

The Art of Paying Attention : A Primer

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Matthew W. Humphrey

Matthew 6

²⁵ “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷ And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? ²⁸ And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹ yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ³⁰ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? ³¹ Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³² For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. ³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be

ONE: Gazing at flowers in a time of global collapse

“The real reason we are failing to rise to the climate moment is because the actions required directly challenge our reigning economic paradigm..., the stories on which Western cultures are founded..., as well as many of the activities that form our identities and define our communities... Only when we identify these chains do we have a chance of breaking free” (Naomi Klein, 2015: 263).

TWO: Creation as counter-formation to Civilization's ills

katamanthánō (CONSIDER) /*katá*, "down to a point, exactly according to," which intensifies *manthánō*, "learn") – properly, *thoroughly* (exactly) learn; **to grasp something conclusively by considering it carefully** (AS).

emblépō (OBSERVE) /*en*, "engaged in" and /*blépō*, "look") – properly, stare (look) at with a "locked-in gaze"; **To look at in a sustained, concentrated way**, i.e. with special "interest, love or concern" (DN TT, 3, 519).

PSALM 104

You make springs gush forth in the valleys . . .

giving drink to every wild animal . . .

You cause the grass to grow for the cattle,
and plants for people to use . . .

The young lions roar for their prey,
seeking their food from God . . .

These all look to you

to give them their food in due season;

when you *give to them*, they gather it up;

when you open your hand, they are filled with good things

(Ps. 104:10–11, 14, 21, 27–28)

JOB 38

Can you hunt the prey for the lion,
or satisfy the appetite of the young lions,
when they crouch in their dens,
or lie in wait in their covert?

Who *provides for the raven* its prey,
when its young ones cry to God,
and wander about for lack of food?
(Job 38:39–41)

PSALM 145

The eyes of all look to you,
and *you give them their food* in due season.
You open your hand,
satisfying the desire of every living thing
(Ps. 145:15-16)

“But I’m telling you,’ urges Jesus with rhetorical insistence, ‘Solomon in all his glory was never ‘wrapped around’ like one of these.’ His reference to the sumptuous royal garb of Israel’s most powerful king is probably a euphemism for the Jerusalem temple, the zenith of Israel’s civilizational aspirations. **In other words, the greatest technological and social achievement known to his Judean contemporaries has less intrinsic value than one wildflower in the Divine economy. What if Jesus means it?”** (Ched Myers, 2009)

THREE: Jesus' invitation: what you observe will shape who you are

The creation is quite like a spacious and splendid house, provided and filled with the most exquisite and the most abundant furnishings. Everything in it tells us of God. (John Calvin)

“What a pleasure it is to dive into the secrets of nature. What a deal of the majesty of the great Creator doth shine in the face of this fabric of the world!” (Richard Baxter)

“I want creation to penetrate you with so much admiration that wherever you go, the least plant may bring you the clear remembrance of the Creator... One blade of grass or one speck of dust is enough to occupy your entire mind in beholding the art with which it has been made.” (Saint Basil)

Science “polishes the gift of seeing... but beneath the richness of its vocabular and its descriptive power, something is missing, the same something that swells around you and in you when you listen to the world. Science can be a language of distance which reduces a being to its working parts; it is a language of objects.” (Kimmerer, 2015)

“We must say of the universe that it is a communion of subjects, not a collection of objects.” Thomas Berry