All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. John 1:3

... in him all things hold together (Col 1:17)

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. (James 1:17)

Creation reflects and reveals God. Not just trees, mountains and rivers, but human beings. Human beings reflect the One in whose image they are made. The creations of human beings, in various ways, reflect the fact that we were made by God.

That means that in the time between church services, and in the time between our times of personal devotions, we need to learn to worship God, by contemplating who God is in his works and world.

We love God in all of life not only by consecrating all things we do, but by contemplating all things. Christians are worshippers, and you cannot worship God in all of life unless you live the examined life. Christians must reject the half-awake mind of so many, who are content to live on surface-meanings, entertainment and distraction. Plato once said, "A life that is not examined is a kind of death." People who simply live by their instincts and do the best they can, but do not examine themselves are careless and, according to Plato, may as well be dead. Instead, it searches for meanings, as a bee gathers nectar.

God's Word speaks highly to the person who wants to understand the world around him and be more pleasing to God.

Proverbs 1:2-5 ² *To know wisdom and instruction, To perceive the words of understanding, ³ To receive the instruction of wisdom, Justice, judgment, and equity; ⁴ To give prudence to the simple, To the young man knowledge and discretion -- ⁵ A wise man will hear and increase learning, And a man of understanding will attain wise counsel,*

Proverbs 2:1-6 **Proverbs 2:1** *My son, if you receive my words, And treasure my commands within you, ² So that you incline your ear to wisdom, And apply your heart to understanding; ³ Yes, if you cry out for discernment,*

And lift up your voice for understanding, ⁴ If you seek her as silver, And search for her as for hidden treasures; ⁵ Then you will understand the fear of the LORD, And find the knowledge of God. ⁶ For the LORD gives wisdom; From His mouth come knowledge and understanding;

But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil (Hebrews 5:14)

And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. (Philippians 1:9-11)

Negatively, Paul tells us to be people who:

1 Corinthians 7:31 ³¹ *and those who use this world as not misusing it. For the form of this world is passing away.*

We will end up abusing creation, if we do not understand it.

The life of loving God is a life of wisdom, discernment, understanding and good judgement. Being able to judge, distinguish, weigh and compare is part of a mature walk with God. We are always to be extracting meaning from what we observe and judging it to be good or evil, conforming to God's image and pattern, or diverging from it.

The discerning eye seeks to see beyond and behind surface meanings. What does this reveal of God? Why was this made? Why was it made in this way? What in the heart, or plan of God, chose to make this? How does this activity reveal God? Why did God permit this action? How did God weave these events into his plan? How was this an answer to prayer? What is this like? Everything is a picture, a symbol of something else. Does it teach anything? Why does this exist? For what good purpose did God make it, or for what evil purpose has man used it for? How does it reflect God? How can I be like God with this – be His image-bearer? What does it communicate or reflect?

We can easily see how the examined life can be one of perpetual worship. In looking for God's fingerprints on all he has made, the whole world becomes a form of general revelation. In examining the unfolding of events, in perceiving beauty, in looking for truth, we are seeking God.

And since we know that God rewards the diligent seeker with himself, we can be confident that the eye of faith, that is looking for God's beauty in all of life, will find it. The response will be one of admiration and thanksgiving. We admire God's wisdom and power, as revealed in his works. We express gratitude for answered prayers, for wise and kind providences and for his sovereign rule over all things. We express hope and trust in him, as we observe and perceive life in all its complexity. All we observe and consider can lead us to dependence, devotion and delight.

Now just like a life of consecration seems alien to us, so too, does a life of contemplation. Stop and think. What are the enemies of a life of gaining wisdom? What are the enemies of becoming reflective, contemplative, thoughtful? What prevents you from looking thoughtfully at the world, people, and your own ways?

Busyness and life's pressures. Modern life has become very complicated and very busy. From the time we wake up till the time we go to sleep, it is possible to be running non-stop from one errand to another, and the time in-between thinking only of the other things on your to-do list. Much of this is not in your control. If you live in this time, and live in the country and city we do, the pace of business life, the pace of keeping up can tax your mind.

Abundant Distractions. We cannot avoid many of the diversions that the world throws at us, but too often, Christians add to the noise in their souls by adding distractions. The brief quiet they might have between appointments gets filled with the car radio, the iPod, surfing the web, hours on Facebook, Twitter, or blogs, DVDs or TV, apps and computer games, more trips to the mall. The result of too much of these things is that they divide our attention; they scatter our thoughts; they disquiet the heart; they absorb our interests; they shift our focus to temporal matters; they make us curious about what does not matter; inquisitive about other people's business and generally thoughtless about meaning.

Blaise Pascal said "I have often said that the sole cause of man's unhappiness is that he does not know how to stay quietly in his room," And: "Distraction is the only thing that consoles us for miseries, and yet it is itself the greatest of our miseries."

If we are to become worshippers in all of life, we need to narrow our focus and eliminate what scatters and drains us spiritually. Think of your own habits in this regard: have the abundant media and technologies made you a more thoughtful person? Have they given you more time to think about the meaning of how to please God as a mother, as a father, in your job, in your dress, your use of money and use of entertainment?

People's chief objection to a life of contemplation is, "I don't have time!" In truth, ours is the first society in history where people work 5 days a week, and have technology to be up at night. We have more leisure time, and more discretionary income than any culture before ours. The problem is how our culture teaches us to fill those extra hours.

So how can we learn to become people who see God in all things? How can we become reflective, contemplative worshippers?

1) Protect your quiet time, and the Lord's Day. Don't fill these with more busyness, and more distractions.

Psalm 4:4 *Meditate within your heart on your bed, and be still. Selah*

Retire from the world each day to some private spot, even if it is only the bedroom (for a while I retreated to the furnace room for want of a better place). Stay in the secret place till the surrounding noises begin to fade out of your heart and a sense of God's presence envelops you. Deliberately tune out the unpleasant sounds and come out of your closet determined not to hear them. Listen for the inward Voice till you learn to recognize it.

I do not say that your quiet time is the be-all and end-all of your Christian life. But without it, I have little hope for you that you will be able to have a quiet soul during the day. Without beginning with God, tuning out the noise, you will almost certainly be distracted all day long.

Andrew Bonar wrote of Robert Murray M'Cheyne, "His morning hours were set apart for the nourishment of his own soul; not, however, with the view of laying up a stock of grace for the rest of the day, – for manna will corrupt if laid by, – but rather with the view of 'giving the eye the habit of looking upward all the day, and drawing down gleams from the reconciled countenance.

We have often heard the comparison of Mary and Martha. Martha the active, working busy one, and Mary the thoughtful, contemplative, listening one. And the truth is, we all have to do some Martha in our lives to get along. We have to do work and run errands and be busy. The point is that if we never are like Mary, we will be as frustrated and flustered and upset as Martha. We should combine Mary and Martha, spending time alone, so that when we are busy, we are less distracted.

2) Meditate on God's Word, and take it with you to meditate on God's World.

Psalm 1:1-3 *Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful; ² But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night. ³ He shall be like a tree Planted by the rivers of water, That brings forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also shall not wither; And whatever he does shall prosper.*

To meditate on God's Word day and night means it must be in you, not just in front of you. You need to take God's Word in with the kind of interest that will cause it to remain with you while you drive, while you make meals, and clean, and teach, and plan, and calculate, and fix.

Don't just read the Word. Think on the Word. Do more thinking and praying with your heart than reading with your eyes. Think on the meaning of the Word until it begins to glow in you. Then it will lodge in your heart, and you will have it with you while you work and walk and talk and rest.

When God's Word dwells richly in me, I start to notice it in all settings. It becomes a lens through which I see the world.

Deuteronomy 6:6-9 ⁶ "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. ⁷ "You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. ⁸ "You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. ⁹ "You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Wesley said, be a student of many books, but be a person of one book. The Word of God must be deeply embedded in us if we are to view the rest of life through Scriptural lenses.

3) Consider God's world and works as an attentive worshipper.

Exodus 3:1-4 ^{NKJ} **Exodus 3:1** *Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. And he led the flock to the back of the desert, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ² And the Angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed. ³ Then Moses said, "I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush does not burn." ⁴ So when the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am."*

Moses did something that was interesting. The Bible tells us that Moses saw the sight, and then said to himself, "I will now turn aside and see this great sight." And then, most significantly, the Word tells us that *when the Lord saw that he turned aside*, He called him. We might speculate, what if Moses had not

turned aside? What if Moses had just shrugged it off, and carried on? What if Moses had been content to not know, not investigate, not understand? After all, the Lord could have simply called Moses – He didn't need to set up a burning bush. Yet we see a principle – that when a person is willing to notice God's works, pay attention to them, and not simply carry on in his distracted way, God will reveal something to that man.

How many things in your day might God be wanting you to turn aside to and consider? What about the meaning of motherhood, or fatherhood, or singleness, or being a grandparent? What about the meaning of your vocation – what it reveals about God, and man, and the world, and how to do it as only a Christian can.

1 Corinthians 7:20-22 *Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called. ²¹ Were you called while a slave? Do not be concerned about it; but if you can be made free, rather use it. ²² For he who is called in the Lord while a slave is the Lord's freedman. Likewise he who is called while free is Christ's slave.*

Our various callings, be they mother, student, plumber, pilot, or pastor are to be lived out for God's glory. Each man should consider the meaning of his calling, how it reveals God. In small and big ways, our callings enable us to order the world God has made for his glory. When we do our work, consecrating it to God, and contemplating how it reveals God, we are seeking and submitting to Him in all of life.

What about your leisure time? What about your body – how you treat it, feed it, rest it, clothe it? What about your home and house, and garden? What about your reading habits, and watching habits, and listening habits?

What about the world in general – the things we are considering in Ethics' Class – economics, human sexuality, technology, medical ethics, the sciences, politics, education? The thoughtful Christian wants to understand all of life in light of God. He believes what Abraham Kuyper said: "...and there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: 'Mine!'"

Now the process of learning meaning is not something you do on your own. You do this in partnership with other Christians, particularly when you find Christians who have similar backgrounds or experiences as yours. Christian fellowship includes helping each other understand how to glorify God in your lives. Even when Christians have very different vocations and callings, they become blessings to each other, explaining how to see something of God in their area of work or calling.

All this comes back to the heart that seeks wisdom. The attitude of our day is one of seeking to do as little thinking as possible, whereas the Bible encourages as much reflection and contemplation as possible. We need to remember that Paul told us to:

Romans 12:2 ² *And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*

As we take time to meditate on Scripture and then approach all of life as worshipers, prepared to turn aside and consider the meaning of all the things we encounter or experience, we will be learning to love what God loves, and to hate what God hates. We will be learning how to best use the world without abusing it.

Consecration and contemplation - these are the two modes of loving God in all of life. George Herbert wrote:

*Teach me, my God and King,
In all things Thee to see,
And what I do in anything
To do it as for Thee.*