

## See how the flowers of the field grow...

### Part 2: STOPPING

What is life if, full of care,  
We have no time to stand and stare?

No time to stand beneath the boughs  
And stare as long as sheep or cows?

Thus wrote the Victorian poet William Henry Davies, in a poem called 'Leisure'. And while we will leave Davies and his rhyming couplets there, he makes a point which is as relevant today as it ever was. Many of us find ourselves full of care, and time for standing and staring is a rare thing indeed in this overly busy world.

What might happen if we did a bit more stopping and staring, particularly at the natural world? Plenty of books tell us it is good for our wellbeing. Fintan Creaven goes further, describing nature as a window into God, an insight into the mind and personality of the creator. He also describes nature as the "garment" of Christ - the garment which the woman with the haemorrhage reached out to touch when she needed healing.

Of course we know that nature is not always nice. We are often reminded how damaged it is - and that human beings are largely responsible for that damage. And yet, as the Gerard Manley Hopkins poem on the printed handout says, the amazing vitality of the natural world is undimmed. While we will explore this here with words and pictures, you might like to take some of these thoughts with you on a walk, if you can. Go where you can see trees and plants and birds, and take time to stop and look closely, maybe even stare a little.

To begin, I invite you now into a time of stilling. Find a place where you can feel comfortable, where you can be at ease, and yet attentive. And attend to what is around you, if you can hear any sounds apart from my voice, any sounds from outside, and notice and name them. Then notice anything you can hear in the room where you're sitting, even the slightest sounds. Don't let them distract you, just acknowledge them and move on.

And then bring your attention in still further. Pay attention to your body, the shifts and adjustments, the beating of the heart, the rhythm of breathing, these tiny movements which are never completely still, powering the mechanisms of our physical being. How wondrous that is, these biological systems we might not even fully understand, working away, making life possible.

As I sit here, the beating of my heart,  
the ebb and flow of my breathing, the movements of my mind  
are all signs of God's ongoing creation of me.  
I pause for a moment, and become aware  
of this presence of God within me.

PAUSE

I'm going to read Mary Oliver's poem, *The Summer Day*, and you might want to go back to it in your own time and read it a couple more times. Notice how much close observation there is going on here. And while the last line appears to challenge us to think about our ultimate purpose, remember that the poet only says this after admitting she spent the whole day walking through fields. "Tell me," she says, "what else should I have done?"

*The Summer Day* - by Mary Oliver

Who made the world?  
Who made the swan, and the black bear?  
Who made the grasshopper?  
This grasshopper, I mean-  
the one who has flung herself out of the grass,

the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,  
who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down-  
who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.  
Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.  
Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.  
I don't know exactly what a prayer is.  
I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down  
into the grass, how to kneel in the grass,  
how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,  
which is what I have been doing all day.  
Tell me, what else should I have done?  
Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?  
Tell me, what is it you plan to do  
With your one wild and precious life?

PAUSE

And now some words from Psalm 8:

When I consider your heavens,  
the work of your fingers,  
the moon and the stars,  
which you have set in place,  
what is mankind that you are mindful of them,  
human beings that you care for them?

You have made them a little lower than the angels  
and crowned them with glory and honor.  
You made them rulers over the works of your hands;  
you put everything under their feet:  
all flocks and herds,  
and the animals of the wild,  
the birds in the sky,  
and the fish in the sea,  
all that swim the paths of the seas.

Lord, our Lord,  
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

(Psalm 8: 3-9)

PAUSE

As I read this again, notice anything which is standing out for you, perhaps a word or a phrase in the Psalm, or perhaps there's a picture forming in your mind as you listen, or there is a connection in your mind with a place you have been, or a memory. I would encourage you to stay with these things in a time of quiet reflection after the recording is finished, allowing one thing will lead on to another, and keeping in mind the question:

If the natural world is a window into the creator, what do I learn? What do I learn about the artist by looking at the artist's work?

READ AGAIN

What do I learn about the artist by looking at the artist's work? And what response do I want to make?

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