

Ready to stand in the glory gap?

DOCENTS OF GLORY: GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS



A ReVision Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Welcome to *Docents of Glory: Gerard Manley Hopkins*

The history of the Christian movement features many outstanding servants of God, whose service in His Name has left a legacy of glorious achievement. We can learn much from such servants to help us in knowing and serving the Lord in our own callings in life.

Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889) never published a poem during his lifetime. Only because of a friend, Robert Bridges, are Hopkins' many wonderful verses available to us today. His poetry can be difficult at times, and requires slow and thoughtful reading. But once you begin to enter into Hopkins' mind and worldview, his poetry springs to life with insights and beauty that can be breathtaking.

Christians are called to glorify God in all aspects of life, even in the most ordinary, everyday details. We stand in what might be called the "glory gap" between God's self-revelation in creation and culture and the recognition of His glory as such on the part of human beings. To Christians falls the task of pointing out, explaining, and celebrating the glory of God, thereby directing the thoughts and affections of the people around us to the greatness of our Savior and King.

But we need help in fulfilling this calling. And here is where Hopkins comes in: His poetry can teach us how to *see* the glory of God in creation and culture, and lead us to *delight* in His glory, so that we will be better fitted to *proclaim* His glory as He gives opportunity for us to do so.

We hope this study will help you to take up your calling as a docent to the people you meet each day in the world-museum of the glory of our Lord.

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May the Lord bless you as you take up this study of the Lordship of Christ, and how He works to express that through the right working of civil government.

T. M. Moore
Principal

1 Glory Gap

*The heavens declare the glory of God;
And the firmament shows His handiwork.* Psalm 19.1

...what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. Romans 1.19

*For the earth will be filled
With the knowledge of the glory of the LORD,
As the waters cover the sea.* Habakkuk 2.14

Continuous proclamation

Scripture teaches that the glory of God, that radiant, alarming, thrilling, and weighty manifestation of His presence, is everywhere on display in the created world. The heavens declare God's glory. The skies bear witness to His immensity, beauty, and might. All the works of God's hand, throughout all creation, testify to His splendor, goodness, righteousness, wisdom, power, and love (Ps. 145.5-9). We are surrounded by, immersed in, swaddled with, and even refractive of the glory of the eternal, triune God, everywhere and at all times.

This is only what we would expect, since the world and everything in it is made by God, belongs to God, is upheld in whole and part by God, and exists in God (Ps. 24.1; Heb. 1.3; Acts 17.27, 28). Indeed, God's great desire is not only that He should *proclaim* His glory in everything He has made, but that the *knowledge* of that glory should cover the earth as the water covers the sea.

Yet here is where we encounter what might be called the "glory gap." The glory of God is being revealed on every hand, by creatures great and small; yet, as is abundantly clear, that glory is not being acknowledged by people nor responded to as we might expect. It is even the case that human beings are seeking to rob God of His glory by taking credit themselves for all His many good and perfect gifts.

Can anything be done to fill this glory gap and to focus the people around us on the greatness, goodness, and glory of God?

A world charged with grandeur

Gerard Manley Hopkins captured this situation eloquently in his poem, "God's Grandeur." In the first part he echoes the teaching of Scripture about the ubiquity of God's glory. Then he explains that human beings, distracted by their pursuits and labors, have lost sight of that glory and are corrupting the earth by their ways. Finally, Hopkins returns to the theme of creation's glory, and the determination of God, by His Spirit, to bring that glory to light again, day after day after day. Here's the poem:

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do men then now not reckon his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell; the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;

And though the last lights off the black West went,
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs –
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

God never gives up on making His glory known. He ever renews His creation with His presence, power, and goodness, ever beckoning men to “reck his rod” – to acknowledge His presence and rule.

Docents of glory

Hopkins has framed a challenge for us: How can we bring the knowledge of God to light in a world where people are distracted by idols and uninclined to acknowledge or worship Him? This is precisely where we come in. Like docents in an art museum, who point out and explain the details and beauty of the exhibits, believers, called to glorify God in all things (1 Cor. 10.31), are to be docents of the glory of God to a world numbed to His existence and blind to His presence.

But we need help in fulfilling this calling – help in how to *see* the glory of God ourselves, and help in how to *make known* God’s glory to the people around us. Here is where Gerard Manley Hopkins can lend a hand. In this series we’ll look to Hopkins and discover how, by meditating on his poetry, we can learn to see that “dearest freshness deep down things” and to dwell in the warmth of God’s brooding Spirit, so that we are able to discern and discover His glory, and to make it known day after day after day.

For reflection

1. Can you think of a time when you experienced the glory of God in the creation around you? Reflect on that experience. What did you feel? What did you learn?
2. In what particular aspects of creation – or of culture – might we expect to be able to discern the glory of God?
3. Can we expect to discern the grandeur and glory of God in creation if we do not learn to know Him in His glory in His Word?

Next steps: Talk with a Christian friend about this idea of being “docents of glory.” What does that require of us? Can we really expect to help others experience the knowledge of God’s glory? How can we prepare for this?

Prayer:

2 Minds in Gear

*It is the glory of God to conceal a matter,
But the glory of kings is to search out a matter.* Proverbs 25.2

Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ... 1 Peter 1.13

Glory in all things

Perhaps every believer knows Paul's familiar exhortation concerning living for the glory of God: "Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10.31). But let's not glide over this important text too quickly. I want us to note a couple of important points.

First, Paul suggests that *everything in life is fraught with potential for glorifying God*. Even such mundane, everyday, ordinary activities as taking a meal can "flame out" with glory, giving, if only for a moment, a glimpse of the grandeur of God. If only we knew how to "shake out" the glory, or if only it would "ooze" like precious olive oil from our every gesture!

Second, note that *this text is in the form of an imperative*. This is a command of the Word of God, and as such, it should receive our careful attention. Apparently, glorifying God – making His glory known – in everyday situations and circumstances is something every believer is capable of doing, and is *expected* to do.

Being docents of glory, in other words, is not an option. It is the glory of God to conceal His "dearest freshness deep down things" in the everyday situations and things of our lives. It is the calling of His royal children to "search out" His glory and to make it known in all we do.

But in order to do this, we're going to have to heed the exhortation of the Apostle Peter and get our minds in gear.

Get curious!

We turn to a sonnet by Gerard Manley Hopkins to help us in learning how to apply our minds to the task of discovering and declaring the glory of God. This poem is entitled, "Spring," and I want you to listen for the very practical instruction that appears about half way through:

Nothing is so beautiful as spring –
When weeds, in wheels, shoot long and lovely and lush;
Thrush's eggs look little low heavens, and thrush
Through the echoing timber does so rinse and wring
The ear, it strikes like lightnings to hear him sing;
The glassy peartree leaves and blooms, they brush
The descending blue; that blue is all in a rush
With richness; the racing lambs too have fair their fling.

What is all this juice and all this joy?
A strain of the earth's sweet being in the beginning
In Eden garden – Have, get, before it cloy,
Before it cloud, Christ, lord, and sour with sinning.
Innocent mind and Mayday in girl and boy,
Most, O maid's child, thy choice and worthy the winning.

Three things to note here. First, Hopkins shows us that we must learn to *look with wonder and appreciation* at the many familiar ways the glory of God flames and oozes around us every day. The weeds that invade our gardens, the songs of birds in the trees, trees greening against the blue sky, little creatures gamboling and scrambling around us – all this, Hopkins insists, is “beautiful,” and should command our careful attention.

Then, second, we need to ask questions about what we’re seeing: “What is all this juice and all this joy?” In seeking to answer such questions, let your mind be guided by, first, the teaching of God’s Word and, second, the mind of Christ, which all who believe in Him possess (“Innocent mind”). How can we associate what we’re observing with what God teaches in His Word? And how can we see the evidence of Christ in the glories of creation, so that we grow in appreciation of His power, beauty, faithfulness, and love?

All together

Finally, we should seek the Lord to help us put everything together in such a way as to make some conclusion about His presence and glory. Hopkins could write a beautiful sonnet. We can’t all do that, but we can all point to something familiar, something everyday and ordinary, consistently overlooked for the glory it displays, and wonder aloud about the simple beauty, elegance, life, or power it manifests. And then we can trace that back to God and what we know about Him from His Word.

This is neither rocket science nor brain surgery, my friends. It is rather the calling of everyone who intends to live for the glory of God in every aspect of life. Fulfilling our callings as docents of glory, however, will require that we begin to use our minds with renewed focus, attention, wonder, and insight. Our King has concealed His glory in everyday places, and He expects us, His royal children, to search out that glory and hold it up with wonder and worship for the world to see. Make it your choice to take up this calling each day, and you’ll discover that it is indeed a choice “worthy the winning.”

For reflection

1. One way to begin paying more attention to everyday things is to learn and use their names. See how many different trees or birds you can identify today. Or describe in your own words the various sounds you hear outdoors.
2. Focus on one everyday object within your immediate purview. How many different questions can you think to ask about this? How might you connect this object with God’s revelation of Himself in Scripture?
3. Hopkins kept journals in which he wrote down his observations for subsequent meditation. Have you ever considered doing this?

Next steps: As you take a meal today, how many different ways can you “search out” the glory of God “concealed” in that meal? Talk about what you observe with the people with whom you share the meal.

Prayer:

3 No Peace?

“Because, indeed, because they have seduced My people, saying, ‘Peace!’ when there is no peace... Ezekiel 13.10

“Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” John 14.27

...and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.
Philippians 4.7

A world without peace

It never fails. Listen to people being interviewed on the street. Read the latest polls asking what people want most in life. Pay attention to the ads on TV offering all manner of drugs designed to deliver us from anxiety, help us get some sleep, or allow us to feel better about ourselves and our situation. They all point in a similar direction: People want peace. They want peace among the nations of the world, sure; but primarily, they want to be at peace within their souls. They're tired of living full of worries, doubts, fears, and uncertainties. Every day they struggle for some peace, just a little peace and quiet in the midst of their relentlessly hectic lives.

And yet, as the polls and interviews and ads make clear, peace is elusive. “Peace, peace!” the people cry, but there is no peace.

Every reminder that ours is a world desperate for some peace is an opportunity for showing others the glory and grandeur and beauty of Him alone Who can bring us lasting, guarding peace.

Undergirding peace

Gerard Manley Hopkins knew precious little peace during the course of his lifetime. A Jesuit priest, Hopkins was posted in some very difficult calls, for which he felt largely unsuited, and where he was as often as not ill, troubled, and filled with self-doubt.

But Hopkins knew where to find peace, the peace that remains, and he shows us in his wonderful little poem by that name:

When will you ever, Peace, wild wooddove, shy wings shut,
Your round me roaming end, and under be my boughs?
When, when, Peace, will you, Peace? I'll not play hypocrite
To own my heart: I yield you do come sometimes; but
That piecemeal peace is poor peace. What pure peace allows
Alarms of wars, the daunting wars, the death of it?

O surely, reaving Peace, my Lord should leave in lieu
Some good! And so he does leave Patience exquisite,
That plumes to Peace thereafter. And when Peace here does house
He comes with work to do, he does not come to sit and coo,
He comes to brood and sit.

Peace was an elusive state for Hopkins, like a wood dove, roaming and flitting and never staying around for very long. He longed to know an upholding peace, a peace that would come to “brood and sit” and work its blessings on him. He admits to knowing this peace fleetingly, but he declares it's not enough; and what kind of “peace” is it anyway, that allows wars to ravage the world?

But Hopkins knew the key to peace is patience – longsuffering. Bearing up under trials and disappointments, waiting for the peace that passes understandings, ushers us into the Peace Who never fails us nor forsakes us, and Who works eternal peace into our souls.

Peace and happiness

Peace is related to happiness, and, for most people, happiness is grounded in circumstances. When circumstances are favorable, peace folds its “shy wings” and happiness settles in and coos for a while. When circumstances change, then peace and happiness flit away and roam around us, ever elusive, never constant, always fleeting.

The peace Hopkins sought for himself was the peace only Jesus can bring, but he had to remind himself of that over and over again. The same is true for everyone. As Augustine observed, the human heart is in a state of perpetual disquiet until it comes to rest on the undergirding peace of Jesus.

Can we talk to the people around us about peace and happiness, about what brings us peace or what makes us happy, and why? Can we use such an opportunity both to identify with them in our desire for lasting peace and happiness, and to share with them about the Peace Who has come to “house” in our souls, to “brood and sit” and hatch that sense of wellbeing that allows us, come what may, to rejoice in the Lord and His love?

All manner of human emotions and aspirations can remind us that all our greatest joy and highest hopes are fulfilled in Jesus Christ. If we’re paying attention, and if, with great patience and love, we can talk with the people around us about the true nature of peace, we may be able to close the glory gap a little, and point a friend to the Peace Who passes all understanding.

For reflection

1. When do you most experience the peace of Jesus? How would you describe that experience?
2. How does the peace of Jesus sustain you when other things are going wrong?
3. Can you see yourself talking with someone about peace and happiness and how they achieve these? Ask the Lord to give you an opportunity to do so soon.

Next steps: How can believers help one another to know more of the peace of Jesus, more of the time? Talk with a Christian friend about this question.

Prayer:

4 Creation's Voices

Praise the LORD!

Praise the LORD from the heavens;

Praise Him in the heights!

Praise Him, all His angels;

Praise Him, all His hosts! Psalm 148.1, 2

Creation, sing!

Psalm 148 is characteristic of several other psalms in calling on the creation to sing praise and glory to God. Consider the catalog of creation's beings which are summoned to take up the chorus: Heaven and the heights thereof, angels and heavenly hosts, sun and moon and stars, creatures on earth and in the seas, snow and mist and wind, hills and all trees, livestock and birds, kings, princes, rulers, men and women, old people and children – *all* are called upon to voice their praise to God.

The call to humans we can understand, and we can envision what that would look like as it is obeyed. But what about the other, non-human creatures? How do trees and hills, birds and cows, plowed fields and even the trades and works of human beings, even the weather – how do all these bring praise to God?

Well, not with their own voices, since they have none, but in the voices of those who are called to glorify God in everything they do. Everything we do involves us in observing, interacting with, using, and enjoying all the things God has made. All created things have an offering of praise to God, and it is our calling, as docents of glory, to give voice to that praise.

Beauty everywhere!

Gerard Manley Hopkins provides many examples of how we may become the voices of creation to give creation voice in praising the Lord. Here is his poem, "Pied Beauty":

Glory be to God for dappled things –
For skies of couple-colour as a brinded cow;
For rose-moles in all stipple upon trout that swim;
Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;
Landscape plotted and pieced – fold, fallow, and plough;
And all trades, their gear and tackle and trim.

All things counter, original, spare, strange;
Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)
With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;
He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change;
Praise him.

"Pied" means spotted, speckled, or blotched with several colors. Hopkins celebrates all manner of ordinary things that fall into that category. A trout hovering in a shallow stream, a cow meandering through a field, purple finches at the feeder, farmed fields seen from a hilltop, and all the stuff that goes into all the work that people do each day. Hopkins even includes things we taste – sweet and sour chicken, for example!

Clothes or accessories that dazzle, lights that blink and dim, things swift and things slow: Hopkins is agog with wonder and delight at them all.

All these creatures "father-forth" beauty that lasts, beauty that is forever available for us to observe, remark,

and celebrate. And as we do, we can give praise to God, Whose beauty, simplicity, majesty, splendor, glory, goodness, wisdom, power, and grace are refracted through all these creatures, as they in being merely what they are, flame, shake out, and ooze the glory and grandeur of God.

Voicing creation's praise

We can give voice to creation, so that it fulfills its purpose of giving glory and praise to God. But we're not likely to be docents to the world of the glory God has concealed in everyday creatures until we actually begin to *observe* and *learn more* about the creatures of the world around us, paying loving attention to each in order to discover the peculiar way each proclaims the grandeur of God.

This takes time, and may require that we be willing to forego certain activities so that we can devote ourselves to paying more attention to the world. But if we will take the time to look, listen, ponder, and enjoy even the most mundane, everyday things, we will find no shortage of reasons to thank and praise the Lord for these precious gifts.

Delight in the works of God in creation, and study to learn them. God has appointed each of us, in our own way, to voice creation's praise so that others can see His glory and praise Him as well.

For reflection

1. Meditate on 1 Corinthians 10.31. How can a simple situation like eating and drinking bring glory to God?
2. What about other simple situations? Or simple things? How can you begin to show more gratitude to God for everyday blessings, gifts, and situations?
3. The psalmist and Gerard Manly Hopkins voiced the praises of creation by writing poetry. How do you see yourself fulfilling this aspect of your calling as a docent of glory?

Next steps: Today, choose one everyday object – something you see or use every single day (a fork, article of clothing, particular road, etc.). How many different ways can you think to thank and praise God for this item? Think into the “dearest freshness deep down” of the thing, and give praise and thanks to God throughout the day. Share one or two of your observations with someone else.

Prayer:

5 The Purpose of Everything

Go to the ant, you sluggard!

Consider her ways and be wise... Proverbs 6.6

Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. 1 Corinthians 10.31

Science catches up

Scientific American reports that ants, which have no leaders but exhibit enormous collective wisdom, might provide insights for improving a variety of human social systems (“Collective Wisdom of Ants,” Deborah M. Gordon, February 2016). The renowned science journal recommends that we go to the ant and consider her ways and be wise, to learn how shared need and common interest can generate undirected cooperative social behavior.

There is wisdom to be gained from observing even common ants, because ants are creatures of God, and they have a voice of praise for Him. We welcome the voice of the scientific community to that of King Solomon in calling us to study God’s creatures for what we can learn from them about Him.

Every created thing has a purpose; nothing is here by chance. The world is just too complex and wonderful for that to be a reasonable explanation. As Pierre Simon (1749-1827), one of the fathers of the scientific revolution observed concerning the progress of stars and planets, “We are compelled to acknowledge the effect of a cause; chance alone could not have given a form nearly circular to the orbit of all the planets” (*Considerations on the System of the Universe*). What’s true of the great things of the cosmos is true of even the smallest: Everything has a cause, and every cause expresses a purpose; and that purpose is to praise and glorify God.

The entire creation is a vast Rorschach Test, and the answer to the questions posed by every created thing is always the same: God and His glory.

One thing and the same

And, since the glory of God is most perfectly, lucidly, and compellingly present in the face of our Lord Jesus Christ, that means that all creation points to Jesus, reveals Jesus, and glorifies God in Jesus Christ. If your view of Jesus is limited only to the four books of the gospels, you’ll never know Him as He intends. All Scripture speaks of Jesus (Jn. 6.63). And beyond that, all the millions of creatures throughout the entire vast cosmos have something to tell us about Jesus, if only we know how to look.

Gerard Manley Hopkins knew how to look, and he saw the purpose of created things as carrying out the will of God in making Jesus known. Here’s his poem, “As kingfishers catch fire”:

As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame;
As tumbled over rim in roundy wells
Stones ring; like each tucked string tells, each hung bell’s
Bow swung finds tongue to fling out broad its name;
Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:
Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;
Selves – goes itself; *myself* it speaks and spells,
Crying *What I do is me; for that I came.*

I say more: the just man justices;
Keeps grace: that keeps all his goings graces;

Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is –
Christ – for Christ plays in ten thousand places,
Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his
To the Father through the features of men's faces.

Everything has a purpose – flashing birds, shimmering insects, little stones falling into a well, plucked guitar strings and ringing bells – everything! And this is especially true of people, who are made in the image of God. People and creatures are, in Hopkins' vision, stages on which Christ plays out the drama of God's glory. Each creature, great or small, living or nonliving, human or otherwise, is a prop or member of the cast to declare the praises of God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

No little creatures

Francis Schaeffer wrote a book entitled *No Little People*, in which he argued that God has invested every human being with vast potential to glorify and serve Him, even in the most ordinary and everyday of ways. He wrote, "Each Christian is to be a rod of God in the place of God for him. We must remember throughout our lives that in God's sight there are no little people and no little places. Only one thing is important, to be the consecrated persons in God's place for us, at each moment."

What's true for us is true for all God's creatures. Everything exists by God, in God, and for God, to sing His praise and glorify His Name through our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us pray that God will give us eyes to see, like Gerard Manley Hopkins, and voices to proclaim, in our own place and way, the wonder of the presence and beauty of Christ in glory, upholding and filling the universe and everything in it, playing in 10,000 places everyday, in every situation in our lives (Eph. 4.10).

For reflection

1. What "stages" has Christ provided you, to live in and through you the drama of God's glory?
2. Meditate on John 1.1-3, Hebrews 1.3, and Colossians 1.17, 18. Why is it reasonable to regard the world as a Rohrschach Test with Jesus as the ultimate answer to every question?
3. How do you think people would regard you if you began talking about "seeing Jesus" in the various places and people of your life?

Next steps: Do people see Jesus in your eyes and in the features of your face? What would that look like if they did? Talk with some Christian friends about these questions.

Prayer:

6 Who Cares?

*O LORD, You have searched me and known me.
You know my sitting down and my rising up;
You understand my thought afar off.
You comprehend my path and my lying down,
And are acquainted with all my ways.* Psalm 139.1-3

And Jesus answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed..." Luke 10.41, 42

Alone

One of the lingering effects leftover from the existential moment of the '50s and '60s is the sense that many people have of being all alone in the world. Existentialism encouraged such thinking, with the idea that this would empower us to break free of outside influences and efforts to manipulate us, so that we could discover our true and authentic selves.

Instead of empowering people, though, such thinking has left many people feeling misunderstood, uncared for, isolated, hopeless, and despairing. Couple this with the surge in narcissistic thinking which began in the '70s and continues unabated to this day, and the feeling of loneliness can quickly morph into feelings of fear and dread.

A wide range of social agencies, including government, have recognized this situation and provide programs, counseling, and a variety of community activities to overcome the loneliness people feel and let them know that someone actually cares.

But if caring for others ever became a way of life, let's say, among the members of the Christian community, I rather suspect that the need for social programs, anti-depressant medications, and individual therapy would begin rapidly to decline.

First, observe

But before we will care enough about people to pray earnestly for them and look for ways to encourage and assist them, we'll first have to take note of them. And here we can turn to Gerard Manley Hopkins for a glimpse at the form such attentiveness might take. Here's his poem, "Lantern":

Sometimes a lantern moves along the night,
That interests our eyes. And who goes there?
I think; where from and bound, I wonder, where
With, all down darkness, his wading light?
Men go by me whom either beauty bright
In mould or mind or what not else makes rare:
They rain against our much-thick and marsh air
Rich beams, till death or distance buys them quite.

Death or distance soon consumes them: wind
What most I may eye after, be in at the end
I cannot, and out of sight is out of mind.

Christ minds: Christ's interest, what to avow or amend
There, eyes them, heart wants, care haunts, foot follows kind,

Their ransom, their rescue, and first, fast, last friend.

Sometimes, Hopkins says, he'd see someone wandering the streets at night, and his mind would begin to wonder about them – who they are, where they're going, why they're out at night. Mostly, he says, we tend to take note of the “beautiful people” – those who appear to have it all together in life. They seem to be doing so much better than we are – fresh rain compared to the “much-thick and marsh air” which is our lives – and we don't consider that one day they, too, will die. And perhaps they're thinking about that? And all this outward show of body, mind, or what not else is just that, as inwardly they may feel as lonely as Hopkins did much of the time?

And then they're gone, whether by distance or death, and we don't think about them anymore: Out of sight, out of mind.

Christ cares

But Jesus cares for them, just as He cares for us. He pays attention to them, sustains them, shakes and oozes out His glory in 10,000 places to get their attention. Jesus loves people. He “haunts” them by His Spirit, Who woos and strives to get their attention; He follows them wherever they go, seeking to ransom, rescue, and befriend them.

With Jesus, there is no “out of sight is out of mind.” And as Jesus is mindful of all people, and attends to their needs, seeking to draw them to Himself – though they heed or hank Him not – we must learn to be and do as well. Whether the people around seem to have it all together, are putting on airs, or are obviously in need of encouragement, Jesus has sent us to embody His love and communicate His care.

Pray for the people God has put in your life. Let them occupy your thoughts and command your attention. Then look for ways to flow the living water of Jesus' love to them, as often as you can.

For reflection

1. How do you feel when someone offers a kind gesture or encouraging word? Would you like to experience more of that? Meditate on Matthew 7.12.
2. Do you pray for the people in your sphere of influence? Read through Jesus' prayer in John 17. Does this suggest any ways you might begin praying for the people you see each day?
3. How can you see from Jesus' own example that caring for others and sharing the Good News with them must go hand-in-hand?

Next steps: Begin praying daily for the people you will see that day. Ask the Lord to prepare you to show His care for them, if only – indeed, especially – in small ways. At the end of the day, review your day before the Lord in prayer, and give Him thanks for the ways He showed His care for others through you.

Prayer:

7 Never Give Up

I would have lost heart, *unless I had believed*
That I would see the goodness of the LORD
In the land of the living.
Wait on the LORD;
Be of good courage,
And He shall strengthen your heart;
Wait, I say, on the LORD! Psalm 27.13, 14

And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Galatians 6.9

The glory gap

We began this series by noting what we referred to as “the glory gap” – the lacuna which exists between the glory God is everywhere revealing and the *knowledge* of that glory on the part of many, if not most people. God has chosen us to fill that glory gap by serving as docents of glory, discerning the ways God has hidden His glory throughout the world, and showing, by words and deeds, the reality of God’s presence through all the things He has made.

God has chosen to fill the glory gap through believers like you and me. *Through* us, but not *with* us: God is filling the world with Jesus, with His sweet, strong, illuminating, and transforming presence; by His Word and Spirit; in the lives and culture and moments of life where we engage the dark world with the living presence of the eternal God (Eph. 1.22, 23; 4.10).

We’ve followed the lead of Gerard Manley Hopkins in trying to learn how to observe the grandeur of God as it shakes and oozes out through all kinds of created things and people. And we’ve seen that, for the most part, bringing people to the knowledge of God’s glory is accomplished in the little things, everyday things, unheralded and uncelebrated things of life. God intends to be glorified in the daily details of life, not the evening headlines.

And He has sent us to work at this daunting task, relentlessly, and without despairing.

Never give up!

Winston Churchill is famous for the phrase, “Never give up!” That simple phrase inspired a nation, and continues to inspire many people yet today.

But Churchill’s exhortation was preceded by nearly a century in Gerard Manley Hopkins’ poem, “(Carrion Comfort)” (the parentheses are his). Here’s the poem:

Not, I’ll not, carrion comfort, Despair, not feast on thee:
Not untwist – slack they may be – these last strands of man
In me or, most weary, cry *I can no more*. I can;
Can something, hope, wish day come, not choose not to be.
But ah, but O thou terrible, why wouldst thou rude on me
Thy wring-world right foot rock? lay a lionlimb against me? scan
With darksome devouring eyes my bruised bones? and fan,
O in turns of tempest, me heaped there; me frantic to avoid thee and flee?

Why? That my chaff might fly; my grain lie, sheer and clear.

Nay in all that toil, that coil, since (seems) I kissed the rod,
Hand rather, my heart lo! lapped strength, stole joy, would laugh, cheer.
Cheer whom though? the hero whose heaven-handling flung me, foot trod
Me? or me that fought him? O which one? is it each one? That night, that year
Of now done darkness I wretch lay wrestling with (my God!) my God.

Hopkins fought despair all his adult life. He languished in his calling as a priest (“kissed the rod/Hand rather”), which had seen him become estranged from his Anglican family and friends, never to feel quite at home among his Jesuit surroundings. He struggled with poor health, dismal working conditions, and the frustration of longing to be a poet, yet without any outlets or encouragement.

But he would not give up, would not give in to Despair, though it hounded him, swung against him like a lion’s paw, and caused him to stumble as though over a rock. Deep inside he understood that all this flaying and chafing was intended to bring out the best in him, and he would not allow Despair to cause him to sink into paralysis of soul or body.

Wrestling with God

Hopkins had a calling from God, with whom he had wrestled since a young man, and, difficult as it may have been, he would not fail to stay the course of daily duties, though often with a heavy heart. God had wrestled Hopkins down and set him on a course of service, and, as he had always managed to lap strength, steal joy, and find some laughter on his way through every difficulty and trial, he would continue to do so, for the honor and glory of God, to “Love, O my God, to call Thee Love and Love”, as he put it in his poem, “Let me be to Thee as the circling bird.”

Just so we must not despair or grow weary of doing good and standing in the glory gap for Christ to flow His life through us. We will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living if every day, in every situation, we will say with Hopkins, “I can/Can something...” and take the next step of following Jesus into showing and telling His love to others.

For reflection

1. What opportunities do you regularly encounter for filling the “glory gap”? How have you done at this calling thus far?
2. What do you need to do in order to be better prepared to fill the glory gap?
3. Meditate on the two Scriptures introducing this article. How do these apply to your calling as a docent of glory?

Next steps: Download the PDF of this study. Make copies for a few friends, then invite them to join you in working through it, to improve your work as docents of glory.

Prayer:

Questions for discussion

1. What does it mean to be a docent of glory? Have you ever been able to fulfill this role?
2. What are some ways we might expect to encounter the grandeur of God in the things of creation?
3. We can also see God's glory in aspects of human culture and history, as well as in the lives of people we see each day. Can you think of some examples?
4. What do you need to do in order to be prepared to stand in the glory gap more consistently?
5. How can you help your fellow believers become fulfill their callings as docents of glory?

Prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

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Thank you.