***DANCING*** *WITH GOD* ***THROUGH THE ARTS***

**Part Two – Birdwatching**

I purposely began with a *Walk In Nature* for the first part of this series, since I want to start from the outside and work our way in using the different arts, however one defines “Arts”. The title of my series is *Dancing With God Through The Arts* which is a way of describing what we do when we participate in the Arts, whether it be drawing, music, ‘dancing,’ or, in this Part Two – *Birdwatching*, since it is an art. We participate with God through *the good* and *the beauty*, which are ***attributes*** of God, who is good and beauty, and birdwatching is good and beautiful. We will go into more detail about attributes of God later on in this series.

What is interesting about Birdwatching is that it brings the novice from backyard birdwatching to the great outdoors. In other words, it brings the novice in his or her controlled environment of their backyard with their bird-houses, bird-baths and feeders, into the uncontrolled world of birds, that is, into nature. As the novice birdwatcher grows from just a backyard viewer in a controlled environment to the uncontrolled nature reserve enthusiast that tracks several species of birds over the seasons, you will find that something interesting occurs inside of our seasoned birdwatcher over the years. The birdwatcher will find that he or she is dancing with God through the act of birdwatching.

When we let go of controlling birds in our backyard and move out into the real world of birds in nature, we enter into ***their*** world and let them control us! In other words, because we enter into their world, we have to not only study the birds themselves but we have to know well their calls and their mating practices, their source of food and migration routes, and the animals and even other birds that prey on them. We find ourselves entering into a whole new world that we never knew about before as we learn and understand these wonderful creatures.

A day in the life of a birdwatcher becomes as close to contemplative prayer as a monk or nun. Yet the Lord is present to us and waiting, if we are willing to dance with him, through even a simple discipline as the art of birdwatching. Notice that the birdwatcher carefully plans his day, intending to spend as least a couple of hours in silence, prepares himself with the right equipment, like binoculars and a wide brim hat, but also properly dressed to blend into his or her surroundings.

Today we even have Bird Species and Bird Call Identifier apps on our phone to aid us in entering more deeply into the world of birds. The birdwatcher knows well the season and times when to spot their bird in their particular environment.

As we seriously dance with God through birdwatching, the rewards are worth it, since we grow in patience and knowledge, but even more, we grow in our sense of awe at how finely tuned all species are to their environment. How wonderfully we are made.

Once on a retreat at the Trappist Monastery in Gethsemane, Kentucky, I happen to spy an older monk standing in the garden with his hand stretched out as if asking for an offering from some invisible person. Suddenly, a small chickadee landed in his hand and started eating seed that the monk had offered him. He saw me standing there, watching him in awe in the distance, and then he silently beckoned me to come over and join him. I slowly approached until I was close enough for him to put some small seeds in my hand. He told me to just stand there quietly and the birds would eventually come and eat them. He said later that they are the most trusting of birds, even more so than city pigeons. The trick is to stand still long enough for them to land in our hand. And they did! Their little feet tickled. Unfortunately, I laughed out loud just for the sheer joy of such an experience…and, of course, scared them away.

Is God, like a bird, where most of time we scare God away with all our antics and attitude and loudness? “Be still and know that I am the Lord,” reads the Scriptures. Contemplation is listening to God in stillness, being attentive and aware of our affections, like birdwatching, and waiting, waiting on the Lord.