

Gazing Upon the Truth

By Eddie Spencer

"One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple. For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his tabernacle and set me high upon a rock" (Ps. 27:4-5).

What an encouraging promise the Psalmist gives us. *"For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his tabernacle and me high upon a rock" (Ps. 27:5).*

The promise is not that God will keep us from trouble. Jesus clearly reminds us, *"...in this world you will have trouble"* (Jn. 16:33). Many of us get spiritually discouraged because we have unreasonable expectations in this sin-filled, fallen world. This side of heaven, we will have trouble. The promise is that we can live with confidence and without fear in the face of trouble. *"The Lord is my light and my salvation— whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life— of whom shall I be afraid?" (Ps. 27:1)*

The Psalmist not only gives us a promise but instructs us how to spiritually realize the promise. *"One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple"* (Ps. 27:1). Notice the language of the Psalmist, *"to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord..."* What does it mean to gaze on the beauty of the Lord?

"To gaze" comes from a group of Hebrew verbs that can be translated, *"to consider", "to remember", "to meditate"*. Gazing involves two dynamics. For example, *"to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord"* is not just to acknowledge that one of God's attributes is His beauty or holiness. Meditating on God's holiness involves much more than doctrinal assent.

"Gazing on the beauty of the Lord" is to think deeply on the subject of His beauty. Consider a cow eating his hay. The cow chews the cud. Practically, as gross as it sounds, a cow chews, swallows and then throws his food up and chews on it some more. This is what we are doing when we gaze upon the truths of the Scripture. So how do we do it, to gaze upon God's beauty, His truths?

In order to gaze upon God's truth revealed in His Word, we must learn to practice the meditative reading of the Scripture. Contrast informative and formative reading of the Bible.

Informative reading is when we are reading for information or the truth. There is nothing wrong with such reading. We need to understand the truth revealed in the Scriptures. But informative reading is not gazing.

Formative reading occurs when we comprehend the revealed truth of the Bible and the truth of God's Word becomes alive in us. God's truth begins to form and conform us to His revealed truth. *"Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly..." (Col. 3:16).*

Informative reading is like listening to a favorite piece of music on your iPod. In contrast, formative reading is like being in the presence of the composer as he plays your favorite piece of music. This is what happened to the travelers on the road to Emmaus. *"They asked each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?'" (Lk. 24:32)*

Gazing on the truth of God is reading the Scriptures all the while seeking the presence of the Author. Gazing on God's Word brings together the two primary spiritual disciplines, Bible reading and prayer. For example,

we consider that God is holy. His holiness reflects God's beauty. Then we begin to think deeply about the beauty, majesty, greatness, power, creativity... and such gazing turns into prayer and praise of the Lord.

"It sounds spiritually complicated," some may say. It sounds mysterious if not esoteric. It is not. We gaze all the time. Have you ever been hurt by someone and bitterness begins to take hold? Why? You are gazing on the hurt, nursing and rehearsing it in your mind. Have you ever had a big decision? Night after night you struggle to sleep. Daily you feel the magnitude of the consequences of the decision. Why the stress? You are gazing.

To gaze upon the beauty of the Lord is to fill your mind with thoughts of His greatness, majesty and artistry. What will happen is the Scriptures of God will become more real and the God of the Scriptures will become more alive and powerfully at work in us. His truth will begin to take root in us.

Of course maintaining the spiritual discipline of gazing upon the Lord is difficult. David, the Psalmist, had the same challenge. *"My heart says of you, 'Seek his face!' Your face, Lord, I will seek. Do not hide your face from me, do not turn your servant away in anger; you have been my helper. Do not reject me or forsake me, O God my Savior"* (Ps. 27:8-9). Yet the more we learn to daily gaze on God's truth, the more confidence and courage God will work in us. We too will be able to say, *"For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his tabernacle and set me high upon a rock"* (Ps. 27:5). This is the gospel truth for the week.