

THINK AND FEEL DEEPLY

“Contemplation is nothing else than a secret, peaceful, and loving infusion of God, which, if admitted, will set the soul on fire with the Spirit of love.”

— St. John of the Cross

Think of the most amazing natural wonder in your part of the world.

A canyon. A waterfall.

A mountain. A body of water.

Imagine if someone told you that they had visited there and enjoyed it — for only 10 minutes! How would you evaluate their understanding and appreciation of that place? What would you advise them to do so that they would really know that place?

That same advice is helpful when it comes to friendship with God. Knowing God beyond mere intellectual acknowledgment is not a

fast-food endeavor. **Slowing down to practice the spiritual habit of contemplation will help us truly know God and enjoy him.** Thinking and feeling deeply means that we linger as we pay attention to God’s activity. It means we ponder and deeply enjoy his interactions with us. Contemplation helps us be present with the One who is with us and moves us away from being preoccupied with the temporary.

God is at work in his world, and our enjoyment of life is directly linked to how aware we are of his work. **Thinking and feeling deeply opens us up to pay attention to God’s activity in our lives.** It is one of the practices that makes space in our crowded life to notice the Spirit of God’s movement. Contemplation nurtures wonder, patience, gratitude, and hope. Contemplation dilutes self-importance, entitlement, greed, and despair.

Scripture invites us into this practice in 2 Corinthians 4:18: “So we don’t look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever.”

Reminders of God’s presence and his power are all around us. We are distracted from his comfort and reassurances by such incidentals! Imagine the security that can be nurtured in a child if they can learn to notice the reminders of his care for them. The flowers, the breeze, the bugs, the water cycle, gravity, sunrise, the moon — all of these are “*I love you ..., I am here ...*” whispers from God. **We can help children hear God’s whispers when we dial down the pace of life, and show them how to linger and listen.**



THINK AND FEEL DEEPLY

INVITATIONS TO ENGAGE

Start the conversation with your child!

“Come and sit with me a minute. Let’s talk about the little things that are really reminders of the big things.”

EARLY CHILDHOOD (2-6 years old)

God loves you and put many things in this world to remind you that he is your best friend. Let’s read Psalm 11:2 together slowly. **“How amazing are the deeds of the LORD!”**

Today we will take a walk and look for some amazing deeds that tell us that God loves us. Let’s see if we can find five reminders of God’s love to put in this little sack (or use a bucket or a basket). We will have to pay close attention. **Every time we find something, we will stop and say, “I hear you, God. I love you, too!”**

ELEMENTARY AGE (5-10 years old)

Let’s read Psalm 11:2 together slowly. **“How amazing are the deeds of the LORD! All who delight in him should ponder them.”** Ponder means to think slowly and watch for details.

Today we are going to take a slow, slow walk and make a pondering bracelet. (Put a loop of tape around the child’s wrist with the sticky side out.) God loves us and is here with us. He puts reminders all around us so that we won’t forget that he is with us.

We will pick up some tiny reminders that God made this world and is continuing to care for us. We will make a beautiful reminder of his love as we stick them to this bracelet. And we will stop many times to thank him.

PRETEEN/EARLY ADOLESCENT (10-14 years old)

Put this little blank card right in front of your eyes. Stare at it for a little while. See how it is blocking your view of everything else? Now, if you move it a little farther away, you might see that there are more important things here, too.

Slowly write 2 Corinthians 4:18 on this small card. **“So we don’t look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever.”**

Sometimes we are so busy looking at the things right in front of us — the “right now” things — that we miss the things that last forever. We need to slow down and look past the temporary.

Let’s walk outside together until you see something little that tells you the big truth that God loves you. Let’s find a little something that means more than what first meets the eye. (Maybe a small rock would be a reminder that God is reliable, our refuge, or a sure foundation.) Then we will bring it inside and put it — and the verse card — where we will be reminded to stop throughout the day to acknowledge our life with God.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCE

Perspectives on Children’s Spiritual Formation, edited by Michael Anthony

(See Chapter 1 by Scottie May. Also see index for her responses to the other approaches to children’s ministry.)