

Things to Consider

- ▶ At one point in his book on John Henry, Cardinal Newman, his biographer, Ian Ker, wrote about Newman's hymn *Lead Kindly Light*. There is a line in it, 'One step enough for me', that Ker says, summed up Newman's approach to life. Newman believed that God gives us enough light to see the next step that we need to take, but no more. Then, when we have taken that step, we will be shown the next one. So to begin, we must start with that first step.
- ▶ That first step is to begin looking for or noticing God's presence in our life and the world around us. And what eyes will you bring to this seeing? This does not mean that you will be constantly thinking about God in an obsessive manner. Rather you are allowing a love-relationship to develop and deepen. You can be present to God without thinking about Him during every waking moment.
- ▶ A husband and wife can be deeply in love with each other, but they do not need to be constantly thinking about the other. Rather, their love forms a backdrop to all else. The other person is just there in their life and influences it – and it is the same with us and God.
- ▶ In the Book of Exodus we see God telling Moses to 'Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.' (3.5) We stand on holy ground and that means that we must approach God with a sense of awe, thankfulness, and humility.
- ▶ It is seeing the gift of the moment and God within it. As we struggle with all of this and our constant failures, God is there through the struggling. It's the struggle that can help to give positive shape to our life with God.
- ▶ A central key in all this is humility – that wonderful gift from God which we would prefer to do without when we are faced with some humbling situation, but which, deep down, we know is so vital for growth towards spiritual depth.
- ▶ One final thought – in that story from Genesis, it was only afterwards that Jacob realised he had been sleeping on 'holy ground'. And we too only notice the traces of God, after the fact.

AtG/B3/MBH

Attending to God

The First Step – Just Noticing



This wonderful photo says it all! Just as in other areas of life we do not notice what is staring us in the face, so too, in our relationship with God, we often don't notice His presence in our midst. He is always there, but we are not sensitive enough to notice the little, constant indications.

In the Book of Genesis (29.10–22) in a dream, Jacob has an experience of God, with a ladder 'reaching to heaven; and the angels of God ... ascending and descending on it'. When he awakes he exclaims, 'Surely the Lord is in this place – and I did not know it!' (v.17). How true this can be of our own experience!

So the first step is teaching ourselves to notice what is there before our eyes. Let me push this a little deeper. As Eugene Peterson reminds us, it is not so much *what* we see, but *how* we see that is important. It may seem an odd statement, but as he says, the question is 'What eyes do we bring to what we see before us?'

A woman was reputed to have asked the artist, Joseph (J.M.W.) Turner, 'Mr. Turner, I can't see in nature what you paint in your pictures' to which Turner simply replied, 'But don't you wish you could Madam.'

An ancient legend has it that when God was creating the world, He was approached by four angels. The first one asked, 'How are you doing it?' The second, 'Why are you doing it?' The third, 'Can I be of help?' The fourth, 'What's it worth?' The first was a scientist, the second a philosopher, the third an altruist and the fourth a real estate agent. A fifth, who had been watching, simply delighted in it and gave thanks. He was the mystic.

In this second story we see how five individuals look at the world through different eyes and with a particular view in mind. So my question is '*How* do you see?' What eyes do you bring as you try to notice God's presence in your life and the world around you? In a way, our response will be a variation on Turner's reply to the woman: we want to notice what we might miss at first glance – we want to see with different eyes.

It's learning to 'open' our eyes to seeing, 'opening' our ears to listening, and 'opening' our hearts to God. 'How do we see?' becomes important in a spiritual context when we link our eyes and ears to opening our heart to God. 'How do you see?' is the initial, critical question.

From a spiritual perspective there are times, when we all go through life asleep. We are unaware of the rich depths of the spiritual world. And if we do wake up and focus on the realm of the spiritual, we bring much baggage for we have numerous assumptions and firm ideas about God. In short we do not come with an open mind; we are like Nicodemus when he visited Jesus. (John 3.1–21)

There is a story about the professor of Religious Studies who went to visit a renowned holy man. They began with tea and as the holy man poured, the professor launched immediately into a monologue about religion.

The holy man said nothing as he poured tea into his guest's cup. Feeling wonderfully inspired the professor kept talking, hardly noticing that the tea was being poured. Suddenly he realised that the holy man was still pouring, even though the cup had long since been filled and was now running all over the mat. 'Stop, stop, what are you doing?' cried the professor. The holy man looked up and said, 'Just as the cup cannot hold any more tea when it is already filled, how can I give you anything when your mind is already filled?'

The truth is we need to come humbly to God, with an open mind, ready to receive what He will give us. If we come with baggage, such as preconceived ideas, we will learn nothing and cease growing spiritually.

And so we need to become aware through being still, listening and noticing, so we can recognise God's presence – and that requires humility. And we will develop these attitudes by actually getting on and trying to do it.