

**Optional Study and Practice for The Eight Most Important Chapters, Revisited
Session 6: “Contemplation Develops the Beholder,” from *The Contemplative Life*
Recording 369B: “Contemplation Develops the Beholder”**

What Joel said about this chapter

In the recording that we used as an introduction to this study series (453A), Joel said: “In the 1961 August Letter, you have ‘Contemplation Develops the Beholder,’ and you have an entire lesson in contemplation, in learning how to contemplate, how really to engage in contemplative meditation. When you go through a program of that kind, again you come out of it absolutely immersed in the atmosphere of that article.”

Also, in Chapter 10 of the book *Spiritual Discernment*, Joel says,

“From the very beginning, the major vision of the Infinite Way has been not to treat disease to get rid of sickness and get health, or to take human footsteps to gain supply, but to rise to another dimension of life. These ideas, together with that of incorporeality, have given us in plain ABCs, not only what the vision is, but how to attain it. What our daily practice must be, and how we are to train ourselves when these appearances are brought forcibly to our attention is thoroughly explained in ‘Contemplation Develops the Beholder’ in *The Contemplative Life* and in ‘Living above the Pairs of Opposites’ in *A Parenthesis in Eternity*.”

What does it mean to be a beholder?

To be a beholder is to be in a state of consciousness that does not concern itself with good appearances or evil appearances. A beholder sees both with a sense of detachment, as an onlooker without judgment or emotion, and with no interest in changing, improving, or destroying the appearance. A beholder rests at the center of their own being and does not use personal mental powers to enter the picture. The attitude of a beholder is like that of someone watching a sunrise or sunset, just watching nature at work, letting God express Itself.

How does contemplation develop the beholder?

Joel teaches that through the contemplative life, or a life of contemplation, you come to a new state of consciousness in which, while you may still see what appears to be evil in the world, no longer will you judge, condemn, or misunderstand it. You become a beholder, judging neither good nor evil. And what is the contemplative life? It is a life in which we ponder, meditate, and cogitate upon truth and commune with our inner or spiritual Self. It is a life in which we maintain a receptive attitude that enables us to be responsive to impartations from the infinite to the individual.

Some key points about being a beholder from the chapter and the recording

Joel covers a lot of territory in this chapter and recording. Here we just focus on some key points related to being a beholder.

- The entire spiritual life is based on the rejection of appearances, and the discipline on this path lies in rejecting *every* appearance, whether it is good or evil, in the realization that what is of God is invisible to the human senses.
- That which appears to be good may turn out to be evil and vice versa. But there is a Presence and Power within every one of us, and Its function is to create, maintain, and sustain harmony in our life. If for any reason harmony is apparently taken from our lives, Its function is to restore it.
- Jesus is our wayshower, and with every miracle he performed, he bore witness to the presence and power of God and denied any personal goodness. To do as he did, we must *be still* in the face of *any* appearance. The moment we do something or think something, the moment we judge good or evil, we become something other than a simple beholder of the presence and power of God.
- So in the face of any appearance, we become still, judging neither good nor evil, just being a beholder. We let the Father within present the true picture to us and reveal that which has always been there, even though finite sense could not discern it. This attitude enables you to pierce the veil of illusion. The material picture, which is always a misperception of the spiritual reality, gives way, and the spiritual truth stands revealed. Yet all we have done is bear witness to God in action, withholding judgment as to good or evil, recognizing that only God IS, and listening within. In other words, we have been a beholder.
- As we look out at this world of appearances **without judgment**, it is as if we were realizing that God, Spirit, made all that is, and thus all that is, is spiritual, not material. In that realization, we can behold the spiritual universe. By looking at this world without judgment, we are trying to see the universe as God sees it, just as when we behold a work of art without judgment, we can enter the consciousness of the artist.
- So the spiritual path is one of discipline, and that discipline is withholding judgment of "this world," the appearance world, the world of concepts and misperceptions. Jesus' words, "Be not afraid, it is I," are an immense help in releasing ourselves from the world of appearances, because with those words, you divest yourself of judgment as to good or evil and recognize that God, or *I*, stands behind every appearance. When we no longer love or fear appearances, we can look at them with a sense of detachment as a beholder, with no interest in changing, improving, or destroying them.
- When we are in the midst of what seems to be a problem for ourselves or another, it takes great discipline to refrain from trying to do something about the appearance and instead, to know with conviction: "My kingdom—the place where I live, move, and have my being—is not of this world. I have nothing to do about this world except to know that it is not of My kingdom." If we can withdraw our hate, fear, or love of the appearance, the invisible Spirit of God within us can reveal the spiritual reality.
- As you live the life of contemplation, you find yourself gradually withdrawing judgment from appearances. Then when you see or hear about erroneous appearances, you do not react to them. You have no desire to change, alter, or improve the appearance. You are just a beholder, waiting for God to reveal the truth.

- Even In the face of danger, you refrain from judgment and bear witness to God. You realize, "Whatever is *real* is God-maintained and God-sustained, and it is permanent and eternal. I do not have to do anything to save it or preserve it. I do not have to do anything but behold God in action." You sit without judgment, in the realization that this is God's universe. "It is I; be not afraid. My kingdom is not of this world." Your life is one with God, and so your life cannot be put asunder by sin, disease, lack, death, war, or any other means. God maintains your life eternally and immortally, and neither life nor death can change that. When harmony has been restored, you recognize, "I of my own self did nothing. The Father within me did the work." Of course, you did one thing that was important and difficult: You came to the place of being a beholder.

Practicing the lesson

Self-reflection

Self-reflection can be a helpful tool in developing our ability to become a beholder. We can ask ourselves:

- To what degree do I judge appearances to be good or evil?
- If I do judge good and evil, are there certain areas of life which are the most tempting for me in that regard? Do I tend to judge people? Do health conditions pull me into judgment? What about politics? Family? My personal life situation? When we are aware of our vulnerable spots, we can be more vigilant.

Bible Quotes

Joel gives us three Bible quotes to contemplate that are of particular significance for developing our consciousness as a beholder:

- "Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of?" (Isaiah 2:22)
- "My kingdom is not of this world." (John 18:36)
- "Be not afraid, it is I." (John 6:20)

Practice being a beholder

Joel says that in this attitude of a beholder, your personal mental powers come to a stop, and it is as if you were watching a sunrise or a sunset. You become a beholder, simply watching nature at work. You never enter the picture, or seek to change, remove, destroy, or attempt to improve it in any way. You are at the center of your own being as a beholder. Making an analogy, Joel speaks about viewing art in a gallery: "If we were in an art gallery, standing before the works of the great masters, we would be beholders because all that we would be trying to do would be to draw from the picture what the artist had placed there. We do not try to improve the picture; we do not try to destroy it: all that we seek to do is to draw forth from the picture what the artist has created and placed there for our enjoyment. You are not trying to improve or destroy it. All you want is to understand what the artist created, so you *behold* it. We do not

enter the picture: we behold it. If we enter anything, it would be the consciousness of the artist to behold exactly what he beheld because we are now of one consciousness—one mind.”

Does this describe your attitude in an art gallery? Or do you entertain beliefs about art that interfere with your taking the attitude of a beholder? You may enjoy seeing how you actually respond by viewing the works of art pictured in the carousel below. Are you simply able to be a beholder?

[See the art carousel on the website.]

Joel says, “As we live the life of contemplation, therefore, we find ourselves gradually withdrawing judgment from appearances, and when we see, or when we are told about erroneous appearances, we do not react to them, and they do not register in our consciousness. As far as they are concerned, our mind is a blank. We have no desire to change, alter, or improve the appearance presented to us: we are just beholders waiting for God to reveal it to us as it is.”

Are you able to do this in the face of appearances? Again, you might want to assess yourself with the news items shown in the carousel below. These are all actual headlines and photos that have appeared recently in the media. Are you able to be a beholder with a sense of detachment, without judging good or evil, and with no interest in changing, improving, or destroying the appearance?

If not, why? Do certain things trigger emotions? Do you hold any beliefs that prevent you from being a beholder as Joel describes?

[See the news carousel on the website.]