

Transforming Presence: God's work within us

JourneyMates Community Reflection

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Mary Zimmerman, JourneyMates Community Leader

What are God's deepest desires for us? How are we drawn into them?

We have been blessed this year in our JourneyMates Communities by reflecting on the holiness of God. We looked up in awe to God in all his transcendent “otherness”; now we turn to ponder his nearness, which is **closer than our breath, nearer than our heartbeat...** that inner presence the apostle Paul refers to as a hidden-for-ages mystery:

“Christ in you...the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27)

God within us is God at work. His is a powerful, transforming Presence – but perhaps not power in the way we readily think of it. Subtle....slow.... hidden in the ordinary... not often screaming for our attention. *And we can miss it...*

So we hold out this question, this longing to know God's deepest desires for us and to be drawn more deeply into them, that we might recognize his subtle movements in our spirit; discern what is of God, and what is not.

From scripture we know he desires **new life** at the very center of our being. Dallas Willard calls this center *“the beyond that is within”...* our truest identity, where God's vision for us is called forth. Jesus painted a wonderful word picture of this new inner life when he spoke of giving us “living water” ...welling up inside, overflowing to others...John 7:38.

life that begets life.

Listen Evelyn Underhill's words from her book *The School of Charity*, as she speaks of such a life: *“The final test of holiness is not in seeming very different from other people, but in being used to make other people very different; becoming the parent of new life”.* So beautiful. Oh how I want that kind of life!

And though this creative work is all of God, we are called to cooperate... to avail ourselves. We attend. We “prepare the way”. There are many spiritual practices that may help us along this path; one that is foundational to JourneyMates is a prayerful listening to God. Listening is a vital aspect of **beholding our Triune God...** and nurtures the new life within. We practice this discipline each time we meet.

Contrary to inclination, we are not transformed by scrutinizing and picking ourselves apart.

A vision of God transforms human life. By beholding the Lord, Paul writes that we *“are transformed into his image from glory to glory”. 2 Cor 3:18*

Beholding

We frequently encounter the word “Behold” in older translations of scripture, and I encourage our holding onto it. This expression is not part of everyday speech, so unaltered by overuse; it implies something far deeper than a glance of observation. AW Tozer uses the lovely phrase *“the gaze of the soul”*.

Beholding includes all of our senses: we look upon... we listen with ears to hear... we “taste and see” that the Lord is good... there is a full engaging of ourselves in this gaze of the soul... an expectant attentiveness.

When we behold Christ, we encounter the beauty of perfection. A scholarly work by Father Thomas Dubay called *The Evidential Power of Beauty* brings findings of the scientific world – both Christian and non – that show truth can be recognized by its order, beauty and simplicity.

Order...Beauty...Simplicity. Divine fingerprints.

In contrast, consider the art form of caricature which intentionally distorts and exaggerates out of proportion. In life this is not intentional – yet occurs in every heart as things are elevated out of their proper balance. Distortions are only recognized as such by gazing at the true portrait. That portrait is Jesus our Lord...

Gazing upon him we begin to replace falsehood with truth.

I struggle with a deep-rooted fear of not “getting it right”, covering a lot of ground including beliefs. This is a generational pattern; it can get in the way of loving others, along with being destructive to my own soul. Good things skewed out of proportion may even seem virtuous.... until God reveals otherwise. Learning to be still in Christ's presence, to listen, contemplate his person, words and life... I began to notice *his* priorities:

conditions of the heart... acts of mercy and justice...cups of cold water in his name.

God opened my eyes to behold the beauty of this truth, so when I fall back into old patterns (and I do), I can repent. That unbalanced state is not attractive.

Caricatures never are.

But Jesus is. He is beautiful.

*We gaze at his portrait in faith, and by that gazing are changed
step by step,
one distortion at a time....*

And somehow, amazingly, life gets rooted in our tilled soil. It grows...
takes on shape and form.

In our JourneyMates Communities we get to notice the formation of this Christ-life in each other... so precious...and as we do, we encounter profound mystery. This new life growing is beyond us. We don't understand transformation. There remains always a hidden aspect of God, an unknowing.

Embracing Mystery

Jesus addressed hidden-ness in two of his shortest parables. These verses from Luke 13 take place immediately after a miraculous deliverance:

Then Jesus asked, "What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to? It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds perched in its branches."

Again he asked, "What shall I compare the kingdom of God to? It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into three measures of flour until it worked all through the dough."

Hidden. Unnoticed. Its growth all but imperceptible, yet look at the results: shade... shelter...nourishment...bread for life.

I am fascinated by these tiny life-forms: all that history and destiny embedded in that seed and passed down from one tree to another... And the yeast – an ordinary kitchen item! So common.

"The Kingdom of God is within you...among you...." Luke 17:20.

We are humbled before the mystery and the beauty of what God is offering....

Responding

...and that offer ushers us into a posture of response. In our JourneyMates gatherings you hear the word "invitation" used often; the Lord does not force or coerce us. Oh he may bring some powerful things to get our attention ... but even then, we can choose to turn away.

We've been reflecting on God's desires for us...I wonder how often it is simply for our **yes**. Our "yes" to God is both freely given and an act of obedience. The mother of our Lord modeled both with her response *"let it be unto me according to your word"...*Luke 1:38 a nuptial yes that makes space for God's Holy Spirit, who fills our hearts that we might be a womb of new life. A holy space....

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Perhaps we should take off our shoes.

Within you is the holy ground of God's Presence. His desire is always and ever *for you*.

Take a few moments to quiet yourself. Receive this wonder. And with the gaze of your soul

behold Your God...
In his beauty
In his mystery
and listen for the One who beckons

Amen