

What Does It Mean To Live With an Eternal Perspective?

Sue Bohlin, who has been working on developing an eternal perspective for decades, provides some examples of how to do that.

Years ago, after spending his whole life on the mission field, a career missionary made his final trip home on a passenger ship. One of the other people on his sailing was a celebrity, and as the ship made its way into the harbor, all those on board beheld a huge throng of well wishers at the pier with signs and instruments to celebrate the famous person's return.

The missionary stood at the railing, watching wistfully, knowing that not a soul was there for him. He said, "Lord, I've served You my whole life. Look at all the recognition and revelry for that famous person, and there's nobody here for me. It hurts, Lord."

He heard the still, small voice say, "You're not home yet, son."

I love this story that helps me keep in mind the big picture that includes the eternal, unseen realm, and the long picture that extends into the forever that awaits on the other side of death.

But how do we *get* an eternal perspective?

Seeing the Unseen

As I've grown older, 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 has become my new life verse:

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal

weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

We have to work at seeing the unseen and eternal. We do that with the eyes of our hearts. We do that by training ourselves to view everything through the lens of God's word.

I've been working at developing an eternal perspective for years. For me, it's about connecting the dots between earthly things and heavenly things.

I look at earthly things and wonder, "How does this connect to the spirit realm? How does this connect to what is unseen and eternal?" (For examples, look at [Glorious Morning Glories](#), [Back Infections and Heart Infections](#), [Cruise Ships, Roller Coasters and Attitudes](#), and [Blowing Past Greatness](#).)

Jesus' parables are the world's best examples of using the physical to provide understanding of the eternal. He was always connecting the dots between the things He was surrounded by—different types of soil, lost coins and sheep and sons, a wedding banquet—and explaining how these things related to the Kingdom of Heaven.

Another aspect of seeing the unseen is staying aware of the fact that we live in a permanent battle zone of spiritual warfare. We have an enemy who hates us because He hates God, and is continually attacking us with lies and deceptions. When we forget that we live in a culture barraging us with anti-God anti-truth, it's like going out in our underwear, needlessly exposing ourselves. Living with an eternal perspective means staying vigilant, donning our spiritual armor (Ephesians 6:10-18) and using it to fight back against the lies of the enemy.

One of the most important prayers we can ask is, "Lord, help me see Your hand at work"—and then intentionally looking for

it. For years I have kept a “God Sightings” Journal where I record evidence of God intervening in my life and the lives of others I have seen. I love to ask my friends and mentees, “Do you have any God Sightings to share?” to help them identify the hand of God in their lives.

One final aspect of seeing the unseen is to remind ourselves that everything we can see, is going away. Everything we can see and measure is temporary and passing. So we need to think about what’s around us that is permanent and eternal, and invest in those things.

God.

People.

God’s word.

God’s work in people’s lives.

And the things we do to honor God and bless others. [Randy Alcorn writes](#), “With eternity in view, nearly any honest activity-whether building a shed, driving a bus, pruning trees, changing diapers or caring for a patient-can be an investment in God’s kingdom.”

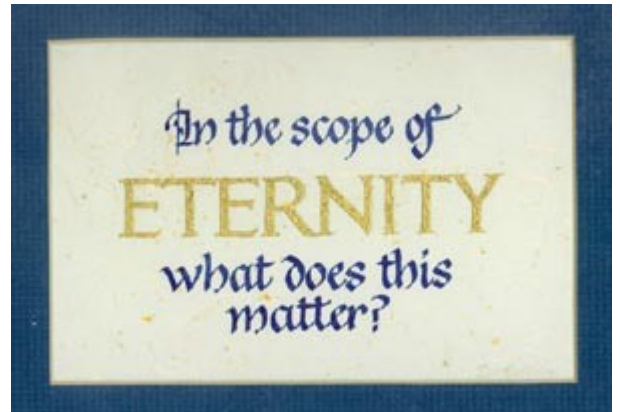
One of my friends is a TSA agent. She diligently reminds herself daily that every traveler who comes through the security line is infinitely valuable because they are made in the image of God, and Jesus died for them. She showers kindness on them because they are so important. One of her co-workers, for whom work is just a job where he punches a time clock, told her, “In two years you’ll stop being nice to everyone.” We don’t think so. She works at maintaining an eternal perspective, seeing the unseen, to the glory of God.

Remembering the Long View

Another aspect of living with an eternal perspective is focusing on the reality that our time on earth is short,

especially compared to the never-ending life on the other side of death.

Another one of my favorite questions is to ask, “A hundred years from now, when you are face to face with Jesus in heaven, what do you want to be glad you chose today? Indulging your flesh and doing whatever you think will make you happy, or making choices that honor God and bless other people?”



Several years ago I wrote a [blog post](#) about one of the power tools for our “life tool belt” that remains an essential part of my eternal perspective: passing everything through the grid of the great question, “In the scope of eternity, what does this matter?”

In the decades since I started asking that question, it’s still the best filter for deciding what’s worth getting upset about, and what to let go, and what to just roll over into the Lord’s hands.

Moses was very helpful for helping us develop an eternal perspective. He writes in Psalm 90:10, “Our days may come to seventy years, or eighty, if our strength endures.” So we need to be sober about how much time we actually have. Then he writes a great prayer in verse 12 that helps us remember the long view: “Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.”

So I did.

As of today, I have lived 24,500 days.

If I live to be 70, I have only 1,050 days left.

If I live to be 80, I have only 4,700 days left.

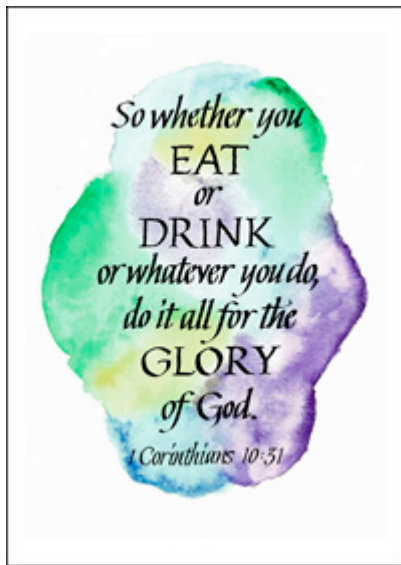
Oh my word, I have so much earthly work to do in a very short time, before my life continues on the other side! And I so want to grow older well.

One way to do that is to pre-decide now that we will use our earthly days fully, engaged in ministry, as long as God gives us breath.

Years ago, my view of living with an eternal perspective was shaped by a lady who decided to start college in her 70s. When they asked her why she would do such a thing when her life was basically over, she said, "Oh no! It's not over! I'm preparing for the next part of my life in heaven! The more equipped I can get on earth, the more ready I'll be for what the Lord has for me on the other side!"

Another lady was homebound because she was so disabled. She got the word out that every afternoon, her home was open for anyone who needed prayer. Some days it was like there was a revolving door, so many coming and going! She had a vibrant ministry in the waning days of her life because she was determined to use her remaining earthly days fully, to the glory of God.

In the time you have now, live well. To the glory of God. Keep reminding yourself that everything we do now has an eternal impact. Our choices, our behaviors, our words, ripple into eternity. Which is why we need to seek to do everything for the glory of God.



I lettered this calligraphy and put it in a frame in my kitchen next to the coffee maker so I see it and recite it to myself every morning.

Two great questions to consider: "Lord, in order to live well, in order to live to Your glory, with an eternal perspective, what do You want me to do less of in the time I have left? And what do You want me to do more of?"

As a mom of littles, Nicole Johnson was feeling sorry for herself when she met with a friend who had just returned from Europe. [She writes](#),

"My friend turned to me with a beautifully wrapped package, and said, 'I brought you this.' It was a book on the great cathedrals of Europe. I wasn't exactly sure why she'd given it to me until I read her inscription: 'With admiration for the greatness of what you are building when no one sees.'

"In the days ahead I would read—no, devour—the book. And I would discover what would become for me, four life-changing truths, after which I could pattern my work:

- "1) No one can say who built the great cathedrals—we have no record of their names.
- 2) These builders gave their whole lives for a work they would never see finished.

- 3) They made great sacrifices and expected no credit.
- 4) The passion of their building was fueled by their faith that the eyes of God saw everything.

“There’s a story in the book about a rich man who came to visit the cathedral while it was being built, and he saw a workman carving a tiny bird on the inside of a beam. He was puzzled and asked the man, ‘Why are you spending so much time carving that bird into a beam that will be covered by the roof? No one will ever see it.’

“And the workman replied, ‘Because God sees it.’”

Living with an eternal perspective as we make choices and invest our time to glorify God is like building a cathedral that we won’t be able to see finished.

But every “next faithful step” of the tasks in your life, is building something. The things you do that no one sees but God—the unseen and eternal—they matter!

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/what-does-it-mean-to-live-with-an-eternal-perspective/ on March 17, 2021.

Glorious Morning Glories

This is what love looks like.

My husband planted morning glories for me on our back fence because they are my favorite.



I love that a whole new batch of brand new blooms pops out each morning, day after day of fresh beauty that reminds me of Lamentations 3:23, that God's mercies are "new every morning—great is Your faithfulness!"

This year, we had to wait long into the fall for the flowers. The green foliage was crazy lush and full for months, but there were no gorgeous "blue happies," as I think of them, until late October.

Finally they started exploding daily with beauty and color. Not long afterwards, an unseasonable cold snap hit us, and the green foliage started to wither and dry up.

But the "blue happies" kept popping out!



I had to smile at what was happening on our fence, because it was a powerful illustration of what it's like for me to grow older. The green leaves were getting old and spent and dry and yucky, at the same time that every morning, there were still fresh and new morning glory blooms sprouting out. What a picture of what has become my new life verse, 2 Corinthians 4:16-18—

Therefore we do not lose heart, but ***though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day.*** For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

My body is growing older and weaker, especially ravaged by the lingering effects of polio. Not long ago, I spent almost two years [unable to walk](#) at all because of severe arthritis in both hips. (The Lord has restored so very much to me on the other side of two [hip replacements](#)!) I'm able to walk and stand without pain these days, for which I give thanks every single day, but the march of time continues and, like everyone else, I'm going downhill physically.

But—the glorious but!—on the inside I get to be fresh and new every day! Just like the “blue happies”! As I walk in faithfulness with the Lord, seeking to abide in Him and allow the beauty and character of Christlikeness to flow into and through me, He keeps bringing renewed energy and joy to my soul. Every day! I love it!

The hope for us as believers, especially older believers, is that we get to be renewed daily with the radiance and vibrancy and joy of Jesus within that keeps getting better and better the older we get!

In fact, the Bible even speaks about our transformation as a special kind of glory: 2 Corinthians 3:17-18 says,

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

I LOVE being transformed, a little bit every day, into the image of Jesus, with ever-increasing glory! I get to be a spiritual morning glory!

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/glorious-morning-glories/ on December 15,
2020.

Invisible Women

Sue Bohlin addresses the call for the church to meet the needs of single moms and those widowed by death, divorce, desertion,

and imprisonment.

The other morning at church, I was talking to one of our church leaders as he spotted one of our three-year-olds making a run for the lobby. He called the boy's name three times, including extending his hand for a high-five, and was ignored all three times. (I'm a boy mom. I get it. The little guy was completely focused on escaping the worship center—no room for any other thoughts!) Laughing, I asked my friend, "Hey, how are you doing with that 'feeling invisible' thing?"

He was fine with it. But there are a number of people in our churches for whom feeling invisible is no laughing matter. It hurts.

A few days later, I was privileged to teach on 1 Timothy 5, where Paul gives Timothy direction on caring well for the widows in his congregation. In preparing for my message, I learned that in the first century, "widow" referred to a much larger group of women than just those whose husbands had died.

Widows could be women who had lost husbands through death, divorce, desertion, or imprisonment. (We have all four of those in our church.) They could even be women whose polygamist husbands had come to faith in Christ and learned that God's plan for marriage is one man and one woman, and they sent all but one wife away. Widows could also refer to unmarried women; the sense of "widow" in the first century was a "without-a-man woman." And of course in that time, when women had so few rights and privileges, that was a scary situation.

Paul's instruction to Timothy on superintending the care of widows resonates with how important vulnerable women are to God. The Old Testament has 32 references to widows or widows and orphans! If God says something once it's important . . . but THIRTY-TWO TIMES??!! In the New Testament, the Lord's brother James sums up this Old Testament value, defining true

religion as caring for widows and orphans in their distress (1:27).

How should the church care for vulnerable women today? The ones who can easily feel invisible in the church?

One group we need to take better care of is single moms.

I asked my dear friend, a single mom, about her experience. She was grateful for the ways in which a few people from her church stepped in to provide physically in various ways:

- A new friend brought her son to the hospital when she was suddenly admitted, and then cared for him until she was discharged.
- They mowed her lawn
- Some folks gave her a break by taking her son for a few hours to several days
- One especially memorable year, a man took her son to the store to get my friend her one and only Mother's Day gift

But she was always plagued by a constant longing—for belonging, for protection and help, for men to provide balance to her over-protective feminine mothering.

- She longed for a healthy family to draw them into their home and invite them for meals and family times together so they could see what “healthy” and “loving” and “respectful” looked like.
- She longed for a man to invest in her son so he could see how the boy treated his mom and take him aside to say, “Hey buddy, it’s not OK to talk to your mom that way.”
- She longed for a family to say, “Come spend Christmas with us” so it wasn’t just her and her son alone with the Christmas tree—again.

In addition to relational needs, many single moms have needs

for practical assistance concerning their homes and cars. And another group of “invisible women” with the same kinds of needs are older single women.

Typical practical needs:

- Help with assembling furniture such as from Ikea
- Trimming trees and other kinds of yard work
- Home repair
- Changing out-of-reach light bulbs
- Winterizing (and then summerizing) a house
- Organizing a closet, room, or garage
- Changing the oil in the car
- Moving stuff (both to a new home and just moving heavy furniture in the house)
- Plumbing help such as installing a new faucet, fixing a dripping faucet or running toilet
- Installing a ceiling fan
- Grocery shopping
- Rides to the doctor, chemo appointments, tests, surgeries and procedures
- Babysitting and carting kids places they need to go
- Helping with budgeting and financial direction
- Meals: home-cooked and delivered, gift cards to restaurants

Just as in the church at Ephesus when Paul was helping Timothy love his people well, we need to connect those with needs, with the people gifted to serve. Or even those without supernatural giftings for service, but a generous, Christlike heart to love others. That’s how the church cares for its own.

So they don’t feel invisible.

This

blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/invisible-women/ on October 25, 2020.

On Suicide

The incidence of depression, anxiety, and suicide has skyrocketed as the isolation and life-disruption from Covid-19 has ravaged our world. I wrote this post in April 2013, but it's even more salient today.

Over the weekend, Rick Warren (pastor of Saddleback Church in California, author of *The Purpose Driven Life*) and his wife Kay revealed that their son Matthew had taken his life after a lifelong struggle with mental illness. In an email to his church, Pastor Warren wrote, “[O]nly those closest knew that he struggled from birth with mental illness, dark holes of depression, and even suicidal thoughts. In spite of America’s best doctors, meds, counselors, and prayers for healing, the torture of mental illness never subsided.”

Many years ago, I was privileged to take a three-year lay counseling class from a wise and experienced man who taught us that those who commit suicide don’t really want to die; they just want the pain to end. Deep depression feels like being locked in a dark dungeon with no way out. The pain can become intolerably intense; one friend likened it to being forced to hold a large cauldron of boiling liquid with no hot pads. Those of us who have been spared from deep depression cannot really imagine how dark and how painful it is.

Psalm 139:16 says, “All the days ordained for me were written in Your book before one of them came to be.” That means that before God even creates us, He knows the day of our death. That also means that those who commit suicide are dying on their ordained last day. Most of the time, though, God intervenes in people’s plans to end their lives, each story different and drenched in grace.

When one teenage girl learned she was pregnant, she planned to drive one of her family's cars into an embankment at the end of the week-but her parents sold that car before she could carry out her plan, and she decided she couldn't wreck the one remaining vehicle. Today, she is so glad she gave birth to her baby girl, who brought immeasurable joy to her adoptive parents, and enjoys her life of service to God which includes her own family.

Another friend lay in bed one night planning to end her life by walking out in front of an 18-wheeler on the nearby interstate. As she thought about making her way in her nightgown across the empty field that lay between her house and the highway, she suddenly thought, "I can't walk across that field in my bare feet!" . . . and turned over and went back to sleep.

When our son was suicidally depressed in high school, his friend came to us and told us of his plan to hurt himself a few days later. He was not pleased that his friend had "betrayed" him, but we were so grateful-and it enabled us to get him some badly-needed help.

There are so many stories of God's intervention that when we do hear of someone taking their own life, I do believe it means God allowed it because it was their ordained day. This doesn't diminish the pain for the survivors, though.

My dear friend Caren Austen, responding to the news of Matthew Warren's suicide, wrote an essay revealing her own struggles with mental illness and suicidal depression so that people would know what it's like. With her permission, I gratefully share these excerpts:

"I am not weak, lacking in faith, demon-possessed or oppressed or anything else but suffering from faulty brain chemistry.

"The disorder affects my daily life: my ability to work,

interact with other people, activities of daily living to the point of sometimes being unable to get out of bed or leave my house. I hate it. I hate that God has chosen this path for my growth and sanctification. Depression is my nearly constant companion. I rarely get a break. I wake up with it. I work with it. I go to sleep with it, knowing that tomorrow I'll wake up and live it all over again.

"There are so many of us who suffer silently, because it is not acceptable to discuss mental illness. Cancer is OK. People have sympathy and understanding for that. Cystic Fibrosis, diabetes, MS and the multitude of other terrible diseases and disorders are acceptable. Mental illness is considered taboo. The stigma attached to it prevents people from getting the help they need, from picking up the phone, from asking for prayer.

"Many, many people, especially Christians, negatively judge people with mental illness and especially those who have made the awful decision to take their own lives. A common statement is: 'It's the ultimate selfish act.' I'd ask you to consider what agony any individual must be enduring to fight every natural instinct for survival to choose instead to die. To be feeling psychic pain so incredible that the very thought of even one more moment is unendurable. I have, in the past, been completely and thoroughly convinced that if I loved my family, especially my children, as I said I did, I would remove the evil (me) from their lives, so I would no longer influence them for evil.

"These are the kinds of thoughts that people who choose suicide experience. They are not to be judged harshly. They are to be seen with compassion. Yes, it is an unspeakable tragedy that leaves those left behind with the worst kind of pain. A pain that I can't even imagine as they believe that the one who died didn't love them enough to fight. I know those are the thoughts, the feelings of those left behind, but they are not the actual reasons suicide was chosen. In

fact, just the opposite is likely true. The one who chooses suicide often does it out of love for those they care most about, as strange as that may seem.”

Please, please pray for the Warren family and for all those teetering on the edge of suicide. God knows who they are. It may even be someone you know and love.

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/on_suicide/.

The Internet Dad With Millions of Kids

A father's YouTube channel went viral during the pandemic as he kindly taught adulting skills to the fatherless. Sue Bohlin just loves this sunny spot on the internet!

This Father's Day, millions of people worldwide will have a new dad to salute and appreciate. The “Internet Dad” is a warm, loving father-figure whose YouTube channel [“Dad How Do I?”](#) exploded during the Coronavirus quarantine.

Rob Kenney creates unfussy, easy-to-understand how-to videos on practical adulting tasks like how to change the tire on a car, how to iron a dress shirt, how to shave, and how to use tools like a stud finder, pliers and a wrench. He's a natural teacher, but what has captivated over two million subscribers in just a couple of months is his heart.

Every single video radiates *kindness*. You know, the fruit of the Spirit that seems to be in alarmingly short supply these

days?



He starts his videos with a smiling, “Hi kids!” and always includes a dad joke. A perfect dad joke, even when he messes up. (“Did you hear the joke about the butter? . . . Oh, I just blew it. Did you hear the *rumor* about the butter? Well, I’m not gonna spread it . . .”) As a response to the overwhelming number of views and heartfelt comments, Rob started creating simple messages from the heart; his “Thank You” (for people’s enthusiastic response) video has had over 1.6 million views in just under a month. His description for a video titled “I Am Proud of You” reads, “The internet can’t understand what you all just did! Apparently it doesn’t have an algorithm for kindness. :0) I am proud of all of you!” He has read a children’s book with the intention to read one a month.

He’s being the dad every heart longs for.

Viewers’ comments on Rob’s videos are the most eloquent expression of the worldwide father hunger I’ve ever seen.

One repeated sentiment Rob himself has responded to, which really touched *his* heart, was the sweetly defensive “Protect this man at all costs!”

In the comments on the “I Am Proud of You” video, I was moved to tears by a long thread of “kids” from different countries responding to one poster’s heartbreaking comment: “The words any Asian child dreams of hearing their whole life.” Then “amens” from around the globe: China. India. Eastern Europe. Arabia. Indonesia. And, of course, the United States.

Such heart hunger! Such pain from absent, or distant, or abusive, fathers!

- My dad.. Actually tried to kill me when I was little... He never loved me . . . Will you be my new dad?. . . My Internet dad?
- I've always been scared that when I grow up and if I become a father I won't be able to teach my children "dad" things because no one taught me. Thank you this might change that.
- As someone who's dad left behind 6 girls and a wife, i have NEVER ever appreciated a mans help before. ♥this makes my heart hurt in a good way♥
- "You got this and I'm proud of you." I have a dad and I'm still crying
- Everytime he says hi kids i just wanna say hi dad.
- "I Love you, I'm proud of you, God bless you." All of the internet crying

(OK, I'm gonna stop pasting in comments now. I can't see for the tears.)

What delights me the most about this "Mister Rogers for Adults" is that Rob is a Christ follower. He allows Father God to love His hurting (and not-so-hurting) children through him. The millions of people who watch his videos, and especially the over 100,000 commenters, are experiencing the affection and warmth of the God who loves them more than they can imagine, and this God is using technology to reach millions of people around the world with His love—packaged in a way they can receive.

And It. Is. Glorious!

In the midst of a very hard time for us as a society, it seems that God the Father has bestowed a Father's Day gift on people they didn't know they needed.

God bless you, Internet Dad. I'm proud of you, too. And Happy

Father's Day, brother.

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/the-internet-dad-with-millions-of-kids/ on June 16, 2020.

Two Sides to Every Story. Especially Now.

Sue exhorts us to make Proverbs 18:17 our filter to find the balance in news stories, analyses, and opinion pieces by asking wise questions and finding trustworthy sources.

Please, please, please, make this powerful Proverb the filter through which you process information, especially during this Corona-Crazy time:

The one who states his case first seems right, until the other comes and examines him.

Proverbs 18:17

We HAVE to remember that there are two sides to every story, particularly now when we have to navigate a slippery slope of opinion, and fake news, and deliberately skewed news, and trustworthy reporting of facts.

Many people are grabbing one compelling-sounding video or article or even just a meme on social media, and they stop thinking there. We need to be asking ourselves the power questions that help us think:

What do they mean by _____? We need to make sure that we understand what others mean by the words and terms they use.

Politically- and ideologically-charged rhetoric often uses language that means something very different from what it appears on the surface. For example, the innocuous-sounding “Equality Act” is intended to severely restrict and punish those who hold to a biblical perspective on gender and sexuality—who, it is clear, are not considered equal to those who hold pro-LGBT values.

Where do they get their information? There are extreme-right and extreme-left sources that pump out nothing but slanted and unbalanced ideas. We need to be aware of the difference between reports from the very conservative Infowars and The Blaze, and the leftist MSNBC and CNN.

How can we know it's true? Much of what appears to be journalism today is analysis and opinion pieces. How are your discernment skills? Can you tell the difference between factual reporting and spin? Probably not if you live in a bubble of only opinions and voices you agree with. “Confirmation bias” is a powerful dynamic that keeps us from considering anything from a different perspective. This is why it's essential to keep in mind, as Proverbs 18:17 reminds us, that there are two sides to every story, and we need to delay clamping down our minds on a position until we have more information and perspective. Do you know about allsides.com? That's a good place to find news from the left, from the center, and the right.

(Please see my article [“Four Killer Questions: Power Tools for Great Question-Asking”](#))

My extremely wise colleague at Probe Ministries, Steve Cable, offered this counsel in his article [“Seeing Through News Media Bias: Exposing Deception and Proclaiming Truth in an Age of Misinformation”](#):

“[W]e need to be on the alert for the warning signs of misinformation. When we recognize the need for discernment,

begin by asking God for wisdom in looking for and applying the truth:

But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him (James 1:5-6).

“Then we need to ask ourselves some tough questions about the article or news report:

1. Does it begin with truth?
2. Is it logical?
3. Does it consider all of the evidence?
4. Does the conclusion make sense apart from the argument?
5. Does it stand up to close examination?”

These are great questions.

And we need to hang on tight to common sense, not being afraid to ask questions of what we're reading and hearing. Biological viruses will not be transmitted through cell towers. Washing our hands thoroughly will ALWAYS be a good idea. We were told not to wear masks, now we're told to wear masks; maybe there's not a one-size-fit-all rule?

Conspiracy theories abound; is anybody addressing the assertions in them? At this point in time, Google is still our friend in finding the answer to that question.

The bottom line is that we need to always remember that “the first to make his case *seems* right, until the other comes and examines him.” If we've only heard the first side, we need to hold our thoughts and judgments loosely until we hear if there is another side.

And be kind the whole time.

This blog post originally appeared at

3 Truths to Feed Our Hope in a Pandemic

*When the world is upside down due to unforeseen circumstances, we need hope, but not just any hope. Sue explains that **biblical hope** is something different. Something better. Because it's about God.*

When pretty much the whole world is in stay-at-home mode . . .
when pretty much the whole world is impacted by sudden unemployment because the whole world is in stay-at-home mode . . .
. . . when pretty much the whole world's economy might be affected by the crazy fall in oil prices . . .

We desperately need hope.

Hope that things will get better. Hope that we will be able to experience "normal" again. Hope that everyone's stress level will go down, especially health care heroes and first responders.

I've been thinking a lot about hope lately.

Your everyday kind of hope is a wish or expectation for the future. It's oxygen for the soul. An important part of mental health is being able to look forward to something good.

But *biblical hope* is something different. Something better. Because it's about God.

Where everyday hope is about wishing, biblical hope is a

confident expectation that God will be good, and He will do good, toward us. It is faith in the future tense.

Everyday hope is horizontal, looking at circumstances, the world, and other people—which are all broken by the Fall, and they are guaranteed to disappoint. But biblical hope is vertical. It looks UP instead of out. Biblical hope is focused on a perfect, loving God who is all-knowing and all-powerful. He doesn't just *know* the future, He *holds* the future.

We can encourage one another daily, as Hebrews 3:13 urges us, by reminding ourselves and each other of what is true. Let me suggest three truths that will feed our hope.

God is good.

Probably the #1 lie of the enemy is that God ISN'T good. It's what was behind his temptation of Eve in the Garden of Eden: that God was holding out on her because He's not good.

And when life is hard and we live in pain, it's easy to look through the filter of "God is not good, that's why He's letting me hurt."

But the truth is that our circumstances are not an accurate indicator of whether God is good or not. Our logic and thinking are not accurate judges of whether God is good or not.

Even if we don't say it out loud, we can sit in the self-pity puddle of the belief, "If God was good, He wouldn't let me hurt."

But our pain is achieving something eternally significant, an eternal weight of glory (2 Corinthians 4:17). When life is hard, God is doing something really big in us. And eventually, for those who have trusted Christ, God's goodness will mean He carries us to the place where there is no more pain, no more tears, no more sickness or weakness or even disappointment.

That is our hope, that the future will hold nothing but GOOD for us.

We're not there yet. But it's coming!

God is faithful.

He is faithful in His character, He is faithful to His word, He is faithful to His promises.

Faithfulness means being a promise-keeper, even when it's hard. The Hebrew word for faithfulness means steadfastness, firmness.

On a trip to Colorado, my brother-in-law Phil learned that a cashier at Rocky Mountain National Park was also from Chicago. He said, "It must be cool to be here with these mountains all the time."

"Let me tell you something about the mountains," she responded. "They're . . . always . . . THERE." Meaning, they don't move, they don't change, and it takes a long time to get from A to B because those mountains are always THERE.

Like God's faithfulness.

We can have hope that God will remain faithful to His promises, such as Jesus promising, "I will be with you always."

Sports Illustrated covered a memorable incident at the 1992 Olympics when runner Derek Redmond tore his hamstring near the end of the race. He fell face first onto the track in agony.

As the medical attendants were approaching, Redmond fought to his feet. "It was animal instinct," he would say later. He set out hopping, in a crazed attempt to finish the race. When he reached the stretch, a large man in a T-shirt came out of the stands, hurled aside a security guard and ran to Redmond, embracing him. It was Jim Redmond, Derek's father.

“You don’t have to do this,” he told his weeping son. “Yes, I do,” said Derek. “Well, then,” said Jim, “we’re going to finish this together.” And so they did.

Fighting off security men, the son’s head sometimes buried in his father’s shoulder, they stayed in Derek’s lane all the way to the end, as the crowd gaped, then rose and howled and wept.[\[1\]](#)

Most people don’t remember who won the gold medal in the 1992 Barcelona Olympics, but millions will never forget the faithful love of a father who left his seat in the stands to enable his son to finish his race.

What a picture of our faithful heavenly Father who sent His Son from His seat in glory to earth to rescue and redeem us! Jesus promises that He will be with us always, to the end of the age—just as Derek Redmond’s father was with his son to the end of the race.

God is at work in my life.

Philippians 1:6 promises that He who began a good work in me will continue to complete it. Once God gets started on the process of making us like Jesus, He doesn’t quit!

One of my pastors has said that if you don’t like how things are, it means the story’s not over and God’s not finished.

How encouraging is that??!

Romans 8:28 teaches us, “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good for those who are called according to His purpose.”

Since God is at work in us, then He has a plan to make us like Jesus, and He’s using every situation and every circumstance in our lives as His tools.

When we open our hearts and minds to God’s plans to make us

like Jesus, and we cooperate with the Holy Spirit in the process, it strengthens our hope that our future will be different from the past or the present.

But to be like Jesus means we have to follow Him, which means denying ourselves, and taking up our cross. It means not fighting the tools of sanctification He is using to make us like Jesus. The best way to do that is to obey scripture, which says to give thanks IN everything, FOR everything. If God has allowed it, there must be a purpose in it. It means developing an attitude of gratitude by disciplining ourselves to say, "This stinks, Lord, but You have allowed it in my life so I will give You thanks for this crummy boss, or this difficult roommate situation, or this physical challenge, or this thorn in my flesh."

When we realize we are not content with WHO we are or HOW we are, because we long to be better, it means God's not finished with us. We are still a work in progress. The story's not over.

It means there is hope. Biblical hope.

God is good, God is faithful, and God is at work in me. Those are the truths that will feed our hope and allow us to look at the future with confident expectation that it's going to be better than OK . . . it's going to be amazing. Either in this life, or on the other side, we can have hope.

A living hope. Hope has a name. His name is Jesus.

1. vault.si.com/vault/1992/08/17/track-and-field-ode-to-joy-carl-lewis-exulted-along-with-all-of-barcelonas-gold-medalists-many-of-whom-vanquished-giants-to-win-their-events. Accessed 4/21/2020.

This blog post originally appeared at

Responding to COVID-19: God Already Had It Figured Out

As America grinds almost to a halt as we try to suppress the spread of the Corona Virus, governments are closing things up and shutting things down. As we are instructed to stay in our homes and keep our distance from other people, we are also being encouraged about how to think about these restrictions. We're hearing pleas to younger people, especially, not to gather in bars and restaurants, because it speeds up the transmission of the virus. This will help protect the physically vulnerable—older folks [um, *wince*—somehow that now includes me] and those with compromised immunity.

What strikes me about the messages we are receiving is that God came up with them first.

These calls to citizens parallel God's calls to believers. Several of the "one anothers" of scripture are particularly salient to our needs right now to pull together to fight this invisible enemy: not merely as a nation, but as human beings facing a global pandemic together.

Love one another (John 15:12). It is loving to keep your distance from others and stay home in order to keep yourself from catching, and even worse become an unknowing carrier for, what is a serious and sometimes deadly virus. It is loving to wash our hands for 20 seconds because it kills the virus and helps us keep from spreading the virus to others.

Serve one another (Galatians 5:13). It just *delights* me to receive texts from friends asking if they can go to the store for us, and to read offers on my Next Door app from people offering to run errands and shop for the older and health-challenged people in our neighborhood.

Bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2). Saying no to ourselves (such as wanting to hang out with friends in groups) in order to protect others is one way of bearing each other's burdens. Buying online gift cards from restaurants that now can't serve diners in order to provide a cash flow when they are strapped is another. Providing childcare, eldercare and respite care is yet another. Reaching out by phone, text and other social media is how we can bear the burden of loneliness to people in isolation.

Be hospitable to one other (1 Peter 4:9). Leaving food gifts on a neighbor's door step. Sending/leaving notes to assure people they are remembered and they are important.

Pray for one another (James 5:16). We need to pray for protection, especially for health care workers who expose themselves to danger every minute of their working day. We need to pray for those struggling against the symptoms of the virus. Is there anything as scary as having trouble breathing? We need to pray for business owners and employees who have lost their ability to provide for themselves and their families.

I have a mental list that I pray through every time I wash my hands.

Finally, I especially love Philippians 2:3-4 in view of our current challenge:

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind **regard one another as more important than yourselves**; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

The entire country is being asked to put the risks and needs of other people ahead of our own. In a spectacular display of biblical thinking, Dallas County judge Clay Jenkins said we need to “turn from selfishness to sacrifice.”

Yes we do. Jesus said, “Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). In big and small ways.

It’s an exceptional opportunity for all of us to do things God’s way. Because He knows what works best.

This blog post originally appeared at
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How Can I Make God Answer My Prayers My Way?

How can I get God to give me what I want? That’s often at the root of our interest in prayer. If we’re honest, that’s the question we want answered when we read books on prayer, listen to a message or podcast on prayer, or talk to people known as prayer warriors.

Instead of New Year's Resolutions

Fill in the blank: New Year's _____.

You probably either supplied "Eve" or "Resolutions," right?

Resolutions are intentions that may last days or weeks, but so often they peter out before we even get used to using the new year in our dates. May I suggest that instead of forming resolutions, we spend time asking some powerfully insightful questions that will help us evaluate ourselves truthfully and helpfully?

Here are three questions that many community/accountability groups ask each other regularly (as in, weekly):

What am I doing to feed myself (spiritually)? *How am I spending time in God's word and other sources of spiritual truth and wisdom such as books?*

What am I doing to feed my flesh? *How am I indulging my appetites and desires in ways that glorify myself instead of God?*

What am I doing to feed others? *How am I pointing others to Christ and helping them grow spiritually?*

My pastor at Watermark Community Church-Plano, Kyle Kaigler, is especially good at pointed questions. Every morning, as he thinks back on the previous day, he examines himself in four areas:

Where was I hooked? (caught in a bad habit that controls me)

Where was I cold? (being so self-focused that I failed to be loving and kind to those around me)

Where was I scared? (allowing my fear of man to keep me from saying and doing the things I should be)

Where was I proud? (taking credit for what God did)

(Pastor Tim Keller asks these same questions: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/erik-raymond/help-with-prayer-simple-clear-gospel-devotion-from-tim-keller/>)

Kyle also offers these questions:

John Piper says that “God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.” So, looking back over the last 12 months:

What are the most God-glorifying occasions over this past year that came from finding satisfaction in Him? *When was I moved to erupt in gratitude and praise for what God did in my life? Were there sweet moments of deep connection with others, or a “lightbulb moment” when He revealed truth to me in a way that zapped lies and wrong beliefs? Were there moments of realizing I was just immersed in His goodness?*

What was a distraction to the glory of God? *In what areas of my life is my stubborn affinity for my flesh, getting my way, insisting on staying in my comfort zone, serving like mud that covers up “Christ in me, the hope of glory”? Where did my entrenched habits (such as continually checking my phone) function like a stop sign, keeping God at a distance? How have I tuned Him out so that I miss the ways He wants to nudge me, direct me, lead me through the day?*

Here are some helpful spiritual assessment questions:

What has God been teaching me in His word? We should be recording the things the Holy Spirit is showing us in our time in His word so we can remind ourselves of His lessons and insights. Otherwise we are the guy from James 1 who looks in a mirror and then turns away, thoughtlessly unaware of what he

looks like.

How's my time with the Lord?

- a. Consistent and meaningful (It's ok to choose this option)
- b. Consistent but not so meaningful (I am faithful to go before the Lord but I leave the time unfulfilled)
- c. Inconsistent but meaningful (I don't do it very often but when I do, He is faithful to meet me there)
- d. Inconsistent and not meaningful (it's just not happening)

(If a or c) **How is God transforming my life?** What is God revealing about Himself and His desire for my life? How is my heart being changed to more faithfully follow where He is leading? What have I surrendered (or still working on surrendering) to Jesus' control? How is my life changing so He is increasing, and I am decreasing?

(If b or d) **What are the barriers to consistent and meaningful time with God?** (Busyness, worldliness, selfishness, sin—lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, sinful pride of life)

Am I sharing my story of how Jesus Christ changed my life?

Am I being a good steward of the body God gave me?

Am I being a good steward of the resources He has given me?

And finally, again thanks to Kyle, here are some interesting survey questions for family members:

Spouse survey

1. What were the best memories that we made together this year as a *couple*?
2. What were the best memories that we made together this year as a *family*?
3. What would you consider the key challenges we faced as a family this past year? What about in our marriage?
4. If someone were to ask you, "Describe your current

- marriage relationship.” What would you say and why?
5. If you could change anything about last year, what would it be and why?
 6. Based on the experiences that we have had as a couple and as a family, what have you learned about God and His work in our lives?
 7. What are 3 trips or activities that you would enjoy doing together this next year?
 8. What do I do that really ministers to you and you would love it if I did it more?
 9. What are your top fears/concerns for each of our children?

Kid Survey

1. What have been some of the best times you have had with me this past year?
2. If you had to give me some advice on being a better parent, what would it be and why?
3. What are some things that you would like to talk with me about and why?
4. What are some of your fears that you would like me to pray for you about?
5. What is something that you would like to do with me?
6. How can I help you grow as a Christian?
7. As you consider conversations and time together as a family over the past year, what new things have you learned or understood more about God?

I think these powerful questions, answered thoughtfully and truthfully, will serve us better than any New Years Resolution we've ever made.

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/instead-of-new-years-resolutions/ on December

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