Chapters 13 - 17

FOREWORD BY DENINIS SWANBERG

I ONCE WAS BUTNOVI SQUINT

HOW PERSPECTIVE
AFFECTS
OUR BEHAVIOR

KENT CROCKETT



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Forming Your Perspective

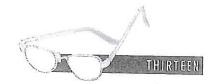
Perspective: a specific point of view in understanding people, things, or events

If you could win an Olympic medal, which would you prefer—the silver or the bronze?

A study of Olympic medal winners produced some unexpected results. Most people would assume the silver medal winners would be happier than the bronze medalists since they received a higher honor, but that wasn't the case. The bronze medalists, who came in third place, were found to be happier than the silver medalists, who finished in second place.

The former Olympians explained how they felt about their medals. The third-place winners were thrilled just to have won a medal. The silver medalists, on the other hand, felt like losers because they didn't come in first place. ¹

Don't read any further until you grasp this astounding truth: What happens to you is not nearly as important as how you perceive what happens to you.



Worry Glasses: The Movies in Your Mind

I've suffered a great many catastrophes in my life. Most of them never happened.

~Mark Twain

ARCH 1994. Three men, copying a movie they had just seen, shot and killed a retail clerk and then robbed a store. Within hours the group struck again, robbing a florist and a pizzeria. Detective Doug Hummel of the Oakland County, California, Sheriff's Department explained, "All of them had apparently watched the film (Menace II Society) several times and were acting out parts of it."

March 1995. Fifteen-year-old Jason Lewis carried his father's shotgun into the living room of his family's mobile home, where he brutally murdered his unsuspecting parents. He had just seen the movie *Natural Born Killers* and was acting out what he had seen on the screen.²

June 1998. A woman on a cruise ship off Sweden climbed out on the bow and spread her arms, imitating Rose's famous scene in the movie *Titanic*. Her next action, however, did not go according to script. She lost her footing, then fell into the ocean and drowned. Nearly two dozen copycat incidences of people reenacting this movie scene on ships' bows caused the Passenger Vessel Association to issue a "Titanic alert" to its cruise operators.³

When was the last time you watched a movie? I don't mean in that cinema at the mall. I'm talking about the movies in your mind. Satan has produced a wide variety of films that he wants you to view.

A seat has been reserved for you. The popcorn is ready. The lights have been turned down, and the show is about to begin. Admission is free. All Satan requires is that you believe what you see.

He projects his films onto the movie screen of your mind, trying to convince you that what you see is real. Although the movies in your mind are imaginary, worry glasses make every scene appear in 3-D as though it were actually happening. The devil wants you to react to what you see, just as the people acted out what they saw in the movie theaters. By making deception appear as reality, he can manipulate your behavior.

Acting on Belief

Several years ago someone called a package delivery driver's wife in Kansas while her husband was on the road. A man in a professional-sounding voice said, "Mrs. Jones, this is Dr. Johnson. I'm sorry to inform you that your husband is in the hospital with a life-threatening, unknown disease and may die. We need a hair sample from you immediately because we believe you may have also contracted this disease."

The terrible news jolted the poor woman. The man instructed her to get a pair of scissors and cut off all her hair at the roots so the hospital could run some lab tests. She obediently did as she was ordered, cutting off her hair.

After completing the caller's instructions, she asked what to do next.

Satan wants our perception to be based upon deception.

forting the many

The man replied, "The next thing you need to do is wait for your husband to come home. I made up this entire story." The prankster then hung up.

Satan wants our *perception* to be based upon *deception*. This woman acted on what she believed to be true. We act, not necessarily upon what is true but on what we *believe* to be true. Satan also knows this, so he creates an unreal world through our imaginations. He knows that if he can get us to believe his lies, we'll react as though they were true.

That's why he projects his disaster movies onto the screens of our minds. As we watch these imaginary horror flicks, we experience agony and despair as we view every catastrophe imaginable. We see plane crashes . . . car wrecks . . . incurable diseases . . . and financial crises. Although none of the events have occurred, we writhe in anguish as we watch each terrifying scene. Our frantic imaginations manipulate our emotions like a puppet on a string.

A lady had pain in her hand, so she looked up "arthritis" in her medical book. After reading a couple of pages, she knew she had arthritis in every joint in her body. She read a few pages about ulcers. "Now I know what's causing the pain in my stomach," she muttered. As she continued to read, she realized she had nearly every disease in the book. She made an

appointment to see the doctor. After doing an examination, the doctor scribbled a prescription and handed it to her. The lady opened the note and read, "Stop reading medical books."

When we nurture fearful thoughts, we can convince ourselves that the imaginations are real. Deception fights against reality for control of our minds. Imaginations are Satan's decoys to trick us into fighting the wrong battles.

During World War II, Americans made hundreds of inflatable tanks and airplanes, the same size and shape as armored tanks and aircraft. Although the decoys would not fool anyone if seen up close, they looked authentic when viewed from a distance. The U.S. Army used the phony tanks to trick the Nazis into believing American troops were entrenched in a certain location. The plan worked. The German forces attacked the dummy tanks and planes instead of the real ones.

When we watch Satan's horror movies, we exhaust ourselves fighting decoys. And we fail to notice the demon laughing behind the movie projector.

Take Off Your Glasses

Want to quit worrying? Here are three ways to conquer your fearful outlook on life.

1. Pray instead of worry.

A husband asked his wife why she was always worrying. "You know it doesn't do any good," he said.

"Oh yes, it does," she replied. "Over 90 percent of the things I worry about never happen."

Most of the things we worry about will never occur. The other concerns either won't be as bad as we think, or God will give us the grace to endure them.

The Lord gave us the weapon of prayer to combat worry. God designed prayer to be a courier service to deliver our problems into His hands. "Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done." (Phil. 4:6, NLT). If we still worry after we've finished praying, we never actu-

God designed prayer to be a courier service to deliver our problems into His hands.

ally prayed in the first place. It was just a religious ritual.

Prayer worriers don't trust because they worry. They don't believe God can help them in their time of need. Although they may mumble prayers with their lips, they never trust God to take care of their problems.

Prayer warriors don't worry because they trust. They come boldly before the throne of grace to find help in time of need. Their faith in God overrules their worry.

Are you a worrier or a warrior?

Worrying can be more stressful on us than actually going through what we fear. My son Scott transferred from a small private school to a large middle school in seventh grade. He had to make numerous adjustments and hated every one of them. He constantly complained about having to attend the new school.

I prayed with him every night and gave him some fatherly advice. "Scott, don't worry about it. It's not as bad as you think."

He responded, "Dad, it's not that easy. It's hard not to worry."

By November I noticed he hadn't said anything about disliking the new school. "Scott," I asked, "You seem more relaxed than you were a month ago. Are you still having problems adjusting to school?" He answered, "Yes, but I quit worrying about it. I found out that worrying was harder on me than actually going through it."

Many people never learn that it's usually more draining to worry than it is to experience the thing they dread. Prayer can remove the weight of worry.

2. Cast down fearful imaginations.

If a horror movie begins to roll on the screen of your mind, take immediate action by "casting down" the imagination. Paul wrote about the importance of "casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God" (2 Cor. 10:5, KJV).

Stop this imaginative film by commanding the thoughts to leave in Jesus' name. The Lord has given His children authority over all of Satan's power. "Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing will injure you. Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven" (Luke 10:19, 20).

Taking authority over demonic imaginations is crucial in making those thoughts leave. If you don't forcefully take a stand, the movies in your mind will continue to torment you. "Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (James 4:7). Satan must leave when you take a stand to oppose him. If you will resist the devil, he will vacate the premises and take his movie projector with him.

3. Saturate your mind with God's thoughts.

Second Corinthians 10:5 continues, "[Bring] into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (KJV). After we cast

down the imagination, godly thoughts won't automatically rush into our minds. We must go after and capture them.

Uprooting weeds isn't enough. We have to plant grass in the soil where the weeds used to live. If we don't replant the barren area, it won't be long before the weeds grow back.

Casting down imaginations without taking every thought captive invites worry to return. If we occupy our minds with uplifting thoughts, the weeds won't have any room to grow. We can occupy our minds by purposely and continually thinking godly thoughts.

In the middle of a wedding ceremony, a jewelry store manager exchanged rings with his soon-to-be spouse. As he slipped the ring onto his bride's finger, he said, "With this ring—we guarantee a full refund if the customer is not completely satisfied."

His sales pitch was so deeply ingrained in his mind that the words came out automatically.

What's ingrained in your mind? You can saturate your mind with godly thoughts by meditating on Scriptures, reading Christian literature, praying, and praising. "Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things" (Phil. 4:8).

4. Trust God.

Worry never trusts. Trust never worries.

Make a conscious decision to go against your own speculations and trust God's Word. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding" (Prov. 3:5).

Scuba divers can get disoriented when they're deep underwater because of the way light is diffused through water. They feel weightless, which makes it easy to lose their sense of direction. When divers don't know which way is up, they remember their training, which has taught them to disregard their own sense of direction and follow their air bubbles. If the air bubbles appear to be going sideways, the diver must override his own logic and trust the bubbles. Air bubbles always go up—they're right every time.

Worry tells you the worst is going to happen. This confuses your spiritual guidance system, which makes you panic. Many people are misled by worry because they abandon the Lord's guidance during times of crisis.

God's Word will direct your steps, just as air bubbles guide scuba divers. To follow the Lord's leading you must disregard your own sense of direction. Trusting in the Lord will displace worry, destroy imaginations, and calm your fears.

Take off your glasses. Sure is nice not being tormented, isn't it?



Discouragement Glasses: At the End of Your Rope

Life is full of obstacle illusions.

~GRANT FRAZIER

O YOU LIVE where never is heard an encouraging word, and the skies are cloudy all day? And no one appreciates you, right?

I hear you. I've thought about checking out of my own responsibilities a few hundred times myself. Throughout the years I've watched dozens of people quit. They go into a tail-spin and never seem to recover. That's not the answer.

It's easy to slip on the *discouragement glasses* when everything goes wrong. When we look through these dark spectacles, we lose hope for tomorrow. We're ready to resign from the human race, thinking there's no reason to continue.

A tree is best measured when it's down. That's true with people too. Being down doesn't mean being done. Sometimes we must get to the end of our ropes to experience God in a new way. During the 1930s, 250 men were holding the ropes to a dirigible (an airship similar to a blimp) to keep it from floating away. Suddenly a gust of wind caught one end of the dirigible, lifting it high off the ground. Some of the men immediately

Being down doesn't mean being done.

let go of their ropes and fell safely to the ground. Others panicked, clinging firmly to the end of their ropes as the nose of the dirigible arose to greater heights. Several men who couldn't keep holding on fell and were seriously injured. One man, however, continued to dangle high in the air for forty-five minutes until he was rescued. Reporters later asked him how he was able to hold on to the rope for so long. "I didn't hold on to the rope," he replied. "I just tied it around my waist, and the rope held on to me."

David was once at the end of his rope and learned to let God hold him up. You do remember David, don't you? The sheep-tending, rock-slinging, giant-killing, wife-stealing, songwriting guy who penned the Twenty-third Psalm? He didn't spend *all* his time lying in green pastures beside still waters. Sometimes he had to walk through death valley and sit at a table in the presence of his enemies.

One day when David and his men returned to the city of Ziklag, they discovered that the Amalekites had burned the city down and had taken their wives and children captive. David fell to his knees, along with the six hundred men with him, and they wept until their strength was gone (see 1 Sam. 30:3–6).

Just when he thought things couldn't get any worse, David overheard the men whispering behind his back, "If we hadn't left our families to follow David, none of this would have happened. This is David's fault. Let's stone him and make him pay for the loss of our families."

Murphy's Law, not to be confused with Moses' Law, was in effect that day. David was fleeing from Saul. His family had been kidnapped. His own men were threatening to kill him. His house had been burned down. And he probably forgot to renew his fire insurance policy.

David was at the lowest point of his life. Discouragement had sapped all the strength out of his heart. He had reached the end of his rope. It would have been easy for him to give up.

When Lord Horatio Nelson was fighting the Battle of Copenhagen, his senior officer, Sir Hyde Parker, also known as "Old Vinegar," hoisted the flag signaling retreat. Nelson deliberately put his telescope to his blind eye and said, "I do not see it."

If he had surrendered when it looked like defeat, he would not have captured twelve Danish ships.

I don't see defeat. Do you?

When you're fighting the Battle of Perspective, Satan will hoist his flag, trying to discourage you. Remember to put a blind eye to the telescope. Refuse to see the retreat flag. Keep going forward.

David knew he couldn't keep going forward on his own energy. He had no friends to whisper encouraging words. His only hope was for God to have mercy on him.

Charles Spurgeon said, "Sometimes God sends His mercies in a black envelope." David opened the black envelope and read this message: "Once God has spoken; Twice I have heard this: That power belongs to God" (Ps. 62:11). He called out to a power higher than himself to strengthen him. Like the apostle Paul, he discovered that God's power is perfected in weakness (see 2 Cor. 12:9).

Maybe discouragement has drained the last ounce of energy out of your heart. You're at the end of your rope. Your fingers are slipping. Does the end of your rope mean the end of your hope? Nope.

The end of your rope is the beginning of hope! It's the place where you stop trusting in you and start trusting in God. Only after you have exhausted your own strength will you discover that God's mercy and grace are sufficient for you.



The end of your rope is the beginning of hope.



Take Off Your Glasses

The following anonymous poem gives wise counsel to those who are going through a difficult time:

When things go wrong, as they sometimes will. When the road you're trudging seems all uphill, When funds are low and debts are high And you want to smile, but you have to sigh, When care is pressing you down a bit— Rest if you must, but don't you quit.

Life is strange with its twists and turns, As everyone of us sometimes learns; And many a failure turns about, When he might have won had he stuck it out. Don't give up, though the pace seems slow; You may succeed with another blow.

Often the goal is nearer than It seems to a faint and faltering man; Often the struggler has given up When he might have captured the victor's cup; And he learned too late, when the night slipped down, How close he was to the golden crown.

Success is failure turned inside out
The silver tint in the clouds of doubt;
And you cannot tell how close you are,
It may be near when it seems afar.
So stick to the fight when you're hardest hit;
It's when things seem worst that you mustn't quit.

1. Look for the reward beyond the obstacle.

Henry Ford said, "Obstacles are those frightful things you see when you take your eyes off your goal." Don't let the obstruction in your path keep you from reaching your destination.

A king placed a huge boulder on a roadway. He hid and watched to see if anyone would remove the roadblock. Some saw the huge rock in the road and walked around it. Others blamed the king for not keeping the roads clear. No one made an attempt to move the boulder.

A little while later a peasant came along. He realized the obstruction presented a problem for everyone traveling on that road, so he decided to remove it. He pushed on the rock with all his might, but it wouldn't budge. As he continued to press against the boulder, it slowly began to roll. Finally he was able to move the obstacle off the road.

When he turned around, he noticed a bag lying where the boulder had been. Inside the purse he discovered gold coins and a note from the king. It read, "This reward goes to the one who moved the boulder off the path."

Obstacles are put in the way to see if we really want something or just thought we did. Obstacles are put in the way to see if you really want something or just thought you did.

Jackson J

Sometimes the reward isn't always apparent. A boulder is covering it up. We won't receive the prize until we've removed the obstruction and finished the task.

No difficulty you encounter is greater than the grace of God. "He gives a greater grace" (James 4:6). His grace is more powerful than any problem you will face.

2. Stay confident in the midst of uncertainty.

We must keep our composure during difficult times because confidence promises a great reward. "Do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised" (Heb. 10:35, 36). The demon of discouragement wants us to throw away our confidence so we will forfeit the reward.

I've never met a confident discouraged person. If we took a vote of confidence, the nays would have it. It's hard to endure trying times without being empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Several children in a park watched a man release heliumfilled balloons. The man let go of a white balloon, which floated up into the sky. Then he released yellow and red balloons, which also flew up and away. A little African-American boy asked, "Mister, if you let go of a black balloon, will it go up?"

The man replied, "Son, the color on the outside has nothing to do with it. It's what's on the inside that makes it go up."

When God's uplifting Spirit fills your heart, you'll confidently rise above the clouds of discouragement.

3. Keep knocking on closed doors.

Many of God's blessings are waiting behind doors that are yet to be knocked on. God wants us to be persistent. Keep asking. Keep seeking. Keep knocking. Jesus said, "Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you" (Matt. 7:7).

We'll never know which door has the treasure on the other side until we knock on the right one. It could be door number ninety-nine. The demon of discouragement tries to convince us that the door will never open and we might as well quit knocking on it.

Many of God's blessings are waiting behind doors that are yet to be knocked on.

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Late one afternoon when the office was about to close, a business manager finally allowed a life insurance salesman to see him. The manager told the salesman, "You should feel highly honored. Do you know that I have refused to see seven insurance men today?"

"I know," replied the agent. "I'm them."2

God loves to bless His children who keep knocking after everyone else has clocked out and gone home. Because most people are looking for shortcuts, persistence is the most overlooked means of receiving God's blessings. It's the long, hard way to receive good things from God, and most people aren't willing to take that route.

Scientists have proven the power of persistence through an experiment using an iron ball and a cork. A one-ton iron ball was suspended from the ceiling using a metal cable. A small cork hung by a thread next to the heavy ball. An electrical mechanism kept the cork gently bouncing against the iron weight.

After many days of constant pounding by the cork, the researchers noticed the iron ball starting to move ever so slightly. The cork continued to knock against it until the heavy ball swung widely back and forth on its own.

Although we might think that we aren't making progress, the door will open if we will keep knocking. Our persistent faith will be the difference in moving the mountains in our lives.

Persistence is the most overlooked means of receiving God's blessing.

4. Remember that God has the last word.

God may not have spoken the first word in the difficulty you're experiencing, but He does have the last word. The Lord is still on His throne—no matter how gloomy things may appear. You can still have hope, even when things don't go the way you think they should.

I don't understand why some things happen the way they do, but I do know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love Him (Rom. 8:28). Knowing that God is in ultimate control gives me encouragement to keep going when times get rough.

It kept David going, too. After he strengthened himself in the Lord, he rallied the troops together, conquered the Amalekites, and recovered everything they had taken. That would not have been possible if he hadn't first removed his discouragement glasses.

Take off your glasses and look outside. The sun is shining, the antelope are playing, and I don't hear any more discouraging words. Are you feeling better?

I hope you now understand that the end of your rope doesn't mean the end of your hope. It's the beginning of a new adventure with God.



Correcting Your Perspective

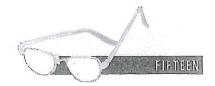
OR CENTURIES, people believed the sun revolved around the earth. They had proof—the sun rose in the east and set in the west. And it looked so small compared to our planet. Scientists balked when Nicolaus Copernicus suggested the earth revolved around the sun. It never occurred to them that they might be seeing with the wrong perspective.

Truth prevailed. People corrected their perspectives to line up with the facts.

Some people today actually believe the world revolves around them. They see themselves as the center of the universe and bristle when God's Word suggests otherwise.

How do you know when you're seeing with the right perspective?

You'll know when your life revolves around the Son.



Seeing as God Sees

The real voyage of discovery consists of not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes.

~MARCEL PROUST

OU ARE sitting in your living room watching a football game on television. The referee throws a penalty flag against your team. You yell, "Hey, ref! Are you blind? That wasn't a penalty!" You know he made an incorrect call because you watched the play from your point of view.

Then the camera shows a replay from a different angle. When you view the play from another vantage point, you discover that the referee actually did make the correct call. You were mistaken because you couldn't see the entire picture from your limited perspective.

To get the right perspective in life, we need to view our circumstances from heaven's point of view. If we look at our situation from God's perspective, we'll interpret what happens to us in a different light. "The Lord looks from heaven; He sees

all the sons of men; From His dwelling place He looks out on all the inhabitants of the earth" (Ps. 33:13, 14).

The Lord *looks* from heaven. God has perfect vision from His heavenly throne. The secret of a happy, fulfilling life is to view our existence through God's eyes.

When a person receives an eye transplant, the patient sees through someone else's eyes. The Lord wants to give us His eyes so we can see as He sees.

Here are four things we must see to have 20/20 spiritual vision:

1. See God in control.

Think how our perspective would change if we viewed every circumstance as God views it. We would look beyond the earthly realm and see Him in control. Faith is the ability to look past adverse circumstances and see God's hand at work.

Jesus had this perspective during His earthly life. He said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing" (John 5:19). Christ always saw His Father's hand at work. He knew His Father was in control, even when He stood on trial before Pontius Pilate. "Pilate said to Him . . . 'Do You not know that I have authority to release You, and I have authority to crucify You?' Jesus answered, 'You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above'" (John 19:10, 11).

From an earthly standpoint, it appeared as though Pilate was in charge. Christ, however, informed him that he had been granted power by a higher authority. He knew that Pilate couldn't do anything without the Father's approval.

Why would Christ appoint Judas Iscariot, the one who would betray him, to be His treasurer? Judas had a bad habit of stealing some of the offerings out of the money box (John 12:6).

Only a fool—or someone who completely trusted in God's sovereignty—would put a traitor in that position.

We don't see Jesus saying: "Father, I can't believe You had me choose Judas to be My disciple and treasurer! What were You thinking?"

Jesus always saw His Father in control and rested in that fact. We also need to see the Father's hand at work in our lives, even when things aren't going our way. We must view life from a higher perspective. We must submit ourselves to His lordship, and look for His hand to intervene in our situations.

Joseph viewed life from this higher perspective. When his brothers sold him into slavery, he didn't put on rejection glasses. When he was falsely accused by Potiphar's wife and unjustly thrown into prison, he refused to wear bitterness glasses. Instead, he trusted God when circumstances didn't make sense.

Years later God promoted him to being a ruler in Egypt. When Joseph was reunited with his brothers, he told them that he viewed their actions from God's perspective:

Do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life.... God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance.... It was not you who sent me here, but God (Gen. 45:5, 7, 8).

Trusting in the Lord's sovereignty simply means we believe God has the final word in all that happens. "The Lord has established His throne in the heavens, and His sovereignty rules over all" (Ps. 103:19).

Some people misunderstand God's sovereignty. They think it means that God causes all kinds of tragedies just to make people angry with Him. As Paul wrote, "This persuasion did not come from Him who calls you" (Gal. 5:8). God is for you, not against you (Rom. 8:31).

God's sovereignty means that He can overrule what others intend for evil and bring about a good result. Joseph told his brothers, "You meant evil against me, but God meant it Trust fills the gap when we don't understand.

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for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive" (Gen. 50:20).

The Lord doesn't always let us in on what He's doing. Trust fills the gap when we don't understand. We must give the Father the benefit of the doubt—that He will work all things together for good to those who love Him (Rom. 8:28).

2. View life from a victor's perspective.

When Arnold Palmer was playing in the West Penn junior finals as a high school student, he missed a short putt. He became so upset that he threw his putter over the gallery into a clump of trees. Arnold quickly forgot about the missed putt when he was awarded a trophy for winning the tournament. On the way home his father told him, "If you ever throw a club again, you'll never play in another golf tournament."

His father was disappointed in the way his son reacted when things didn't go his way. If Arnold had known he was going to win the tournament, he wouldn't have tossed the golf club because the putt didn't change the outcome.

Have you thrown any putters lately? If so, it might be because you can't see yourself winning. If you're a Christian, God has already determined that you will be victorious.

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, "For Your sake we are being put to death all day long; We were considered as sheep to be slaughtered." But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us (Rom. 8:35–37).

The Lord has already announced that His children overwhelmingly conquer. You are on the winning side! Do you view your life from the standpoint of victory?

At the height of World War II, the British army was entrenched in North Africa to defend the Suez Canal from the Nazis. Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, Germany's notorious "Desert Fox," started moving his troops across Libya. His forces rolled victoriously into Egypt.

British troops were demoralized because their armored tank force was decimated. They had retreated hundreds of miles and their backs were to the Suez, facing a seemingly invincible foe.

In August 1942 General Bernard Montgomery took field command to the battered British 8th Army in Egypt. Montgomery was an optimistic man and a brilliant field tactician. One day he and a subordinate climbed up on a desert dune to scout Rommel's camp. Montgomery said, "It's a sad thing that a professional soldier should reach the peak of his generalship and then suffer defeat."

The subordinate was alarmed that the usually optimistic general would sound so hopeless. "Don't be discouraged, sir. We may still win."

The general replied, "Of course we will win. I wasn't talking about my defeat. I'm talking about Rommel!"

Montgomery routed Rommel's forces and drove the Germans eastward, clear across North Africa. The Desert Fox from Germany never won another battle in the African desert.²

By faith you can foresee the outcome of your earthly struggles. God has already declared victory. Now you just need to view life as a winner. Do you see it?

3. Look at people as valuable.

Years ago the prime minister of France summoned a prominent doctor to perform surgery on him. The statesman told him, "I expect to be treated like royalty and not like the common person in the hospital."

"Don't worry," the surgeon replied. "All my patients are prime ministers in my eyes."

We need to view everyone as a prime minister. Most people don't see others like that. They look through *prejudiced glasses* and view some people as less valuable than others. They don't realize that everyone has equal value in God's eyes. "The rich and the poor have a common bond. The Lord is the maker of them all" (Prov. 22:2). The homeless man lying in the gutter is just as precious as the most admired movie star. Only by looking through God's eyes will we see everyone as priceless.

Jesus saw everyone through the eyes of love. "Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd" (Matt. 9:36, author's emphasis). He saw them with compassion because He created each individual and would die for each one as well.

Do you view others in this way? Every person, even the obnoxious one, is a person Christ spilled His blood for. That makes everyone valuable in His eyes.

A well-known speaker began his seminar by holding up a twenty dollar bill. He asked everyone at the conference, "Who would like this new twenty dollar bill?" Hands went up all over the room.

He said, "I'm going to give this twenty dollar bill to one of you, but first I need to crumple it." He wadded up the bill and asked, "Who still wants it?"

Hands were quickly raised. The speaker dropped the bill and ground it into the floor with his shoe. He picked up the crumpled, dirty bill.

"Now who wants it?" Everyone still lifted their hands.

"Friends, you've all learned a valuable lesson," the speaker concluded. "No matter what I did to the money, you still want it because its value hasn't changed. Even though the bill is crumpled and dirty, it's still worth twenty dollars." Although someone may have been misused and abused, he or she still has infinite worth. Every person is precious in His sight.

Do you see others—and yourself—as priceless?

4. View every day with an eternal perspective.

A doctor told his patient, "I have good news and bad news. The good news is that you have only one week to live."

"That's the good news? What's the bad news?"

"The bad news is that I was supposed to tell you last week, but I forgot."

If you found out that you had only a week to live, how would you view life? You need to view every day as if it were your last. You don't know when your life will end.

The length of our earthly life is merely a moment when compared to eternity. "You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away" (James 4:14). Visit a cemetery and read the dates engraved on the headstones. The deceased's days on earth were numbered and are now over. What did that person live for?

One day our names will be chiseled on headstones. How are we spending our allotted days on earth? We must keep an eternal perspective every day, mindful that we're quickly passing through this world. Life on earth is simply a dressing room for eternity. An eternal world awaits us after death.

We need to make every day count because our time on earth is running out. "Teach us



One day your name will be chiseled on a headstone.



to number our days, that we may present to You a heart of wisdom" (Ps. 90:12). Numbering our days means we're continually aware that life could end at any moment, and we want each day to have an eternal purpose.

A man started thinking about how much time he had left to live and how he could measure it. He calculated that the average person lives seventy-five years, which would include 3,900 Saturdays. Since he was fifty-five years old, he had already lived through nearly 2,900 Saturdays. If he lived twenty more years, he would have about a thousand Saturdays left.

He went to several toy stores and bought a thousand marbles, which he put inside a clear container. Every Saturday he took one marble out of the jar and threw it away. By watching the marbles decrease in the jar, he was reminded that time was running out and that he needed to focus on important things in life. Measuring how much time he had left helped him keep an eternal perspective.

When he turned seventy-five, he took the last marble out of the container and said, "I figure that if I make it until next Saturday, God has given me a little extra time on earth."

That man viewed his life in light of eternity. You can make every day count for eternity by living to please the Lord in all that you do.

Let me suggest a few eye-opening exercises to keep your perspective fresh:

Exercising Your Perspective

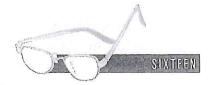
- Look down out of an airplane.
 A friend told me his perspective changes when he looks out an airplane window as it rises in the air after take-off. It makes him realize how little he is when viewed from a higher perspective.
- Take a mission trip to a third-world country.
 See how most of the world lives and it will open your eyes to how much you have.
- Drive through a poverty-stricken neighborhood.
 Picture yourself growing up in one of those houses.
 Think what it's like to view life from a poverty-level income.
- Minister to elderly people in rest homes.

 Take the time to talk with those who are at the end of their lives. What did they regret? Are they ready to face death? If they aren't ready to face God, talk to them about their relationship with the Lord. Teach a Bible study, sing, or pray with them.
- Sit in a hospital emergency waiting room.
 Comfort those people, and pray with the friends and family of loved ones.
- Take sandwiches to homeless people or volunteer at a rescue shelter.
 - Think what it would be like to change places with them. Imagine what it would be like to have no hope to ever have a good job or live in a nice house.
- Walk through a cemetery.

 Some of my most special moments are when I walk through cemeteries and read the headstones. It makes me realize that my body will be in that dirt one day. Think about the shortness of life, the length of eternity, and the meaning of life.

Read the obituary column.
 One day your picture will be in the column. What will be said about how you lived?

In the next chapter I'll show you another revolutionary exercise that will help you see as God sees.



Focusing on Blessings

It is only with the heart that one can see rightly.

~ANTOINE DE SAINT-EXUPERY

NE AFTERNOON my wife, Cindy, called me from the bank where she worked. "The diamond fell out of my wedding ring!" she sobbed. "It broke loose from the ring prongs, and I don't know where it is!"

My mind flashed back two decades, while as a poor seminary student surviving on peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and cheap buffets, I saved \$750 to purchase the most beautiful diamond ring in the world for my future wife. Diamond appraisers wouldn't describe it that way, of course. Less than half a karat. Small carbon flaw. However, the true worth of a diamond isn't determined by karats and clarity but by the love with which it's purchased.

This diamond had collected numerous memories as a traveling companion through our nineteen years of marriage. It was a tenant in our first apartment and visited the hospital when our children were born. It was a frequent passenger in

our \$300 car, which left a trail of black smoke signals wherever we drove. That jewel had been a silent witness as it journeyed with us through good times and bad.

The chances of finding it were slim to none. We had no earthly idea where it could be hiding. Cindy could have lost it in our house while getting ready for work, at the restaurant where she had gone for lunch, or somewhere in the bank.

Lord, I prayed, You know where Cindy lost her diamond. Please show me where it is.

Immediately I felt prompted to go to the bank parking lot to begin my search. When I arrived, the first place I looked was inside my wife's minivan. Nothing in there. When I turned around to scan the lot, I saw something glisten. Tiny rocks and small chunks of gravel covered the parking lot. As I drew closer to investigate, my heart leaped when I discovered Cindy's diamond lying in a crack in the pavement. I snatched up the diamond and ran into the bank lobby holding it high for everyone to see.

"Look—I found it!" I yelled.

Bank customers turned around to find out why I was causing such a commotion. Cindy looked up from behind her teller window, burst into tears, and came running through the lobby into my arms. As we hugged in the middle of the bank in front of the customers, we looked like the final scene of a romantic movie.

Although we hadn't noticed the diamond that morning, it became the center of our attention that evening. We called our friends and relatives to tell them how our lost diamond had been found and then went out to dinner to celebrate.

Our lost diamond incident bore an uncanny resemblance to the parable of the lost coin (see Luke 15:8, 9). The woman in the parable lost a silver coin, searched diligently, and found it. She was so excited that she called all her friends and neighbors to share her joy. After finding our lost jewel, Cindy and I had unwittingly followed the same script as the woman in the parable.

Had the value of the diamond changed? No.

What had changed? Our perception of its value.

I learned one of the great secrets of thankfulness through this adventure. The value of something isn't determined by how much it appreciates, but by how much it is appreciated. The value of something isn't determined by how much it appreciates, but by how much it is appreciated.

Maybe everybody needs to lose a diamond. That way the whole world could rediscover the gift of appreciation.

Blinded to Blessings

Imagine for a moment that you live in a beautiful mansion with a scenic view of the countryside. You own the finest furniture. Paintings by Monet hang in your hallway. Your yard is landscaped with exotic flowers and cascading waterfalls. Your dining room displays the finest china, and a Rolls Royce occupies your garage.

Add one more factor to your hypothetical world. You're blind. Although you possess all these material blessings, you can't see any of them. Your blindness greatly diminishes your ability to appreciate the things you own.

Cursed is the person who is surrounded by blessings but is unable to see them.

Bill Gates, the founder and chief executive officer of Microsoft, was the speaker at a convention in Seattle. Gates is one of the richest men in the United States, with personal wealth of \$35 billion. At the end of his speech, he allowed the audience to ask questions. One man asked, "Mr. Gates, if you were blind, would you trade all your money to have your sight restored?"

Bill Gates replied that he would indeed exchange all his money to regain eyesight. He put a \$35 billion price tag on his ability to see.

Cursed is the person who is surrounded by blessings, but is unable to see them.

Charles of

What price tag have you placed on your vision? Although you may have eyesight, you might not be able to see your blessings. It's easy to take good things for granted. The danger of familiarity is that you stop appreciating what you have.

Moses gave this warning:

When you have eaten and are satisfied, you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land which He has given you. Beware that you do not forget the Lord your God. . . . Otherwise, when you have eaten and are satisfied, and have built good houses and lived in them, and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and gold multiply, and all that you have multiplies, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (Deut. 8:10, 14).

A friend of mine lives on the coast of Florida a few miles from Kennedy Space Center. I told him, "It must be fun watching the space shuttle launches and going to the beach all the time."

"I never go to the beach," he replied. "I don't even go outside my house to watch the space shuttle launch."

"You're kidding me. Why?" I asked.

"I've seen them so many times it's no big deal."

When we see the same blessings every day, we eventually stop noticing them.

When we stop noticing, we quit appreciating.

When we quit appreciating, we stop thanking.

When we stop thanking, we start complaining.

At this point, we have forgotten the Lord our God, who provided all the things we enjoy (see 1 Tim. 6:17). We won't forget the Lord if we continually give thanks. How can we cultivate this attitude? By using reference points.

Reference Points

A man lived in a tiny hut with his wife, two small children, and his elderly parents. He tried to be patient with the crowded conditions, but the noise and congestion was more than he could take. In desperation, he consulted the village wise man.

The wise man asked, "Do you have a rooster?"

"Yes," he replied.

"Move your rooster into your hut, and come see me again next week." The man didn't understand, but the wise man had never given bad advice before.

The next week, he returned and told the wise man that his living conditions had grown worse. The rooster was always crowing and making a mess in the hut.

The wise man asked, "Do you have a cow?"

The man nodded reluctantly.

"Move your cow into your hut, and come see me next week."

Over the next several weeks, on the advice of the wise elder, the man also made room for a goat, two dogs, and his brother's children.

The man couldn't take it any longer. He went to the wise man in a fit of rage. "My situation is worse than ever. What do you expect me to do now?"

The wise man replied, "Go home and remove all the guests from your hut."

He hurried home and kicked out all the animals and relatives, leaving only his wife, children, and parents. Suddenly his perspective changed, and he was overjoyed to have such a spacious, quiet house.¹

give you a mental price tag to help you see the value of your blessings.

Reference points

- Investigate

The wise man made him

create a reference point for thankfulness. A reference point is a predicament that's worse than what we're currently experiencing. Any situation can look good if compared with a worse set of circumstances.

Reference points give us a mental price tag to help us see the value of our blessings. How much is a glass of water worth? It depends whether we're in a desert or a swimming pool. The value of an item is determined by how badly it's wanted.

Here are five common reference points that will increase your ability to appreciate.

Reference point #1: Theoretically trading places

Over 90 percent of the world's population would be thrilled to change places with you right now, no questions asked. Robert Orben says, "The next time you feel like complaining, just remember that your garbage disposal eats better than 30 percent of the world."

The starving people in India would love to trade places with you. They could sit at your dining room table filled with delicious food, and you could sit on the rat infested streets of Calcutta. How would you like that? Would you prefer to exchange living conditions with someone in the bitter cold of

Siberia? How about someone in the poverty stricken villages of Mexico?

Complaining about your car? Swap places with the millions of people around the world who would love to have your clunker right now, and you can ride a burrow to your next destination. Multitudes would love to have your clean water. Exchange your bottle of purified water for their water filled with parasites. Remember, God has His eye on the people in India, Siberia, and Mexico at the same time He's watching you.

You can become thankful by acknowledging how much you have compared to most of the rest of the world. God didn't bless you so that you would feel guilty for having good things. He just wants you to be grateful to Him and to help the less fortunate. That's not too much to ask, is it?

Reference point #2: Memories of doing without

I know a man who has always been thankful for his shoes. When I asked him why, he replied, "When I was a boy during the Depression, my parents couldn't afford to buy new shoes for me. I put cardboard in my shoe bottoms whenever they got holes. When I walked through rain and snow, I had to keep replacing the cardboard. I've always been thankful for shoes because I've never forgotten wearing those shoes with holes in the soles."

His reference point for thankfulness was his childhood memory of worn-out shoes. If we think of the times when we did without, we'll become more thankful for what we have. That's why God told the children of Israel to remember how He brought them out of the house of slavery (see Deut. 8:14). He wanted that experience to be a reference point in their minds.

Stirring up your memory of a time when you lacked will create a reference point for thanking God for everything you have.

Reference point #3: Losing blessings and recovering them

Sometimes we don't realize the value of our blessings until we lose them, like my wife's lost diamond. My father had to undergo radiation treatments for throat cancer. The therapy damaged his taste buds so that he couldn't taste food. His inability to enjoy a meal made eating a dreaded duty. The doctors told him that his taste might return after the treatments were finished, but no one could say for certain.

Weeks passed, then months. Every meal became a forced feeding to keep him alive. After eating flavorless food for over a year, he sat down for dinner one evening. Reluctantly, he forced the fork inside his mouth and discovered that his taste had returned. What most people would call a bland dinner became the best meal he had eaten in his life.

Through losing his taste and then regaining it, my father learned to relish each morsel as never before. He became thankful for the ability to taste because he now had a reference point. He would never forget what it was like to eat tasteless food.

You don't have to lose something in order to be thankful. You can develop a "taste" for your blessings by simply realizing what life would be like without them.

Reference point #4: Comparison with a worse situation

A woman in our church had a seriously ill son. The initial diagnosis revealed that he had either mononucleosis or cancer. The entire church prayed for a good report. After the tests revealed he didn't have cancer, his mother was ecstatic. Although having mononucleosis wouldn't normally be called good news, it's wonderful news when compared to a life-threatening problem.

The mother found a reference point by comparing a bad situation with a worse scenario. The more reference points we have in our mind, the greater our ability to focus on our blessings and thank God for them.

You might think you already have the worst-case scenario. No one could possibly have a situation worse than yours. Remember, perspective is always in the eye of the beholder.

Clarence was a very poor man with a large family. It took every penny he had to take care of his six children. Three of the children had worn out their shoes and needed new ones, but the family also needed a washing machine. He had to make a choice which to buy, so he decided to look for a used washer. He saw an ad in the paper with an address of someone selling a used washing machine.

He went to the house, which was located in a very nice neighborhood. With some resentment and envy in his heart, he rang the doorbell. He wondered why some people had so much and he had so little. A man and wife came to the door, and Clarence asked how much they wanted for their washer. The couple offered to sell it to him for a very low price. Clarence told him he appreciated it, because he had to choose between buying a washing machine or shoes for three of his children. Then he added, "You folks really have it good. I'll bet you've never had to worry about buying shoes."

Without saying a word, the woman teared up and left the room. Clarence gulped. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to say anything wrong."

The man explained, "That's OK. The problem is we only have one child, a little girl, and she's never walked a step in her life. She's confined to a wheelchair. She's never been able to wear out a pair of shoes."

Clarence went home that day with an old washing machine, but with a new perspective. He asked God to forgive

him of his envy and thanked God for those three pairs of worn-out shoes—and his children's ability to wear them out.²

Reference point #5: Experiences that haven't happened to us

Dale Carnegie once went through a prolonged period of depression. To pull out of his despair, he wrote a list of everything important to him. He then imagined what life would be like without his blessings. He listed a number of hypothetical tragedies:

- · My children are in jail.
- · My wife has left me.
- · I'm flat broke.
- · My health is ruined.

After completing his list, Carnegie drew a line through each misfortune that wasn't true. He crossed off the entire list. His reference points for thankfulness were all those bad experiences that never came to pass. His depression soon lifted.³

What calamities have you escaped? Thank God for the bad things that *haven't* happened to you.

Thanks, but No Thanks

Have you ever heard of counterfeit thankfulness? It's saying thankful words but from an ungrateful heart. I call it "Thanks, but no thanks." Jesus rebuked the Pharisees by saying, "This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me" (Matt. 15:8).

We can easily deceive ourselves into thinking that we have a thankful heart simply because we say grateful words. Phony thankfulness gives lip service out of obligation or courtesy. If someone opens the door, we may say thank you, but we aren't really thankful. We're just being polite. We might automatically say thank you when we receive a gift out of habit, or because we have good manners.

To combat counterfeit thankfulness, Paul wrote, "Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you . . . singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God" (Col. 3:16). True thankfulness resides only inside an appreciative heart.

Thankfulness is a powerful tool for correcting perspective. It has incredible authority, with the ability to drive discontentment, pessimism, worry, and discouragement out of our hearts. Once those glasses are removed, our perspective will *greatly* improve.

I believe many people become depressed because they fail to give thanks on a daily basis. They focus on dark clouds and never see the silver linings. Rather than being grateful for all things, they don't try to find even one thing to be thankful for.

Novelist A. J. Cronin tells of a physician friend who often prescribed a "thank you" cure for depressed patients. For a period of six weeks, the patients had to say "thank you" for everything they received and to record each incident. The doctor said he had a remarkable cure rate because his depressed patients simply learned to look for something good and give thanks for it.4

Many depressed people can actually thank their way out of

depression. Not a token "thank you" every now and then, but a radical change in perspective that's constantly on the lookout for God's blessings and giving thanks with a grateful heart. Try it and you'll see. Continual thankfulness will open your eyes to a world full of blessings and will drive depression away.

Many depressed people can actually thank their way out of depression.

Cultivating a Thankful Heart

Three aspects are necessary for cultivating a thankful heart. We need to be immediately, continually, and unconditionally thankful.

1. Immediately Thankful

God wants us to start thanking Him the moment He blesses us. When Jesus healed the leper, the first thing He ordered the healed man to do was show himself to the priest and make an offering (see Luke 5:14). Jesus wanted him to express his thankfulness by promptly presenting a gift. If we don't learn to respond quickly with an act of gratitude, we'll probably forget to thank God.

Thanksgiving is "thanks" with "giving." "He who offers a sacrifice of thanksgiving honors Me" (Ps. 50:23). Express your thankfulness sacrificially—either through words, gifts, or actions. True gratefulness always finds a way to express appreciation to God in a tangible way.

2. Continually Thankful

Ephesians 5:20 says, "Always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God." Thankfulness is not only an attitude; it's also a discipline. "Always giving thanks" means to be *continually* thankful throughout each day. God has given us far more blessings than we've ever thanked Him for. Don't just give thanks a couple of times a day but several times every hour.

The moment you wake up in the morning, thank God for another day of life. Thank Him for saving you forever. Give thanks as you brush your teeth, remembering that many people in the world don't have toothpaste. While you drive your car, thank Him for your transportation. Throughout the day,

notice all the blessings you have, and give thanks. By the end of the day, you should have thanked God at least fifty times.

Little Jenny sat down to eat dinner with her family. She looked at the leftovers and said, "Hey, wait a minute. We thanked God for this *last* night!" God has given us far more blessings than we've ever

thanked Him for.

Just because we've thanked God once for something doesn't mean we can't thank Him again. God loves to hear His children expressing gratitude from thankful hearts. I've thanked God hundreds, perhaps thousands, of times for the same blessings.

Rather than giving thanks one time for a meal before you eat, why not try thanking Him throughout the entire meal as you eat it? Be sure to thank Him immediately, but also thank Him continually.

3. Unconditionally Thankful

God's will begins with a grateful heart. "In everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (1 Thess. 5:18). Why does God say to give thanks in everything? Maybe it's because He wants His children always to have thankful hearts regardless of circumstances.

If you think your conditions must improve before you can thank God, just remember that Jonah thanked God from inside a whale! (Jon. 2:9). "Always giving thanks for all things" means we should be unconditionally thankful at all times. Although God knows bad things happen to everyone, He wants us to maintain a grateful heart during difficult times. An unconditionally thankful heart is crucial to keeping a healthy perspective.

Most people have a short list of things they're thankful for and an extremely long complaint list. Both good and bad are intermingled in every circumstance. Unconditional thankfulness is developed by deliberately focusing on the best in any given situation.

Prices Just Went Up

Has it ever occurred to you that the things you now have were once things you were trying to get? Yet you soon forgot how badly you wanted them. It doesn't take long to start losing appreciation.

A friend of mine bought a brand-new \$125 ski bib for a nickel at a garage sale. At one time, the original owner wanted it badly enough to pay \$125. As time passed, the owner's appreciation for the item dwindled down to a mere five cents. Many people put garage sale prices on their blessings, ready to surrender them to the lowest bidder. Are you one of those people?

A magazine publisher asked a number of prominent people from all over the world what would make them happier. An architect said he wanted a garden and a greenhouse. A noted author said, "Give me perfect health, and I'll be happy." A well-known politician wished for a Vermont farm with apple orchard. However, one particu-

Has it ever occurred to you that the things you now have were once things you were trying to get?

lar man gave an especially insightful answer. He said, "I would like to be given an even greater ability to appreciate all that I now have."

You will gain a new appreciation for your blessings by simply raising the value of everything you own. God's blessings are worth a lot more than you realize. Just change the price tags to reflect their true worth.

Remove those garage sale stickers. Quadruple the prices. Start focusing on your blessings, and it won't be long before you discover a lost diamond—the jewel of appreciation.



Maintaining Your Perspective

Discipline is anything that causes what is believed in the heart to have demonstrable consequences in our daily life.

~ Eugene Peterson

I 'VE BEEN thinking about taking an aerobics class to get back into shape. Only one problem. The YMCA class starts at 5:30 a.m. I've thought long and hard about committing to an exercise program that starts so early in the morning. I've decided to take the plunge. I know that if I don't make a commitment, I won't follow through. I'm recording my experiences as I write this chapter.

WEEK 1: When we began the workout, I found myself awkwardly following the instructor's movements. She's a petite young lady who can twist her body into various pretzel positions.

"One, two, three, four, and again. . . . Now take your leg and put it way up here, grab your other leg, and . . ."

At the end of the workout, we had a cooldown routine. We laid on our sides, stretching for a few moments, which was my favorite exercise of the day. I came home feeling nauseated. Getting into shape is going to be harder than I realized, but I'm determined to go through with it.

WEEK 2: It's only the second week, and the instructor has already added some new exercises. Just when I was getting the old routines down, she's making us do more funny movements. It's somewhat embarrassing as I watch myself in the mirror, stumbling a movement or two behind everyone else. I don't feel quite as nauseated as I did last week. I've lost a couple of pounds.

WEEK 3: It wasn't quite as hard to get out of bed today as it was on the first day. My instructor changed the exercises again. I think she's trying to find every unused muscle in my body so that she can make them sore. I wonder if she realizes that I'm writing about her. I've now lost four pounds. I'm realizing that toning my body is a gradual process, not something that happens overnight.

Over a year has passed since I took that class and wrote the above words. We moved to another state, but I've lost fifteen pounds by jogging, lifting weights, and modifying my diet. I changed my body by consistently following through with my decision.

Reshaping your perspective demands the same discipline as reshaping your body. Your outlook won't change overnight. It may take weeks or even months to correct the perception problem. A healthy perspective can be maintained only by renewing your mind daily. Unhealthy thoughts must go. Godly thoughts must take their place.

Every morning when you climb out of bed you choose how to view your world. Discipline yourself at the beginning of each day to look upward. Thank God throughout the day for everything you have. See God in ultimate control of everything that happens. When Satan makes a move, watch for God's countermoves. Seeing life from God's perspective requires a continual revision of your outlook.

Reshaping your perspective demands the same discipline as reshaping your body.

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View every day as a special occasion. Savor each moment.

Seek to find the best in every circumstance. Realize that your time on earth is a privilege, not a right. And don't forget to take inventory.

Taking Inventory

Author David McLennon worked at his first job in a small-town general store when he was thirteen years old. This was back in the days before malls and supermarket chains. He would sweep the floor, bag items for customers, and stock shelves. One Saturday he heard the store owner say to one of the clerks, "It's that time of the year again—time to take inventory."

McLennon said that he had never heard the word "inventory" before and didn't know what it meant. He asked the owner, "Sir, what's an inventory?"

The owner explained, "It's a time when you make a list of everything you have. You count every item in the store from groceries on the shelves to wrapping paper and string."

"Why do you take inventory?"

"Well, it's easy to forget exactly how much we have," the owner replied. "So every now and then we have to take an inventory just to see everything that we have."

How often do you take inventory? Are you aware of the many blessings you now possess?

Your "Awarehouse"

Try this exercise: Each time your hand touches an object in your house, think what it would be like to be *without* it, and then thank God for it. You'll be stunned by what you discover—just in your own bathroom.

Doorknob. Light switch. Shower curtain. Shower knob. Water. Soap. Shampoo. Conditioner. Towel. Towel bar. Razor. Shaving cream. Toilet. Toilet paper. Makeup (include all items). Toothbrush. Toothpaste. Deodorant. Floss. Mouthwash. Hairbrush. Hair spray.

Do you realize that if you were born in a Third World country, you might not own any of these things? If you can't thank God for an item, perhaps you don't need it. Give it to someone who can use it.

Taking inventory requires you to search and find every blessing in your life and give thanks to God. Perhaps this is what Paul meant when he said, "Always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father" (Eph. 5:20). Each blessing you take notice of counts as one item in your "awarehouse." Perspective is maintained by becoming aware of each good thing you have.

Listed below are some commonly ignored blessings that I thank God for daily. Although not everything in my inventory may apply to you, you can create your own list. Do *not* write down your blessings on paper, because reading your list to God every day could quickly become impersonal. The privilege of thanking God might turn into a legalistic job instead of a liberating joy. Your awarehouse items must be found through seeing them with your heart.

 Salvation. If Jesus has saved you for all eternity, how can you not thank Him every day? I thank Him for dying for my sins, giving me eternal life, and changing my

- 117/7/
- destiny. This is usually the first thing I thank Him for each morning.
- Another day of life. Thank Him for the privilege of living another day on earth. Ask Him to show you how to make today count for eternity. This is the first day of the rest of your life. It could also be the last day of the rest of your life.
- Family. If you're married, thank Him for your spouse.
 Thank Him for your children, and pray for God to bless your family. If you're single, thank Him for the freedom of your singleness. Thank Him for your parents.
- Friends. If you don't have any friends, whose fault is that? Go out and make some.
- Health. If you're sick, ask the Lord to heal you. If you're healthy, have you ever thanked God that all the organs in your body are functioning properly?
- The roof over your head. Count yourselves blessed to have shelter. What if you had to live outside in the cold or rain, like many people in other countries?
- Air-conditioning and heating. Turn a dial and the room temperature changes to make you comfortable. Many people in the world perspire all night long in bed because they don't have cooling. Have you ever thanked God for these comforts?
- Hot and cold running water. People in Third World countries don't have plumbing in their homes, much less heated water for showers and baths. Do you thank God every time you take a shower or bath? I do.
- Toilets. What an incredible privilege to have indoor toilets! Until recently, most of the people since the creation of the earth never had this blessing. On cold, wintry evenings they had to go outside to an outhouse. Remember this the next time you go to the bathroom in the middle of the night. And thank God for your toilet.

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- Clean water. Many people in the world drink dirty, contaminated water, filled with parasites and other organisms. Do you thank God for clean water?
- Closets filled with clothes. While much of the world yearns for clothing to keep warm, you have more than you need and choose clothes based upon the latest fashion. No need to feel guilty, but you have an incredible need to thank God and share with others.
- Electricity. Never take this luxury for granted. You usually don't have to bother with lighting lanterns and candles. This power source operates all your modern conveniences. Do you continually thank God for this blessing? I do.
- Medicine. Thank God for the medical remedies to keep you in good health, rather than complaining about their cost. At least medicine is available to you.
- Refrigerators, ovens, stoves, Crock-Pots, microwaves. You have the most modern ways to preserve and prepare your food. You don't have to chop wood every day so you can cook over an open fire. Thank the Lord for these things.
- Fresh and prepared foods. When you go to the grocery store, you can select from nearly every kind of food imaginable. You don't have to grow your own groceries. Where you live probably doesn't grow bananas, pineapples, or mangoes. These fruits are brought to you from great distances away and from foreign countries for your convenience. Thank the Lord for fresh fruit, vegetables, fish, beef, and even live lobsters. Go to the frozen food section and choose food that's already prepared for you. You have more blessings at your fingertips than most kings had who have lived throughout the history of the world. I think about this

- every time that I'm in a grocery store and thank God for His provision.
- Restaurants. What kind of food would you like to eat? Chinese, Mexican, Italian, or American? Fast food or romantic dinner? Just take your pick where you want to eat. Do you appreciate this blessing, or do you complain about the slow service?
- Cars. Most people in the world don't have their own automobiles. As you travel in your car every day, thank Him for that luxury. Thank Him for the availability of gasoline no matter what the price per gallon is.
- Music. Do you thank God for music? For Christian music? As you travel in your car, you have the finest musicians in the world playing on your radio, tape, or compact disc player. If you don't like a particular song, press a button and you can hear a different one. Have you thanked God for this luxury?
- Bibles and Christian books. You probably own several copies of God's Word. I hope you read them. And today, there are more Christian books than ever—bringing you information from godly teachers to help you in every area of your Christian walk.
- Churches. Thank God for the Body of Christ. If you aren't being spiritually fed in your current church, find one that preaches the Bible and get involved there.
 Thank Him for the privilege of serving in His body.
- Your job. God gives you the power to get wealth (see Deut. 8:18). He's the one who provided your job, so thank Him for it rather than complaining about your work conditions.

If you will thank God for each item in your awarehouse every day, I promise you that your perspective will improve

significantly. You'll learn to see blessings, even in your darkest hour.

On August 14, 2003, the power grid in the Northeast failed, causing the largest blackout in United States history. Suddenly, fifty million residents from New York to Michigan found themselves without electricity for the afternoon and evening. Elevators stopped. Traffic lights went out. Planes were grounded. Tens of thousands of people jammed the streets of New York City, all desperately trying to walk home before the night fell. Many New Yorkers slept on the streets that night.

The next morning with the electricity still off, a television reporter interviewed several people on a New York City street. The reporter rushed over to a lady who wore a big smile on her face and said, "You are the only one smiling around here. Why?"

The woman said, "I'm thankful for the little things—like toilet paper and water."

The reporter, grasping the insight of the comment, replied, "Hmm, it's perspective, isn't it?"

Yes, it is. It's all about perspective.

And now you know the secret about how to change your perspective. All that's left is to put what you've learned into practice each day.

I pray you'll do it.



Study Guide

CHAPTER 1 In the Eye of the Beholder

Read the story about one woman's reaction to Pastor Ed Manning. Ask the members in your study group to share a time when they wrongly perceived a situation.

Discuss how mismatched perspectives can create problems in relationships. (Examples: husband/wife, parent/child, boss/employee.)

Why does Satan try to distort our perspectives?

Read the story about the three people wearing pink, yellow, and blue sunglasses viewing the white paper. Discuss how different perspectives can cause disagreement.

Discuss three ways that our perspective affects us.

We can see faults in others but are blind to our own. If *you* were married to *you*, what attitudes in your spouse would upset you?

If everyone in the world all had identical perspectives, why would we still have conflict? Read Proverbs 16:2. Discuss how God sees us differently than we see ourselves.

CHAPTER 2 The Heart of the Problem

Read Matthew 15:9. What are some of the attitudes and actions that come from our hearts? How do these attitudes mold a person's perspective?

Read the "Candid Camera" story. If you were copying your friend's video, what comments would be recorded on the tape? How does this relate to Luke 12:3?

Why does Proverbs 4:23 tell us to guard our hearts?

Discuss how our eyes and heart work together to form perspective (Matt. 5:28).

Why does God want to put a new heart and spirit within us? (Ezek. 36:26, 27)

When you accept Christ into your life, He calls you out of darkness into light (1 Pet. 2:9). Why do people squint when they leave a dark room and enter a bright room? How does this apply to perspective?

Read Mark 8:23–25. Why do you suppose Jesus performed this healing in stages?

CHAPTER 3 Discontentment Glasses

Discuss the story about Phil wanting to change jobs. What can we learn from his experience?

Discontentment creates an imaginary world. Why do we tend to see others as living in a problem-free world?

Jonah ran away from his divine assignment. Why does discontentment compel us to run from God's will?

Read Philippians 4:11, 12. What are the two "schools" of learning and why do we need to learn from both?

Where is the only place we will find the greenest grass? (Ps. 23:1, 2) Why?

How do you think Paul learned to be happy in prison? What did he accomplish in prison that impacts our lives today?

What does it mean to "play the cards that have been dealt to you"?

CHAPTER 4 Pessimist Glasses

How is perspective like having a cameraman inside your heart?

Discuss the story of the hot dog salesman. How can a pessimistic attitude create a depressing world to live in?

Using the example of the dot on the piece of paper, explain how a closed-in viewpoint leaves God out of the picture.

Do you think that Karl Wallenda's negative focus contributed to his accident? How does pessimism affect our confidence?

How is complaining a sign of pessimism?

Read Philippians 4:8. List the different kinds of thoughts that should saturate our minds.

Kent exchanged his joy for \$7. Name some circumstances that can steal your joy.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:18. What is God's will for you in this verse?

How is Roy Parrino able to find treasure in a sewer? How does this principle apply to perspective?

CHAPTER 5 Rejection Glasses

Discuss this statement: "Rejection isn't what happens to us, but how we interpret what happens to us."

If you invite rejection into your heart, how will you feel?

Why didn't anyone greet the pastor's friend after the church service? Explain why some people cause their own rejection.

Discuss the story about the woman wearing the nice dress. Explain how her warped perspective turned a compliment into an insult.

Read Romans 14:3. Why is it important to accept God's acceptance of us?

Read Matthew 10:14. Why did Jesus tell His disciples to shake the dust off their feet?

Read Romans 12:18. Why should you attempt to make peace with those who reject you? Explain how George Sullivan's attempt to make peace with his father changed his life.

CHAPTER 6 Envy Glasses

Envy compares positions, possessions, and property with others. Discuss the different kinds of envy (salary, mansion, talent).

What does it mean to "covet"?

Read Exodus 20:17. Referring to the story of Robbie's hamburger, discuss how Kent learned how *not* to covet in his head but how *to* covet in his heart.

What did the all-day workers do when the one-hour workers were paid the same amount? (Matt. 20:11). How are modern-day laborers guilty of the same thing?

Read James 4:1, 2. What was the source of their quarrels and conflicts? Why?

Discuss this statement: "Love your neighbor, not what your neighbor has."

How can seeing God as your provider help remove your envy glasses?

Explain what "being content with your wages" means and doesn't mean.

CHAPTER 7 Jealousy Glasses

Discuss some differences between envy and jealousy.

What is jealousy rooted in? How does mistrust create jealousy?

Discuss this statement: "You cannot make anyone love you." What is the lesson we can learn from the kitchen cupboard?

What can we learn about assuming from the Sam Pritchard story?

Read Matthew 22:37. How does jealousy violate the greatest commandment?

Read 1 Corinthians 13:4, 5. Discuss how God's love, agape, acts and reacts.

According to Psalm 84:11, what does God promise to those who walk uprightly?

CHAPTER 8 Inferiority Glasses

The word *hate* doesn't always mean to "cease loving." What does it mean in Luke 14:26?

According to author Leanne Payne, why is it dangerous to hate the soul that God loves?

Read Numbers 13:32, 33. Discuss this statement: "The way we see ourself determines how we believe others see us."

Define "self-image." How can a warped self-image be compared to the crazy house of mirrors at the carnival?

Read 2 Timothy 3:1, 2. What does it mean to be a "lover of self" in this passage? Distinguish between "self" as personhood and "selfishness" as an attitude.

Read Romans 9:20. What does this teach us about accepting ourselves as God's creation? How did King David view himself? (Ps. 139:14).

Why was the woman set free when Dr. Michaelson quoted Psalm 100:3?

What does it mean to love your neighbor as yourself? (Matt. 22:39).

CHAPTER 9 Wounded Glasses

Discuss the insight that Kent received when he placed his hand on the man's wounded shoulder.

Why are wounded people easily injured by innocent comments?

Discuss the story of the dog named "Spot." Why did Spot view the boy who wanted to play "fetch" with suspicion?

Discuss this statement: "A person with a toothache has a hard time loving others." Why?

What is a "victim mentality"?

Read John 5:1-9. Why did Jesus ask him, "Do you wish to get well?"

Read James 5:16. What does confession have to do with healing?

Discuss the story about Laura. Why wasn't twenty years enough time to heal her? What was the key to her being healed?

CHAPTER 10 Bitterness Glasses

What did Paul do when the snake bit him? (Acts 28:5). If you don't shake off the serpent, what will it continue to do?

What is the first stage in the bitterness process? What must you do during this stage?

Explain why you get angry. What does Ephesians 4:26 instruct you to do?

What is unforgivingness and what does it do to our hearts? Why don't we like to think of our unforgivingness as hate?

Define "bitterness."

Read Matthew 5:38, 39. Why does Jesus instruct us to not resist an evil person?

Why are bitter people filled with deadly poison?

Discuss how monkeys are captured. What can we learn from them about letting go?

What can we learn from Stephen about being an "instant forgiver"? (Acts 7:60).

Read Micah 6:8. How does forgiveness relate to mercy?

CHAPTER 11 Judgmental Glasses

What is the difference between judging and criticism?

What do the biblical terms "bless" and "curse" mean?

According to James 3:9–11, why is it wrong to bless the Creator and then curse His creation?

What have judgmental people lost?

When you drive down a highway, why do you notice the vehicles that look exactly like your own? How does this relate to people who judge others? (Rom. 2:1, 3).

Explain why the man with the dirty windshield blamed the station attendant.

Give some examples of people who make judgments based on incomplete information.

What two things are required to take the log out of our own eye? (Matt. 7:5).

As your perspective adjusts, what will also change? (Matt. 12:34).

As your compassion increases what will decrease?

CHAPTER 12 Lust Glasses

Discuss Peter Lord's statement: "Temptation is trying to fulfill a legitimate, God-given desire in an illegitimate way."

To break free from sexual addiction, what must a person become desperate for?

Read Matthew 22:37. How can you love God with your mind?

What is the only way to overcome lust? (Gal. 5:16). What is your only source of holiness?

Why do some people have more temptations than others?

Read Ephesians 4:27. What does it mean to not give the devil an opportunity?

Fasting means to go without food while praying. What does fasting do to your drives?

Discuss the story of the boy shopping for the cookie jar. How will an accountability partner help you?

CHAPTER 13 Worry Glasses

Read the three examples at the beginning of the chapter. What did they all do alike after watching the movies?

Read the story of the package delivery driver's wife. Discuss the statement: "You act, not necessarily upon what is true, but on what you *believe* to be true."

Why does Satan create an unreal world through your imaginations?

What is the difference between a prayer worrier and a prayer warrior?

What does it mean to "cast down" an imagination? (2 Cor. 5:10).

How do we "take every thought captive"? (2 Cor. 5:10).

What must scuba divers do when they think their air bubbles are going sideways? How does this relate to Proverbs 3:5?

CHAPTER 14 Discouragement Glasses

What did David do when he was at the lowest point in his life? (1 Sam. 30:4, 6). How can we tap into a power that is outside of ourselves?

What did the apostle Paul discover when he was weak? (2 Cor. 12:9).

What lessons can be learned from the story of the king who placed the boulder in the road?

Why does Hebrews 10:35, 36 tell us to not throw away our confidence?

What are many of God's blessings waiting behind? (Matt. 7:7).

What truth is demonstrated in the experiment of the iron ball and cork? How does this apply to faith?

What does it mean that "God has the last word"? (Rom. 8:28).

CHAPTER 15 Seeing as God Sees

Read John 19:10, 11. When Jesus stood before Pilate, how did they each view the situation differently?

Discuss how Joseph saw God in control in spite of his circumstances (Gen. 45:5–8).

What does God's "sovereignty" mean? (See Genesis 50:20).

Read Romans 8:35–37. What does it mean that we "overwhelmingly conquer"?

How was Jesus moved when He saw people? (Matt. 9:36).

What can we learn about value through the story of the crumpled \$20 bill?

Discuss the different points under "Exercising Your Perspective."

CHAPTER 16 Focusing on Blessings

What lesson did Kent and Cindy learn about thankfulness from their incident with the lost diamond?

Read Deuteronomy 8:10-14. What causes us to forget the Lord?

How did the wise man create a "reference point" for the man living in the tiny hut?

Discuss how "theoretically trading places" with people in other parts of the world can change our perspective.

Why was the man who put cardboard in his soles always thankful for his shoes? Why is it important to stir up a memory of a time when you lacked?

What was Kent's father's new reference point after he recovered his ability to taste food?

What is "counterfeit thankfulness"? (Matt. 15:8).

Discuss the three elements in cultivating a thankful heart.

Why did the person at the garage sale sell a \$125 ski bib for a nickel? What does this tell us about appreciation?

CHAPTER 17 Maintaining Your Perspective

Discuss why reshaping your perspective demands the same discipline as reshaping your body.

What does it mean to "take inventory"? How can we apply this to the many blessings we possess?

Carefully discuss each item in the "awarehouse" list.