



spiritual practice of seeing others as God's beloved

THE IMAGINATION NECESSARY TO LOVE OTHERS

Jesus invites us to "love others as we love ourselves" and our ability to love others is directly impacted by the ways that we see them. It is more difficult to love those whom we do not view as possessing equal value and worth as ourselves. It is more difficult to love those who we deem broken or malformed due to their actions or behaviors. It is more difficult to love those who do not share the same values as we do because our brains will naturally categorize them as "other." The practice of seeing others as God's beloved is a discipline that strengthens our ability to view everyone we interact with as image bearers of God and deserving of love. When we practice, we are following the example of Jesus. Trevor Hudson emphasizes that "wherever Jesus went, people knew they were valued. Today he requests that we relate to others as he would if he were in our place... we can count on him showing us how best to bear the beams of his love toward those we meet" Jesus is our great mentor and guide in this challenge to see others as God's beloved.

A secondary gift of this practice is that it also strengthens our ability to acknowledge our own belovedness. Trevor Hudson notes that "mysteriously, it is as we see others as brothers and sisters and affirm our common belovedness that there grows within our hearts a fuller appreciation of just how much we are loved by God." This awareness allows us to love others more freely because we are no longer bound by a desire to meet their expectations or win favor and approval. Acknowledging the belovedness of others serves us in the same way the water cycle replenishes the earth. Seeing others as worthy, valuable, and loved allows us to see ourselves with the same clarity that then encourages us to love with even more boldness those we meet.

Questions to consider: How does seeing God's belovedness of others help us see it in ourselves? How does believing my own belovedness by God help me in my relationships to others? What occurs when we relate to each other as Beloved?

HOW TO PRACTICE

There are many ways to practice seeing others as beloved by God. Below is a short list of ways that you can strengthen your ability to see others in this way.

- Envision the other person in the arms of God or in the presence of Jesus. Use this imaginative space to pray for the individual and notice how God interacts with them.
- Discover how you can serve the other person. In what way could you bless this individual? If you interact with them often, consider how you could more intentionally care for them in a way that reflects their belovedness.
- Practice stopping yourself when you are tempted to gossip, speak ill against, or belittle someone else. In these moments, try to focus on their belovedness and consider how your words or thoughts can dignify them instead of tearing them down.