Living With an Eternal Perspective

Sue Bohlin considers several ways to develop a way of seeing our earthly life as part of the much bigger picture that extends into eternity.

What Does It Mean To Live With an Eternal Perspective?

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.

The apostle Paul had a firm grasp on what it means to live with an eternal perspective. We can especially see this in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18–

> 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.

In these verses, Paul provides three aspects of an eternal perspective that kept him from losing heart, despite living with profound physical persecution and assault such as being hammered with stones, whipped by a cat-o'-nine-tails, beaten with rods, and shipwrecked. He knew what it was to go without sleep, food or drink, sometimes he was cold and naked. The man *knew* what it was to suffer! (2 Corinthians 11:23-29)

But Paul had a sort of spiritual periscope that allowed him to "see above" into the spirit realm while continuing to "live below" in this physical world. He saw the contrast between our bodies and our souls, how earthly affliction prepares us for glory, and the need to focus on the unseen and eternal rather than the seen and temporary.

Paul's Eternal Perspective

The apostle Paul showed us in 2 Corinthians 4 that he understood what it was to live with an eternal perspective. He understood that our bodies can be growing older and weaker on the outside, while our spirits are growing stronger, brighter, and more mature on the inside. I get that; as a polio survivor who has also needed both my hips replaced, I am very aware that I keep getting weaker the longer I live in this compromised body. But I also know the beauty and glory of Jesus making me more and more like Himself, day by day, so by His grace I can keep growing in vitality and joy on the inside! I may have diminishing energy in my body, but my spiritual energy capacity keeps getting bigger!

Paul also understood that the hard parts of living in a fallen world, much less living with the pains and trials of persecution, are merely a "light and momentary affliction" compared to what's waiting on the other side: an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison. Even horrible pain on earth is still "light and momentary" compared to the infinite length and glory of eternity with Christ. We can see how the Lord Jesus modeled this understanding as He faced the cross, and Hebrews tells us that He "despised its shame" because He was valuing the glory of the joy set before Him (12:2)

And Paul understood that we can shift our focus from the visible and temporary things of this world, to the unseen and eternal things of the spirit realm. We have to work at seeing the unseen and eternal. We do that with the eyes of our hearts (Ephesians 1:18). 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 my blog posts, such as Glorious Morning Glories [probe.org/glorious-morning-glories/], Back Infections and Heart Infections [probe.org/back-infections-and-heart-infections/], Cruise Ships, Roller Coasters and Attitudes [probe.org/cruise-ships-roller-coasters-and-attitudes/], and Blowing Past Greatness [probe.org/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.

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 recorded 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 any God Sightings to share?” to help them identify the hand of God in their lives.

An Eternal Perspective on Suffering

As we talk about living with an eternal perspective, let’s remember that we live in a permanent battle zone of spiritual warfare. We have an enemy who hates us because He hates God. He and his fellow demons continually attack us with lies and deceptions. Some are personal, but many of them constitute the cultural water we swim in.

When we forget that we live in a culture of 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.

Spiritual warfare is HARD. It means suffering. Sometimes physical, most often mental—because spiritual warfare is waged on the battlefield of the mind. But the suffering of spiritual warfare is temporary, because the vast majority of the believer’s life will be spent in heaven where warfare of all kinds will be a distant memory.

But for right now, suffering is still part of life, and developing and maintaining an eternal perspective really helps us remind ourselves of the larger truth. Romans 8:18 says that “our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.” Being faithful when we’re suffering means glory in the future.

My friend Holly has battled cancer three times on top of the horribleness of cystic fibrosis. She suffers literally every day of her life. Yet, with a beautiful, godly stubbornness, she reminds herself of what is true: "What if the worst thing happens? Oh wait, it can't. The worst thing that can possibly happen to anyone is to die apart from Christ and spend eternity in torment. For me, to die means instant joy and relief in the arms of my Savior!"

Like Joni Eareckson Tada, my friend Chris has lived with quadriplegia for almost fifty years. What comes to mind when I think of Chris is two words: "sweet joy." Because of his eternal perspective, Chris knows his suffering is temporary, and he chooses not to give into self-pity. People are drawn to him like honey because of how he radiates Jesus.

And then there's me. I've lived with a disability my whole life. As a polio survivor, I have walked every step with a very noticeable limp. Living with an eternal perspective means that, by the grace of God, I know I will receive a beautiful, strong, perfectly healthy resurrection body in heaven. My polio days are limited, but my resurrection body days will be unlimited! Meanwhile, I get to see God use my disability for His glory and others' good in ways I never would have imagined. It really is okay!

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.

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 right now, or

making choices that honor God and bless other people?”

Probably my favorite question 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?” [probe.org/in-the-scope-of-eternity/]The frustrations of traffic? Not getting our way? A loved one who does not know Christ? The answer determines what is worth getting upset about, what we should just let go, and where we should be investing time in prayer.

We can remember the long view by pre-deciding 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 the story of 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.

One of my friends is a TSA [Transportation Security Administration, part of the U.S. Government] agent at a major airport. 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, once told her, “In twelve months you’ll stop being nice to everyone.” We don’t think so. (Especially since she’s already had this job for several years.) She works at maintaining an eternal perspective, seeing the unseen.

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.

Eternal Perspective is What God Sees

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.’{1}

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.

It means living with the long view in mind, aware that the things we can see, hear, and feel are temporary, but the spiritual realm is permanent.

An eternal perspective means that the things you do that no one sees but God—the unseen and eternal—*they matter!*

God tells us in Isaiah that our purpose in life is to glorify Him (43:7). Paul puts a point on this in 1 Corinthians 10:31: “Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”

And that’s the key to living with an eternal perspective.

Notes

1. thejoysofboys.com/monday-motivation-the-invisible-mom/

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The Apologetics of Jesus: A Defense of His Deity

Dr. Zukeran shows us that the greatest defense of the deity of Jesus was made by Jesus Himself. Claiming to be God in the flesh, His words and His actions had to be an apologetic for His claim. People could see He was a man; He had to prove to them that He was also deity, God in the flesh.



Jesus was one of the greatest leaders, teachers, and remarkable individuals that ever lived, but few realize that Jesus was also the greatest apologist. Apologetics is the rational defense of Christianity. Christian apologists use reason and evidence to present a convincing case for Christianity, challenge unbelief, expose errors, and defend the message of the gospel. Apologetics was an essential part of Jesus' ministry. If it was important in His ministry, it certainly should be in all ministries looking to impact the unbelieving world for Christ.

The Bible commands us in 1 Peter 3:15, "But set apart Christ as Lord in your hearts. Always be prepared to give an answer [*apologia*] to everyone who asks you the reason for the hope that you have." We are commanded to provide a well-reasoned answer for our faith in Christ to an unbelieving world. Jesus commanded us to "love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Mt. 22:37). Apologetics involves knowing why you believe and complies with Christ's command of loving God with your mind.

There exists some misunderstanding among Christians as to whether apologetics is necessary. Some believe that our belief in Christ is based on "faith" and thus does not require solid reasons or evidence to support it. Therefore, in witnessing to unbelievers, some mistakenly suppose that apologetics is

ineffective in leading anyone to faith. The call of the Christian is to simply present the gospel, and the Holy Spirit and the Scriptures will do the rest. However, this was not the example of Christ.

Christ made extraordinary claims to be the divine Son of God. He made such claims as being the source of life, forgiver of sins, the embodiment of truth, and authority over the Old Testament Law. Such claims were met with skepticism, doubt, and hostility. Jesus knew He was making remarkable claims, and He did not expect people to simply believe His message without good reasons. He was not seeking or wanting people to exercise "blind faith." Jesus understood that we are rational and moral beings, for we are created in the image of God who is a rational and morally perfect being. For this reason, we exercise our rational capacity and investigate the evidence before making decisions.

Christ knew He would have to make a convincing case to uphold His claims and He did. Throughout His ministry, Christ presented compelling reasons and evidence to uphold His claim to be the divine Son of God. Jesus' apologetics included the testimony of witnesses, miracles, the resurrection, prophecy, reason, the use of parables and more. The apologetic methods of Jesus serve as a model for every believer who desires to engage and impact an unbelieving world for Christ.

The Testimony of Witnesses

A man ill for thirty-eight years lay beside the Pool of Bethesda along with a multitude of crippled individuals. Suddenly an unknown stranger walks up and asks him a strange question. "Do you want to get well?" As the lame man begins to explain his situation, the stranger orders the man to "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk!" Immediately, strength enters his legs and he rises and walks, carrying his mat as the stranger orders. Soon afterwards the Pharisees arrive and an examination ensues.

What should have been a moment of rejoicing turns into a serious interrogation. The Jewish leaders in John 5 confront Jesus seeking an opportunity and reason to kill Him. Instead of praising God in the healing of the lame man, the focus of the Jewish leaders is on the apparent violation of their Jewish tradition by Jesus.

Jesus responded saying, "My Father is always at His work to this very day, and I, too, am working." (Jn. 5:17). The following verse states, "For this reason, the Jews tried all the harder to kill Him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God." (Jn. 5:18). In this chapter Jesus performed some remarkable feats and made some extraordinary claims. When questioned, Jesus gave an answer or an *apologia,* a defense of His work and character. In His answer, we see that He was the greatest apologist and that apologetics was a key component in the ministry of Jesus.

In the passage that follows, Jesus presents one of the clearest and strongest cases regarding His nature as the divine Son of God. New Testament scholar Leon Morris states, "Nowhere in the Gospels do we find our Lord making such a formal, systematic, orderly, regular statement of His own unity with the Father, His divine commission and authority, and the proofs of His Messiahship, as we find in this discourse."{1}

What was the apologetic method Jesus used in this instance? Jesus' apologetic involved the testimony of witnesses. According to Jewish law, a testimony is valid only if there were at least two witnesses who could testify to the truth of an individual's claims (Deut. 19:15). Jesus knew these men needed solid testimony to confirm His claims but also testimony that would convict them of their error regarding their understanding of His identity.

Jesus brings forth five witnesses that testify on His behalf;

John the Baptist (5:32-35), His works (5:36), the Father (5:37), the Old Testament Scriptures (5:39-40), and Moses (5:41-46). There were no more authoritative witnesses than these. In a brilliant presentation, Jesus makes His case. The testimony of witnesses was part of the apologetics of Jesus.

Apologetics in the Parables

It is a well-known fact that Jesus was a great storyteller. His stories captivated the audience and taught a valuable lesson. The term "good Samaritan" and "the prodigal Son," are recognized all over the world because of the unforgettable stories told by Jesus. One of the best ways to communicate truth is to illustrate it through stories which are also an effective way to penetrate into hardened hearts that would not be receptive to a direct gospel presentation. The parables of Christ are some of the most remarkable lessons ever taught. However, did you know that the parables of Christ were also powerful apologetic presentations of our Lord?

Through the use of these stories, Jesus makes a declaration and a defense of His ministry and claims. The images He selects are used in the Old Testament and later Jewish literature in reference to God. Jesus uses these images and applies them often to Himself. Philip Payne states, "Out of the fifty-two recorded narrative parables, twenty depict Him in imagery which in the Old Testament typically referred to God. The frequency with which this occurs indicates that Jesus regularly depicted Himself in images which were particularly appropriate for depicting God."{2}

By applying these images to Himself Jesus indicates his self-understanding as the divine Son of God and was communicating this truth to His audience. Payne identifies ten prominent images used in the parables in which images used in reference to God in the Old Testament Jesus applies to Himself.{3} Jesus' repeated use of such images indicates He wanted His audience to recognize His divinity and that He was carrying

out the very will of God in His ministry on earth.

Here are a few examples where Christ declares His divinity in the gospels. The image of the rock is used to describe God, especially in the Psalms (Ps. 19:14, 28:1, 42:9, 61:2, 62:2, 71:3, 78:35). In the parables of Jesus, He states that those who build their lives upon His teachings have built their lives upon "a rock" (Matt. 7:24-26 and Lk. 6:46-49). In Psalm 23 and Ezekiel 34, God is portrayed as a shepherd. In John 10 Jesus identifies Himself as the good shepherd. In another parable, Jesus uses the example of a bridegroom. In Isaiah 49, 54, Jeremiah 2, and Hosea, God is pictured as a bridegroom. In Mk. 2:19, Matt. 9:15, and Lk. 5:34-35, Jesus identifies Himself as the bridegroom. The parables were powerful stories Jesus used to communicate truth but they were also part of the apologetics of Jesus.

The Use of Reason

Jesus commanded us to "Love the Lord your God with all your . . . mind" (Mt. 22:37). Jesus exemplified what it meant to love God with "all your mind." He was the greatest thinker who ever set foot upon the earth. Philosopher Dallas Willard states,

> We need to understand that Jesus is a thinker, that this is not a dirty word but an essential work, and that his other attributes do not preclude thought, but only insure that he is certainly the greatest thinker of the human race: 'the most intelligent person who ever lived on earth.' He constantly uses the power of logical insight to enable people to come to the truth about themselves and about God from the inside of their own heart and mind.{4}

Jesus understood that we are created in the image of God. Our creator is a reasonable and rational being. We are thus endowed with the capacity for reason and rationality. In Isaiah 1:18, God invited Israel saying, "Come now let us

reason together." God wanted the people of Israel to use their ability to reason and consider the consequences of their behavior.

Jesus showed Himself to be a brilliant apologist who used the laws of logic to reveal truth, demolish arguments, and point out error. The communication of truth and discerning error requires the use of reason. Since our faith is a reasonable faith, reason was part of the apologetics of Jesus.

An example of the use of reason is found in Matthew 12:22-28. Here the Pharisees accuse Jesus of casting out demons by the power of the Devil. Through the use of reason, Jesus showed their accusation to be false. The argument He used is the argument known as *reductio ad absurdum* [Latin for "reduction to the absurd"]. This is an argument that demonstrates if the primary premise is supposed to be true, then it leads to a contradiction that is absurd. One would then inevitably have to conclude that the original premise is false.

Jesus responded stating that "Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined and every city or household divided against itself will not stand. If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand? And if I drive out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your people drive them out?" Jesus points to the illogical nature of their accusation and further points to the testimony of His miracles that confirm His authority being from God.

Apologetics of Miracles

Something had gone terribly wrong. The Messiah had arrived but the Kingdom, which would be characterized by liberty, freedom, and the just rule of God, had not arrived. Instead, John the Baptist found himself in prison awaiting execution. Confused and discouraged, John sent his disciples to Jesus to ask Him, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone

else?” (Lk. 7:20). Jesus responds by pointing to the testimony of His miracles: “Go back and report to John what you hear and see. The lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor.” (Lk. 7:22-23). When asked by John if He was indeed the Messiah, Jesus defends His claim by pointing to the testimony of His miracles. Miracles represent another component in the apologetics of Jesus.

A miracle is a special act of God that interrupts the normal course of events. Natural laws describe what occurs regularly by natural causes, but miracles describe what happens rarely, by supernatural causes. A miracle is an act of God designed to confirm the word of God through a messenger of God.{5}

Throughout the Old Testament, God used miracles to confirm His message and His messenger. Christ’s miracles demonstrated that what He claimed about Himself was true and that God’s confirming hand was on the message He preached. Jesus performed a vast array of miraculous signs that demonstrated His divine authority over every realm of creation.

When friendly as well as hostile audiences questioned Jesus, He defended His claims with the testimony of miracles (Mk. 2:1-12, Jn. 2, and 10:22-42). Many who witnessed Christ’s miracles made the connection. Nathaniel, witnessing the omniscience of Christ, responded exclaiming, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel.” (Jn. 1:49). Nicodemus in his evening visit meets Jesus saying, “Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.” (Jn. 3:2).

When Christ establishes His kingdom, all creation will be subject to Him. Sin, sickness, death, and disease will be overcome and the subjects of the kingdom will never be in want. The miracles of Christ reflect His divine character and demonstrate the King of the Kingdom has arrived.

Apologetics was an essential component of Christ's ministry and should be an important part of any ministry looking to engage this lost world for Christ. The Bible commands us to defend our faith, and Christ set the supreme example for us to follow.

To learn more about the apologetics of Jesus and gain valuable practical lessons from His examples, check out the online store at Probe.org and purchase a copy of the in depth book, *The Apologetics of Jesus* written by Norman Geisler and myself.

Notes

1. Leon Morris, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1971), 311.
2. Philip Payne, "Interpreting Jesus' Parables," (Ph.D. diss., Cambridge University, 1980), 263.
3. Ibid., 313-17.
4. Dallas Willard, "Jesus the Logician," *Christian Scholars Review* (Summer 1999): 610.
5. Norman Geisler and Frank Turek, *I Don't Have Enough Faith To Be An Atheist* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2004), 201-2.

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"Why Did Jesus Seem to Want Parables To Obscure His Message?"

In Matt 13:10 the disciples ask Jesus why he spoke to the people in parables. It seemed that His answer was Him not

wanting them to understand and in doing so being saved. If God desires for everyone to be saved and gave His most valuable treasure (His Son), why did He not reveal His Word to all so that they would come and be healed and saved?

Great question! God does indeed want all men to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9). In Matt. 13:10-17 Jesus is referring to God's judgment on willful unbelief. The religious leaders had just accused Jesus of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons (Matt. 12:24). People were willfully rejecting God's revelation in the person, teachings, and deeds of Jesus. Notice that Jesus says that in them Isaiah's prophecy is fulfilled (Matt. 13:14). Notice, further, what this prophecy says in Matt. 13:15. They have willfully "closed their eyes" lest they should see, understand, repent and be forgiven.

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Hope this helps. Shalom in Christ, Michael Gleghorn

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