

Amphibious thoughts of the world around us. . .
by Marilyn Dawson Oct 18, 2012

The powers of observation come in many different forms. . . taste, touch, smell, hearing, seeing, and intuition. By themselves, these methods of observing our world tell us about it and help us interact with it. How they help us interact with the world around us requires more than mere observation however. It is thoroughly possible to observe something and have absolutely no inclination to interact with it or do anything about it. This lack of inclination has proven downright deadly for critters and people alike down through history. Sadly, this lack of inclination to act on what is observed around us has even hit God's People at various times in the past as well.

We have all heard the analogy of the frog in a pot of boiling water. But something about that analogy hit me over the head tonight as I was talking with a friend about the various definitions and uses of something known as discernment.

What is discernment?

Discernment is the ability to act wisely based on what has been observed, and the implications such an observation has presented. Unfortunately, if the implications of what is observed are not apparent to the person doing the observing, their ability to discern the appropriate course of action is severely hampered. Scripture sometimes refers to discernment as walking circumspectly, having your wits about you, being alert, being wise and knowing the right choice to make when faced with a decision. This is not to be confused with intuition. As listed above, intuition is merely another method of observing the world around us. It can tell us when something is about to happen. But if we have no knowledge of that event's implications or have no inclination to act on what our intuition is telling us, it's useless.

While some translations of God's Word list the Gift of Discernment, God has this to say in Hebrews 5:14 "But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." The way a child of God hones their spiritual senses, is through active use combined with having studied God's Word. Ideally, this will produce the ability to not merely observe a situation, but to also recognize short and long-range implications of that situation and make the appropriate judgement call as a result.

This requires several things:

1) It requires knowing what God says about the situation. Many people over the years have come to me asking what God says about this or that. Sometimes it's the proverbial, "What does God say about eating a hamburger?". Other times I am asked what God says about relationships or entertainment choices or church family situations, just to name a few. There are some excellent resources out there that I have used through the course of my life. . . Offline or online, there is first and foremost, the Word of God itself! God's Word is stuffed full of guidance in handling every day situations that come up in our lives. Learning to pull out the guiding principles comes with learning how to study God's Word, learning how to ask the 5 W's and then learning how to appropriate that information to today. God's Word is always relevant! However, that relevance isn't always apparent at first glance. God's Word has the basics for life on the surface, but has filled the Scriptures with depth and layers. God says Himself that those layers are to be plumbed for the riches they contain. The deeper one goes in the Word of God, the more mature they become. Paul speaks of both the milk and the meat of God's Word. The milk refers to the basics of our Salvation and of living the Christian life. The meat refers to the deeper things of God's Word, doctrinal issues, and applications to every day life. We are told in 2nd Timothy 2:15 "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

It is in learning how to rightly divide the Word of Truth that other tools can come alongside God's Word to help us get the most out of it. Now please do not interpret this to mean that God's Word can not stand by itself! Far from it! If none of the resources I will mention existed, God's Word

would still contain all we need for life and godliness! God's Word does not need these resources to be understood. These are merely helps!

Resources include a copy of the Strong's Concordance, the Strong's Hebrew and Greek Interlinears, one of many Bible Dictionaries, and even commentaries written by others who have studied the passage you are looking at. Keep in mind that commentaries are written by people, not by God, and therefore may occasionally be prone to error. Several commentators may interpret the same passage a variety of different ways, not all of which will keep the 5 W's in mind as they do so. I've heard some pretty strange commentaries on various passages of Scripture that left me wondering how on earth they got that out of the passage they were reading!! So be careful! Even the use of resources requires that one be discerning and careful, not accepting everything they come across as Gospel.

2) Knowing what God says about the situation lays the foundation for examining the situation before you. Once you know what God says, you can then begin to ascertain the short and long-term implications facing you. This requires thinking beyond the immediate! Too many people these days think only in the moment, and give no thought as to how their actions will affect themselves or others in the sometimes not-so-distant future. Thinking only in the immediate removes the knowledge of that situation's implications, and has been repeatedly known to have dire effects on those affected by both the situation and the lack of foreknowledge.

But how do you gain a sense of foreknowledge? In most cases it's pretty simple. . . Ask yourself what will happen if you respond to this situation in a given manner. Sometimes you are watching something happen, and it's a simple matter of extrapolating the final culmination of what you see going on before you. For example, if you are watching a motorbike speed down on the wrong side of the road, you can extrapolate that if that biker doesn't cross back into his own lane, the chances of a head-on collision are imminent. The short term effect will often be his death, and the long-term effect might be the loss of a Mother or Father's critical influence in someone's home, and the need for the other driver to replace their vehicle and end up deeper in debt as a result. The person without any such foreknowledge will see the biker speed down the wrong side of the road and rather than see any implications, will comment on how cool that bike is, or how amazing the guy's leathers are, totally missing the import of the situation before him. That example doesn't require action on the part of the observer. But a little imagination on the part of the reader can no doubt come up with examples that require them to act.

3) Once you have that foreknowledge, you are required to act! Notice I said "required"!!! Scripture says that we are beholden to the knowledge we possess. One example is in the book of Proverbs: Proverbs 6:30-31 "Men do not despise a thief, if he steal to satisfy his soul when he is hungry; But if he be found, he shall restore sevenfold; he shall give all the substance of his house." In other words, for this example from Proverbs, a man is not scorned for needing to eat. But if he's caught stealing, he is expected to pay up! He is liable for his actions, and those around him will expect him to own up and pay up. Scripture also says in James 4:17 "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." When you come across a situation and ascertain the potential implications of which way that situation could go, you are obligated to make a choice! The choice you make will decide which of those short and long-term implications will take place! For good, or for bad.

But what if the situation is vague? What if the situation could go either way and neither way seems to have bad implications in the short or long term? What then? Actually, most of life's situations are in this particular camp. Most of life carries along on the backs of the small, seemingly insignificant situations and decisions that appear to affect no one in any kind of negative way. But taken together, they can steer the whole course of a person's life either toward the right track, or away from it. Lifestyle choices for example, are full of this. Choices to be a couch potatoe, eat fast food on a regular basis, don't exercise the brain or the body very much, and just coast through life generally results in a physically ill person with a simple mind, going nowhere and accomplishing very little. We know this is not God's will or purpose for anyone's life, and Scripture is full of the guiding principles that encourage us away from such a life style.

Discernment grows with time and use. It is needed across ALL areas of life, from home life, to entertainment to work life to church life to education and everything in between.

Discernment requires wisdom! God says in James 1:5 "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." Christ said before He went up into Heaven, "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." John 14:26. Other translations say that the Holy Spirit will lead you into all truth.

There are times when we do not have the knowledge within us to make a wise decision regarding some situation that we face. In such situations, we can ask God for that wisdom, and He will guide us to the answers we need in order to formulate the action required to get through that situation wisely.

Unfortunately it would seem many among God's people have become lax over the decades and are no longer circumspect about what is going on their world, no longer discerning the implications of their immediate actions, nor discerning how events around them will affect them now or into the future. This has led to a cooling of faith for many and resulted in what evangelists, preachers, and theologians are referring to as the Laodicean church. This is a church that has lost its saltiness in the world around it. This is a church that has lost its fervor and its fire for serving God at all costs. This is a church content with blending in with those around it, and that has lost its relevancy due to straying from its first love. This church has become blind not only to the world around it, but blind to its own condition, thinking of itself as beautiful and rich, when in reality it is sickly, naked and poor.

This brings me back to the analogy of the frog that I mentioned at the beginning. As we all know, the frog is a cold-blooded amphibious creature. It warms itself in the sun or in warm water. It knows where there is heat, and it knows where there is cold. It can tell hot and cold apart. It's not a dumb frog and would be offended if you referred to it as dumb. But being the cold-blooded creature it is, combined with its love for warmth, it has a weakness. If its surroundings gradually warm up past the point its body can handle, the poor frog will not notice and die. As a child, I used to rescue tree frogs from the road outside my home. They loved to sun themselves there, but would invariably either get run over by cars driving down the street, or get so warm they'd fry right there and die. So my brother and I would rescue them and take them back to the creek behind our house in an effort to save their little lives. These frogs, for all their knowledge of hot and cold, could not discern the danger inherent in gradual temperature increases, nor the danger of their chosen surroundings. Pavement heats up really nice on a sunny day, but it is frequented by huge noisy metal creatures driven by humans, and can get so warm that it hurts human feet to walk on! The frog's ability to discern these things does not seem to exist and many have died as a result.

There is a dark and dire warning here. As Christians, we need to be alert not only to life's myriad of little decisions and situations that make up who we become and how we shape our existence, but we also need to be alert to the situations we face that affect our spiritual lives and those around us. We can't allow our powers of observation and intuition to be limited just to the here and now. It is imperative that we are exercising these abilities in the spirit realm too; learning when seemingly innocuous situations might have short and long-term effects not merely in the physical realm where they appear to be occurring, but also in our hearts and minds and in our spirit, and in the spirit realm around us. Seemingly innocent things such as an interest in ancient mythology, has been shown in my experience with children and young adults, to have deeper consequences than first thought.

I grew up with a fascination for the ancient mythos of Greece, Rome, Norse, Egypt and Babylon. It was a passing fascination and nothing I ever got obsessed with, a fact that I would become very thankful for years later. Several years ago as my own daughter began to develop a fascination

with ancient civilizations and their mythos, she discovered ancient Egypt and began bringing books home about it. These books mentioned the Egyptian mythos and the various names of the gods and goddesses that were not merely in the mythos, but worshipped by the people of the day. Around this time a young friend of mine on the Internet revealed to me a struggle she was having with a particular demon. When she mentioned its name, I ran for one of these books my daughter brought home, and sure enough, it was the name of one of the gods in the book! Suddenly I was aware that what I had previously thought was a combination of "explanation of how the world works" and ancient false worship, was very much alive today and I had to warn my daughter about the dangers of obsession with the ancient mythos. More recently it also occurred to me that the demons behind the perpetration of these myths are bringing their stories into modern times with the likes of the new Persie Jackson series of books and the movies now being made from them, the fresh rise of interest in vampirism, and the growth of the darker sub-cultures leading people into witchcraft(wiccan) and other earth worship such as druidism, paganism, and others I could name.

The discerning Christian must look at what is going on around them, whether it be in entertainment such as books, movies, music, etc, or whether it be on the news, and not simply see the surface for what it is, but look past the surface and see the implications, both short and long-term of what they are hearing, seeing, and experiencing. Failure to discern the times in which we live will hamper our ability to be salt and light in the world around us. We need to see what is coming down the pipe to be prepared for it. Without such preparation, we will be at the mercy of those events equally as much as those God is otherwise calling us to be there for. If we look at the news and say to ourselves, "oh that's over there, it will never affect me", we are missing the import of what is going on. If we see natural disasters, wars and rumors of wars, religious uprisings and unrest, we are to be alert and wise, doing what we can to ensure first that such things are unnecessary where we are, and second, that if such things should ripple back to where we are, that we are ready to address them and to help those who will go through them.

We must not be like the frog, knowing hot from cold, knowing right from wrong, but being desensitized by the world around us because we fail to notice the gradual changes taking place. Remember its all the little things that come together to change the course of one's life, and sometimes change the course of history!

Let us pray for wisdom to be discerning, and for the wherewithall to act on that wisdom in a way that will benefit all involved so that we are enabled to be God's hand extended.