

This Still Room

Psalm 119:27

Do you remember those times in your life when you felt pressured and needlessly hurried? If you could just find a few moments for yourself, to get alone and away from everything for just a little while! You're not by yourself in that, I assure you.

John Greenleaf Whittier was an American poet in the 19th century. He wrote the words to one of our hymns entitled "Dear Lord and Father of Mankind." The second stanza reads,

*Drop Thy still dews of quietness
Till all our strivings cease;
Take from our souls the strain and stress,
And let our ordered lives confess
The beauty of Thy peace.*

But in another poem he expressed the need for a renewal of his spirit, and he told about the solution he found in a little room. He called his poem, "*This Still Room*":

*And so I find it well to come
For deeper rest to this still Room
For here the habit of the soul
Feels less the outer world's control;
For strength of mutual purpose pleads
More earnestly our common needs;
And from the silence multiplied
By these still forms on either side,
The world that time and sense have known
Falls off and leaves us God alone.*

Beautiful, isn't it? We can identify with the need to find a still room and be quiet, alone with the silence and with God, to meditate on His presence with us there. The author of Psalm 119 felt the same thing, and expressed his need in the words, "I am laid low in the dust" (v. 25), and "my soul is weary with sorrow" (v. 28). You recall from the last message from this psalm that the words in verse 28 literally mean "to drop as tears from the eye." The psalmist was saying something like "my life is leaking out of me." Would you use those words to express the way you feel sometimes—even today? Do you feel an overwhelming need for a renewal of your spirit this very morning?

From past experience, the psalmist knew how to be renewed. He knew that he could turn to God. Yet when he did, he discovered afresh that even though God worked in his life to effect renewal, there were some very positive things he had to do himself. The psalmist took a hard look at his relationship with God, and examined himself on several levels. We, too, must look at our relationship with God on several different levels before we can be renewed.

The first level we looked at last week is “*evaluation*,” in v. 26. The psalmist said that he had “recounted” his ways. He had made a close scrutiny of his life and everything in his life. Before we can experience renewal on either the church level or on a personal basis, we must ask some very honest questions of ourselves and our relationship to God. We must take the time to scrutinize our standing before Him. We must of necessity focus on ourselves long enough to measure ourselves according to the standards God has set forth in His Word. It is on this level of evaluation that we fully come to realize how much we need a personal, spiritual renewal.

But then we must turn from ourselves to take a contemplative look at God. We call this level “*meditation*,” and we see it in verses 27 and 48. The psalmist had already expressed his desire for spiritual renewal. He knew something had to change in his life. But he also knew that left to himself, the change would never come. The renewal would never occur. So he turned to God.

When we stop to think about it, we remember that many times when we have been in need of renewal, it has also been true that we have ceased to think about God. He has ceased to become an integral part of our lives, so that thoughts of Him occur naturally. We no longer ponder the eternal truths of the Almighty. Our attentions are captured by much simpler details of life here on earth. We are too easily distracted by worry, fear, guilt, and pain.

The psalmist saw his failure to meditate on God’s eternal Being as being a chief culprit in his spiritual decline. The way he looked at it, the renewal he needed so desperately would come as he once again took the time to contemplate spiritual truths, focusing his very soul on them in such a way as to incorporate them into his life.

Merely thinking about those truths in a casual sort of way would never be enough. He had to ponder them, weigh them, consider them, scrutinize them so that they become a part of who he was. Actually, our English word “meditate” can be traced back to a Latin word which means “to measure.” When we meditate on a particular

thing, we are measuring its value and worth for our lives. We are measuring our lives against it.

There were two general areas which David felt deserved such meditative measuring. In our general experience, we discover that meditating on these two areas helps to refocus our spirit on Eternal God, so that we are prepared to receive spiritual renewal. Today, we look at the first of these two areas, one found in verse 27.

We must meditate on the wonders of God.

David wrote in verse 27, *“Let me understand the teaching of your precepts; then I will meditate on Your wonders.”* Meditating on the wonders of Almighty God was a natural part of the renewal process. No one can be renewed until he has measured himself against the awesome wonders of the Lord God.

Meditating or considering the wonders of God is a common theme in the Psalms. Psalm 40:4 reads, *“Many, O Lord my God, are the wonders you have done. The things you planned for us no one can recount to you; were I to speak and tell of them, they would be too many to declare.”* We can feel renewal in the air when we read in Psalm 111, *“Great are the works of the Lord; they are pondered by all who delight in them. Glorious and majestic are his deeds, and his righteousness endures forever. He has caused his wonders to be remembered; the Lord is gracious and compassionate.”*

We do not have to look far to find something awesome about God’s wonders which are worthy of our meditation. Take the wonder of thunderstorms, for example. A single thunderstorm can dump 125 million gallons of water on the earth, and is capable of discharging enough energy to supply the entire United States with electrical power for twenty minutes.

More than 16 million thunderstorms occur on our planet each year, an average of 45,000 each day, 2,000 every minute. A stroke of lightning may be no wider than a pencil, but may extend as long as five miles, traveling at the mind-boggling speed of 422 million feet per second. (*Planet Earth: Storm*, by A.B.C. Whipple, and the Editors of Time-Life Books, Inc., Alexandria, Virginia, 1982).

Or think about the wonders of the universe. One author (Lloyd John Ogilvie *Ask Him Anything*, p. 18) points out that “if we were to drive a car day and night at top speed without stopping it would take us nine years to reach the moon, three hundred years to reach the sun, eighty-three years to reach the planet Neptune, seventy-five million

years to reach Alpha Centauri, and seven hundred million years to reach the Pole Star.”

There are 3.7 billion miles between the sun and the furthest planet in our solar system. To help put all that into perspective, if the planet Pluto were the size of a quarter, the sun would have to be 38 feet wide and 31 miles away! (*Planet Earth: Solar System*, by Kendrick Frazier and the Editors of Time-Life Books, Inc., Alexandria, Virginia, 1985).

The wonders of God can be seen in the animal kingdom, even in the lowly flea. Fleas can easily jump 100 times their own height and 150 times their own length. That would be equivalent to a six-foot man jumping over a fifty-story building or the length of two football fields. The flea can also accelerate itself at a rate twenty times greater than the acceleration of the Apollo moon rocket. That’s a wonder of God!

During its caterpillar stage, the monarch butterfly feeds exclusively on the poisonous leaves of milkweed plants. That poison remains in the body of the adult butterfly. It is this poison which protects the colorful, easily seen monarch butterfly from its predators. That’s a wonder of God!

An eagle has eyes that are larger and six times sharper than those of a human. An eagle can spot an object the size of a quarter two hundred yards away. A rabbit can be spotted from a distance of over one mile. (*Character Sketches, Volume III*, Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts, 1985). That’s a wonder of God!

There are many other wondrous works of God in our world. There is the wonder of human language, as hundreds and hundreds of different languages and dialects are spoken on our planet. Water is a wonder, and we are blessed with springs, streams, creeks, cataracts, brooks, wells, oceans, gulfs, ponds, lakes, rivers, ice, vapor, mist and rain. A smile on a human face is a wonder of God. The seasons of the year remind us at least four times every twelve months that God is still in control.

And in just our own country, we have the Grand Canyon, the fertile plains, the sparkling coasts, the mysterious Everglades, Niagara Falls, the magnificent forests, the majestic Rocky Mountains, the thundering oceans, and the rushing rivers. The variety of our weather is a wonder of God in which He gives us rain, wind, snow, heat, cold, breezes, tornadoes, hurricanes, clouds, and on and on. There is even the wonder of color, which brightens and enlivens everything we see.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow considered Springtime to be a marvelous wonder. He observed, “If spring came once in a century instead of once a year or burst forth with the sound of an earthquake, and not in silence, what wonder and expectation there would be in all hearts to behold the miraculous change.”

The poet Walt Whitman saw most of these things, and exclaimed, “Why, who makes much of a miracle? As to me I know of nothing else but miracles.” Then he quickly named a few of the wonders in our world which seemed to him to be miracles: wading “with naked feet along the beach just in the edge of the water,” standing “under the trees in the woods,” “the wonderfulness of the sundown, or of stars shining so quiet and bright,” “the exquisite delicate thin curve of the new morn in spring,” conversation with a loved one, or even watching a perfect stranger in the seat opposite him in the railcar.

Then Whitman wrote,

*To me, every hour of the light and dark is a miracle,
Every cubic inch of the space is a miracle,
Every square yard of the surface of the earth is spread with the same,
Every foot of the interior swarms with the same.
To me the sea is a continual miracle,
The fishes that swim—the rocks—the motion of the waves—
the ship with men in them,
What stranger miracles are there?*

(from *Leaves of Grass*)

Meditating on the wonders of God will often bring renewal to our spirits because it helps us to put our lives into perspective. A fine little book that has meant a lot to me over the years is *A Touch of Wonder* by Arthur Gordon (Fleming H. Revell, 1974). One of the stories Gordon tells is about a time in his life when he really needed renewal. He described that time in his life “as one of those bleak periods that many of us encounter from time to time, a sudden drastic dip in the graph of living when everything goes stale and flat, energy wanes, enthusiasm dies.”

As the days passed, and things didn’t get any better, Gordon realized he needed help. So he went to his family doctor and said, “I just seem to have come to a dead end. Can you help me?” The doctor asked Gordon, “Where were you happiest as a child?” Gordon thought a moment and realized that his happiest times as a child were spent at the beach.

So the doctor's prescription for Gordon was to drive alone to the beach the following day, arriving by nine o'clock. He could take a lunch, but was not to read, write, or listen to the radio. He wasn't even to talk to another person. At various intervals throughout the day, Gordon was to take out a specified slip of paper, and he was to follow the instructions the doctor had written on them. There were four of these "prescriptions" Gordon was to take through the day, but the first one is the one which applies to us here.

As Gordon arrived at the beach the next day, he sat in the car with the day stretching out before him. He looked at the ocean, then pulled out the first prescription and read it for the first time. It read, "LISTEN CAREFULLY." He wrote, "I stared at the two words. Why, I thought, the man must be mad. He had ruled out music and newscasts and human conversation. What else was there?"

"I raised my head and I did listen. There were no sounds but the steady roar of the sea, the creaking cry of a gull, the drone of some aircraft high overhead. When I got out of the car, a gust of wind slammed the door with a sudden clap of sound. Am I supposed, I asked myself, to listen carefully to things like that?"

"I climbed a dune and looked out over the deserted beach. Here the sea bellowed so loudly that all other sounds were lost. And yet, I thought suddenly, there must be sounds beneath sounds—the soft rasp of drifting sand, the tiny wind-whisperings in the dune grasses—if the listener got close enough to hear them.

"...I went back to the car and slid behind the wheel. LISTEN CAREFULLY. As I listened again to the deep growl of the sea, I found myself thinking about the immensity of it, the stupendous rhythms of it, the velvet trap it made for the moonlight, the white-fanged fury of its storms...sitting there, I realized I was thinking of things bigger than myself—and there was relief in that" (pp. 83-84).

That is the whole point of meditating on the wonders of God. When we focus on the glorious, majestic and awesome things He has done, everything suddenly drops into focus. When we meditate on the aroma of the earth in the Spring, and how much different it is then than in the Fall; when we consider the mystery and attraction of human love, and how it mirrors the eternal love of the Father; when we contemplate the intricacies of the human body—those are the times when we realize that God is much, much bigger than the things which caused our spiritual decline in the first place.

Arthur Gordon wrote, “There was relief in that.” And there certainly is. It is a relief which floods our spirits when we have experienced a spiritual awakening. The psalmist wrote, “*renew my life according to your word...I will meditate on your wonders*” (Psalm 119:25b, 27b).

David, perhaps as a young shepherd boy out alone one night watching the sheep, pondered the wonders of God as he saw them in the heavens. He came to see himself in relation to the wonders of God: “*When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?*” (Psalm 8:3-4)

On another occasion, David mused over the wonders of God as seen in his own body, and as he did, a wave of renewal and praise swept over him: “*For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand. When I awake, I am still with you*” (Psalm 139:13-18).

When was the last time you really spent some time meditating on the wonders of God? When was the last time your spirit was renewed from spending several unhurried minutes captivated by a single example of God’s revelation of Himself? No, I don’t think we should all become poets or philosophers. But we should all be engaged in worship of God. What better way to worship Him than by being entranced by His glories?

Do you need renewal today? Repent of the hurry in your life which has kept you from seeing our wonder-full God at work in our world and in our lives. We cannot have renewal in our spirits without the perspective that this kind of meditation brings. Will you surrender yourself to this awesome God today?