

A suggested prayer:

Heavenly Father, Lord, we do worship You, we do glorify You, we do give You thanks, and we do see You in creation. We see You everywhere around us. We see You in people. We see You in things made well by man. We see You in nature, and it is good, and we acknowledge that you have revealed yourself to us. Lord, give us the habit or the discipline to come often to this place, to this attitude, to this mindset so that we might be with You, that we might have communion with You and that our relationship with You might deepen. We ask this in the name and the power of the invisible God made visible in creation. Amen.

¹ Otto, Rudolph. (1923). *The idea of the holy*. London: Oxford University Press. Pp. 12-13.

A LOOK IN THE MIRROR™

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Spiritual Disciplines: Experiencing God in Creation

Pat Morley (excerpted from *A Man's Guide to the Spiritual Disciplines*,
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We have been given the visible creation to reveal the deity of the invisible God. In history, matter was once considered unspiritual. At other times, matter has been considered evil. The Bible, however, declares that the whole earth is full of his glory. Theologians call creation God's general revelation. Nature "reveals" a "general" knowledge about God. God speaks to us three ways in creation: through nature, through man's work, and through mankind.

God speaks through nature

You may put this article down and walk outside to enjoy the beauty of your yard. You might go to the mountains or to the beach for some weekend R-&-R. Perhaps you live in a city, but you can still do what I love to do – look up at the nighttime sky and admire the stars. I love sitting in my backyard before dawn and gazing up into the sky. In that quiet moment, when a tangible hush rests on my neighborhood, before the kitchen lights announce the day's beginning, and the engines rev and car doors begin slamming on my street, I think about 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 man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?"

You can pick up a book about any topic, and you will find that it communicates something about its author. Similarly, creation offers its own message of beauty and grandeur, and it also communicates something about its Creator. It gives perspective. Nature reveals God's invisible qualities, His eternal and infinite power, His divine nature. When I sit in my backyard and stare at the stars and the planets and the moon, I am humbled by God's greatness. Yet I also am encouraged by His willingness to stoop into my world and pursue me.

God speaks through man's work

Raw nature has the power to turn our thoughts to God, but so do man-made things. Consider, for instance, the intricacy of a fine watch, the grandeur of a skyscraper, the glorious sound of a symphony, the hum of a finely-tuned engine, the delicious smell of steaks on the grill. I love driving through beautiful neighborhoods and admiring the homes, manicured lawns, and flower gardens. I love the smell of freshly mown grass and the restful simplicity of a well-designed golf course. This list is almost endless: parks, sculpture, art, music, cathedrals, computers, the muscular curves of a Porsche. God uses our works to echo his own character throughout the world. Who doesn't marvel at the power of a laptop computer or PDA? How did that happen? It is a reflection of God's own creative character that he has put in human beings.

God speaks through mankind

Beyond raw nature and man's work lies the wonder of how God has handcrafted people. Who doesn't admire a beautiful woman or a handsome man? We love to recognize and reward human achievement. We have Emmys, Oscars, Tonys, Espys, and People's Choice awards. We can't wait to celebrate the athletic exploits of people like Lance Armstrong and Jeff Gordon. One man may not appear very talented when compared to another man, but both will appear quite talented when compared to a rabbit or a dancing bear. The least human being is infinitely more interesting than the highest beast in creation. Every human being – whether beautiful, or talented, or athletic – is part of the creation and, when pondered, can turn our thoughts to the greatness of God.

Whether you're focusing on natural beauty, man-made beauty, or mankind's beauty, let the result be the same – let it propel your mind to meditate on the greatness and goodness of the holy God. Rudolph Otto's book *The Idea of the Holy* sums it up this way, when he writes of what he called the "mysterium tremendum." He defines it this way:

The feeling of it at times may come sweeping like a gentle tide, pervading the mind with a tranquil mood of deepest worship. It may pass over into a more set and lasting attitude of the soul, continuing, as it were, thrillingly vibrant and resonant, until at last it dies away and the soul resumes its 'profane,' non-religious mood of everyday experience. It may burst in sudden eruption up from the depths of the soul with spasms and convulsions, or lead to the strangest excitements, to intoxicated frenzy, to transport, and to ecstasy. . . . It may become the hushed, trembling, and speechless

humility of the creature in the presence of—whom or what? In the presence of that which is a mystery inexpressible and above all creatures.¹

That's what we're looking for in contemplating nature – the experience of God's holiness. And, when you find it in creation, how should you respond? Look at Romans 1:21: "For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him." We must not fall into that trap. Glorify God; give thanks to God. That's why we do disciplines to begin with. That's why we want to cultivate spiritual habits – so we can come to a place where we voluntarily glorify God and give Him thanks.

A Suggested Spiritual Exercise

- Sit quietly in a quiet room at a quiet time of the day.
- Become aware of everything in the room -- the noises, the silence, the creaks, the wind outside or lack of it, a draft, the humidity, the temperature, your body, the furniture, the light, each chair, fabric, texture, color, and how these things make you feel.
- Consider what else is in the room that you cannot see -- radio waves, TV waves, microwaves, cellular phone conversations, HAM radio transmissions.
- Become aware of the Spirit of God in the room, in the same sense that He was always there even when you were not focused on Him.
- Pray, "Jesus, I know that you are right here with me. (As appropriate) I do sense your presence."

Other Suggested Spiritual Exercises

- Sit quietly in the predawn hour gazing into the sky.
- Go sit still beside a stream.
- Watch an ant hill.
- Stare back at a heron.
- Look at a mountain and think how long it would take one person to cart it away, or make one, or climb it.
- Think about how a human could make a tree.