

Attentiveness Quotes

Distraction

The opposite of attentiveness is distraction. The following quotes speak to the pressure of contemporary culture towards distraction and the dangers to the soul as a result.

To lose one's soul is to become in contemporary jargon, unglued. To lose one's soul is to fall apart. Hence when I feel my inner world hopelessly crumpling, when I do not know who I am anymore, and when I am trying to rush off in all directions at the same time but do not know where I am going, then I am losing my soul. This, as much as the question of eternity is what Jesus meant when he asked: "What does it profit a person to gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his or her own soul?"

From The Holy Longing by Ronald Rolheiser page 14

Perhaps the best metaphor to describe our hurried and distracted lives is that of a car wash. When you pull up to a car wash, you are instructed to leave your motor running, to take your hands off the steering wheel, and to keep your foot off the brakes. The idea is that the machine itself will suck you through. For most of us, that's just what our typical day does to us—it sucks us through. We have smart phones and radios that stimulate us before we are fully awake. Many of us are texting friends, checking Facebook and emails, watching the news, or listening to music or talk radio, talk on our cell phones, and plan the day's agenda. We return to television, conversation, activities, and preoccupations of all kinds. Eventually we go to bed, where we perhaps read or watch a bit more TV. Finally we fall asleep. When in all of this did we take time to think, to pray, to wonder, to be restful, to be grateful for life, for love, for health, or for God? The day just sucked us through.

From Prayer, Our Deepest Longing by Ronald Rolheiser

Why is it so difficult to pray regularly? Some reasons are obvious: over busyness, tiredness, and too many demands on our time. But there are other reasons too, suggested by monks and people we think of as mystics. The problem we have in sustaining prayer, they say, is often grounded in the false notion that prayer needs to be exciting, intense, and full of energy all the time. That is impossible! Nothing is meant to be exciting all the time, including prayer and church services, and nobody has the energy to be alert, attentive, intense, and actively engaged every minute. The solution is not so much new prayer forms and more variety, but rhythm, routine, and established rituals.

From Prayer, Our Deepest Longing by Ronald Rolheiser

Our culture is a powerful narcotic, for good and for bad. It is important that we first underline that there's partly a good side to this. A narcotic soothes and protects against brute, raw pain. Our culture has within it every kind of thing (from medicine to entertainment) to shield us from suffering. That can be good, but a narcotic all can be bad when it becomes a way of escaping

reality. Where our culture is particularly dangerous, I feel is in the way it can perpetually shield us from having to face the deeper issues of life: faith, forgiveness, morality, and mortality. It can constitute, as theologian Jan Walgrave has said, a “virtual conspiracy” against the interior life by keeping us so entertained, so busy, so preoccupied, and so distracted that we lose all focus on the deeper things.

From Prayer, Our Deepest Longing by Ronald Rolheiser

Too many of us increasingly live our lives according to some external narrative that we think represents “success” or “acceptance” but has little to do with who we really are. In other words ordinary Americans are becoming more and more like politicians. That’s right; the very profession we claim to despise has turned into one of the templates for modern life... What has changed is that the outer-directedness of politicians- their relentless need to be in touch and feed off other people—is now leeching into the larger culture. Technology is shaping the change...It used to be that only people in professions like politics, show business and sales dealt with scores of people each day. Now anyone with email does. And because Americans frequently change jobs, they are constantly selling themselves—just like politicians. Much of this outer direction is fine; the coiled ambition helps productivity and brings at least some people the sense of connection they crave in their lives. But these are different lives than led by earlier generations—stretched thin between outer and inner selves, self-absorbed without being self-knowing. The search for spirituality and meaning now underway in so many places must be some reaction against the soullessness of the backslap and the speed dial, the impossibility of “multitasking” what really matters.

Jonathan Alter in “Newsweek”, August 23, 2004, page 29

What is the meaning and value of all this feverish activity? These are perfect questions for my students, who are inundated with factoids, loaded with clichés, and busy with many obligations. Beneath it all, however, they are innocent of purpose. They are blessed with opportunity but deprived of ends. They are members of a prosperous society but are wandering in a teleological desert... Yet when they are able or forced to turn off the distractions, they are awash in questions of purpose. My students and many other young adults are dealing with the other vocational crisis...this is, the crisis of meaning...In the poem Dry Savages, T.S. Elliot remarks that too often we ‘have the experience but miss the meaning.’

Bill Droel, Full-Time Christians, Twenty-Third Publications, 2002, page 4-5

We are a nation in love with speed. We drive fast, eat fast, and make love fast. We are obsessed with breaking records and shortening time spans. We digest our life, condense our experiences, and compress our thoughts. We are a culture surrounded by memos and commercials. While other cultures might believe haste makes waste, we are convinced that speed reflects alertness, power, and success. Americans are always in a hurry... It is ironic that in a culture so committed to saving time we feel increasingly deprived of the very thing we value...Despite our alleged efficiency... we seem to have less time for ourselves and far less time for each other...We have quickened the pace of life only to become less patient. We have become more organized but less spontaneous, less joyful. We are better prepared to act on the future but less able to enjoy the present and reflect on the past...Today we have surrounded ourselves with time-saving technological gadgetry, only to be

overwhelmed by plans that cannot be carried out, appointments that cannot be honored, schedules that cannot be fulfilled, and deadlines that cannot be met.

Jeremy Rifkin in Time Wars page 71, 19-20

Hurry is not *of* the Devil, it *is* the Devil.

Carl Jung

Distraction is one of the deepest problems we face today. All of the visual stimuli, all of the chatter of the blogosphere, all of the confusion of doublespeak keep us perpetually distracted. Remember, silence is a spiritual discipline, and we need this discipline to unplug us from the inane babble of modern culture. Today, as a result of emailing and texting, (wonderful technological interventions in themselves) we are saying more and more about less and less. For many this has become a genuine addiction. The din of noisy words tossed out so casually, so superficially, so carelessly snuff out the silence that would open us to the voice of the Spirit that groans within us. So in our day we must learn to be still. To wait. To hold our tongue. To observe. To ponder. To wonder. Silence cultivates the soil of our hearts so that life giving words are allowed to germinate and take root. Then when the time comes for speaking our words will flow like water from a silent spring.

Richard Foster in Commencement address at Westmont College 2010

Attentiveness to the Inner Life

The following Quotes speak to the need for us to be attentive to our inner world.

(Being attentive) has been one of my most important daily disciplines. It helps me slow down and see the opportunities for transformation that God is constantly giving me. Remember: the spiritual life is all about being awake and attentive to God and attentiveness helps me stay alert.

God speaks through the things that stir us. God speaks through the things that excite and energize us as well as the things that depress and deplete us. So pay attention to your strong reactions and feelings, both positive and negative. The Spirit speaks through both.

Imagine, for example, that as I review my day, I remember how irritated and defensive I became when someone criticized me. I pay attention to that, asking the Lord what he wants me to see and know about my response. How was God present to me right then? What are God's invitations to me? As I pray through I may discover that what the person said was true, and now I can explore what I'm protecting by being so defensive.

Taken from Sensible Shoes, a Story About a Spiritual Journey

"People think of compassion as, like, kindness. The image comes to mind of some nice New Age guy bending to something with a look on his face like he's about to cry. And I don't think that's it. I think of it more as a quality of openness that comes with being in a state of unusual attentiveness."

George Saunders

"Coyotes move within a landscape of attentiveness. I have seen their eyes in the creosote bushes and among the mesquite trees. They have watched me. And all the times that I say no eyes, that I

kept walking and never knew, there were still coyotes. When I have seen them trot away, when I have stepped from the floorboard of my truck, leaned on the door, and watched them as they watched me over their shoulders, I have been aware for that moment of how much more there is; of how I have only seen only an instant of a broad and rich life."

Craig Childs

" If you keep Sabbath, you start to see creation not as somewhere to get away from your ordinary life, but a place to frame an attentiveness to your life."

Eugene Peterson

"We never grow closer to God when we just live life. It takes deliberate pursuit and attentiveness."

Francis Chan

When you pay attention to boredom, it gets unbelievably interesting.

Jon Kabat-Zinn

This then seems the first consideration which should be before the mind of the priest, in planning a personal devotional life. It means that attention to God must be your primary religious activity and this for the strictly practical reason that without that attention to God, all other religious activities will lose their worth, that the life of the minister of religion depends almost entirely for its value on the extent to which it is bathed in Divine Light. This is the first term of all religious life and thought; and probably the term to which most modern Christians give least undivided attention.

Evelyn Underhill, Concerning the Inner Life, Page 23

Those of us who readily embrace leadership, especially public leadership, tend towards extroversion, which often means ignoring what is happening inside ourselves. If we have any sort of inner life, we "compartmentalize" it, walling it off from our public work. This, of course, allows the shadows to grow unchecked until it emerges, larger than life, in the public realm, a real problem we are well acquainted with in our own domestic politics. Leaders need not only the technical skills to manage the external world but also the spiritual skills to journey inward toward the source of both shadow and light.

Parker Palmer in Let Your life Speak, Page 79

I must learn to pay attention to the movements of my heart and mind, to reflect on them wisely and carefully with the help of others, especially my spiritual director, and to test them over time. In this process I must learn two equally difficult and seemingly incompatible attitudes: to trust myself and my reactions and to recognize how easily I can delude myself. Discernment requires that I believe that God's desire will show itself in my experience and that I yet be wary of mindless credulity toward that same experience.

William Barry in Spiritual Direction and the Encounter with God, page 82

The very first requisite for a minister of religion is that his own inner life should be maintained in a healthy state; his own contact with God be steady and true. But just because you are ministers of

religion, and therefore committed to perpetual external activities, this fostering and feeding of the inner life is often in some ways far more difficult for you, than it is for those for whom you work and whom you teach. The time which you have at your disposal for the purpose is limited; and the rest of your time is more or less fully occupied with external religious and philanthropic activities, often of a most exacting kind. There is a constant drain on your spiritual resources, which you simply must make good: while the relief and change so necessary for all of us if our spiritual lives are to remain keen, vivid, real, is often lacking in your case, going incessantly as you do and must from one form of religious activity to another.

Evelyn Underhill in Concerning the Inner Life, page 12

Action without reflection can easily become barren and even bitter. Without the space for self examination and the capacity for rejuvenation, the danger of exhaustion and despair is too great. Contemplation confronts us with the questions of our identity and power. Who are we? To whom do we belong? Is there a power that is greater than ours? How can we know it? Our drivenness must give way to peacefulness, and our anxiety to joy. So concerned with effectiveness, we learn instead to be content with faithfulness. Strategy grows into trust, success into obedience, planning into prayer.

Jim Wallis in the Soul of Politics page 200

Attentiveness is acquired by most people through a habit of reflectiveness—learning to step back from experience to ponder its meaning. Most often meaning presents itself to a gently disengaged consciousness—fierce interrogation habitually yields nothing. As Archimedes discovered, insights often come at the most unlikely moments. Those who give a high priority to the pursuit of wisdom should, accordingly, try to structure their lives so that times of disengagement are multiplied.

Michael Casey in Strangers to the City page 30

Progress in the spiritual life commences when a person abandons a life built on mindless extroversion or on blind obedience to instincts and unconscious mind-sets. Instead the seeker after God begins to take notice of the promptings of conscience and the first stirrings of spiritual desire... A certain amount of drama is necessary to help us make the transition from a comfortable, easygoing, and relatively mindless existence to a careful, industrious, zealous, and even fervent life.

Michael Casey in Living in the Truth, page 71

When we go into solitude and silence, we stop making demands on God. It is enough that God is God and we are his. We learn we have a soul, that God is here, and this world is "my father's house." This knowledge of God progressively replaces the rabid busyness and self-importance that drives most human beings, including the religious ones.

James Bryan Smith in the Good and Beautiful God, page 166

I began to ask myself whether my lack of contemplative prayer, my loneliness, and my constantly changing involvement in what seemed most urgent were signs that the Spirit was gradually being suppressed... I woke one day with the realization that I was living in a very dark place and that the term "burnout" was a convenient psychological translation for a spiritual death.

We need to find God and he cannot be found in noise and restlessness. God is the friends of silence... We need to be able to touch souls. The essential thing is not what we say, but what God says to us and through us.

Malcolm Muggeridge

The Benefits of an Attentive Life—Meaning and Integration

We who serve an entirely indoor God have lost a great part of our faith. We must break through the cold hard walls of our institutionalized worship and reach for the soft, warm reality of God that is found in out of doors. It is impossible to imprison God within the walls of church and yet claim that Christianity brings light, growth, and life. We need to open the windows of our soul to admit God's creative energy... A supersized God makes us aware of our smallness and our humble place in the universe. But in order to see him, we must give up our addiction to electronic media. Once we have seen the God of Yosemite and the Everglades, we will be better able to celebrate his awesome reality and our hearts will overflow with praise. Cognizant of God's majesty, we will subsequently and spontaneously confess our need.

Calvin Miller in The Path of Celtic Prayer, page 39-40

"Meaning is not a luxury for us, it is a kind of spiritual oxygen, we might say, that enables our souls to live."

Dallas Willard – The Divine Conspiracy

Unlike egotism, the drive to significance is the simple extension of the creative impulse of God that gave us being. It is not filtered through self-consciousness any more than is our lunge to catch a package falling from someone's hand. We were built to count... we are placed in a specific context to count in ways no one else does. That is our destiny.

Dallas Willard in the Divine Conspiracy page 15

We are called to be in the modern world in a way that is both productive and nurturing, and we are called to monitor our inner lives, which is the secret source of the wisdom for better choices... We may chose careers, but we do not choose vocation. Vocation chooses us. To chose what choose us is a freedom the byproduct of which will be a sense of rightness and harmony within, even if lived out in the world of conflict, absent validation, and at considerable personal cost. Too often we remain in service to the agenda of the first half of life when the soul has already moved on to the agenda of the second. In the first half of life there is a place for ambition, for the driving powers of the ego, which compels us to overthrow our fears and to step into the world. As we have seen, the chief task of the first half of life is to build a sense of ego strength sufficient to support oneself.

James Hollis in Finding Meaning in the Second Half of Life, Page149

I'll tell you what I mean. Christ is a symbol of integration and wholeness. Demons are symbols of fragmentation and sickness. Human beings have an inbuilt capacity to repair themselves (which is always so useful to doctors) and an inbuilt drive to achieve what Jung called "individuation" (which today we'd see as a state of integrated wholeness, a state of realized potential.) This inbuilt

capacity for repair and this inbuilt drive to be integrated have the power to triumph over damage and fragmentation.

Susan Howatch in The High Flyer page 251

It is as if each human person constitutes a committee constantly sitting to decide life's questions and the behavior desired in a given situation. This committee has many members within, each voice a particular slant—our fears, feelings, dreams, and hopes, our history and relationships, our memory, our various sub-personalities, and our reason. Hopefully the chairperson of that committee is reason, deeply guided and influenced by affectivity. Descriptively the task of a human person appears to become more and more integrated, whole, together, within that on-going meeting. All the voices need to be heard and listened to. Ultimately, at their best, people make choices that chart the direction and, over time, develop the person. Since this ability and responsibility to choose is at the heart of human motivation, the spiritual director aids another to reach a harmonious decision from this complex and fascinating committee.

Dyckman and Carroll in Inviting the Mystic, supporting the Prophet page 33

As I analyze myself I find several things happening to me as a result of these two months of strenuous effort to keep God in mind every minute. This concentration upon God is strenuous, but everything else has ceased to be so. I think more clearly, I forget less frequently. Things which I did with a strain before, I now do easily and with no effort whatever. I worry about nothing, and lose no sleep. I walk on air a good part of the time. Even the mirror reveals a new light in my eyes and face. I no longer feel in a hurry about anything. Everything goes right. Each minute I meet calmly as though it were not important. Nothing can go wrong except one thing. This is that God may slip from my mind if I do not keep on my guard. If He is there, the universe is with me. My task is simple.

From Letters by a Modern Mystic by Frank Laubach