

The Value of Observation

“O taste and see that the Lord is good; happy are those who take refuge in him.”
Psalm 34:8

Christian Jacques Ellul is known for the saying, “Think globally, act locally.” I take this to mean that we’re all in this thing called life together (globally), but there’s only so much anyone can do (locally). The big picture helps us know what to do here and now.

One of my friends in Roswell once decided to raise ostriches. You may remember articles from a couple of decades or more ago saying that ostrich was going to become America’s new meat. It didn’t; still, my friend would sit for hours on the corral observing his ostriches. He had a remarkable knowledge of livestock in general and decided that he was going to learn as much as he could about the birds.

In just a few years his knowledge of which ostriches were ill and what was wrong with them became so great that ranchers in Africa, where ostriches have been raised forever, would call him up and ask questions. He was quite an observer. He died way too young, but his power of observation helped him have a good life.

For Christians a great life consists of being an observer of what God is doing in our lives and world and joining Him there. Our Psalm reading (above) puts it, *“Taste and see that the Lord is good; happy are those who take refuge in him.”* Observation is how most of us get this taste. The power of God in our lives is palpable, observable. If we will but sit awhile on the corral of life observing what is going on, likely Jesus can put us to work. “Think globally, act locally.” What does God do in people’s lives and how can I help?

And let me make a distinction between *watching* and *observing*. The two words are often used interchangeably, but for our purposes let’s say that by watching we mean an activity that is passive, basically a form of entertainment. Suppose we mean by observing an activity that is active. It involves learning something that helps us live with skill or helps us determine where and how we might be of use to God.

Increasingly it seems that people spend much of their lives merely watching rather than observing, being entertained rather than being productive. And there is a rightful place for entertainment in our lives. But determining where and how God can use us is more important. Thus, there is always a need to observe.

And this is not difficult. A couple of weeks ago I was in line at a credit union in the North Valley where I live. A woman came up and stood behind me. We both joked about how there can be ten windows but only one cashier on duty. She looked weary. I asked how her summer was going. Her son had just died two days earlier of heart failure. Her granddaughter had been taken to live with her druggie mother. The lady’s cousin and her husband died a week ago in a car wreck. Twenty-eight of her relatives had died so far in 2017. As we parted she said, “Thanks for talking to me. I didn’t mean to burden you with my problems.” She hadn’t. Sometimes God puts us in a line to observe. – DJ