

# Focused, loving attentiveness

## What Does This Mean?

*What is this life if, full of care,  
We have no time to stand and stare?  
From "Leisure," by W. H. Davies*

It is easy for students to go through life glancing at the world and seldom stopping to listen, so that they give their surroundings and other people only superficial thought and attention. This casual glancing and listening can be the result of our overly stimulated environment, but self-absorption, superficiality, and a lack of respect also can lead to paying scant attention. We need to cultivate a deeper way of viewing the world so that we look away from self to the object or person seen. We need attentive, loving gaze and a listening ear.

Christians believe that God can speak through his world (Psalm 19:1) and through the things people make: poems, ideas, stories, paintings, and music. We need attentive listening and wisdom in order to discern how God's voice can be heard in what we learn.

*The first duty of love is to listen. Paul Tillich*

Loving attention starts with humility. This is an attitude that considers that others deserve to be heard (Philippians 2:3). The Bible describes the world as God's and people as his creation. In some way people reflect a little of God, and this gives them an inherent worth. It is not up to us to assign worth to some people but to withhold it from others (Genesis 1:27).

If we value others, we give careful attention to their lives, ideas, and what they produce. A poem takes time, skill, and creativity, and the writer gives something of him- or herself; the writer hopes for a careful reader. The Apostle Paul encouraged Christians to dwell upon good things (Philippians 4:8), using a word that means "to carefully reflect on."

## What Does This Mean in School?

Teachers can use a range of strategies to encourage loving attention as an expression of respect.

- Read a text slowly aloud together in English class or modern foreign languages.
- Draw attention to close-up images or images seen through a microscope in science.
- Listen with closed eyes in music.
- Use a series of questions that focus attention; or, after asking a question, allow students time for silent reflection before soliciting answers.
- Rearrange the room for some sessions to focus attention on an object that is to be studied.
- Consider the aesthetics of science presentations and encourage wonder.

Think of a time when you were frustrated by students' superficial attention. What teaching strategies did you use to encourage respectful, loving attention? Think of a subject where you need the students to pay focused attention. How could you teach to encourage attention that encourages respect? You could cover up most of a painting and only reveal a little at a time, giving students a series of things to look for so that they discover for themselves the skill that went into the painting.



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