

# CAN YOU SEE?

About a year ago, a friend of mine underwent eye surgery. She had surgery first in one eye and a few months later in the other eye. During this process, I tried to help her with some logistics: rides to and from the doctor, prescription pick up, dispensing eye drops. I was the official eye-patch 'puller-offer-er'!

It was not long after the first eye procedure she noticed the benefits of the surgery. She had very little to no complications and noticed vision improvement almost immediately. The second eye, however, was not so trouble-free. Although her complications were not severe, they were evident and required more attention and action than the first eye. During the weeks that led into months following the second surgery, when she expressed concern to her doctor, he always reminded her, "Be patient. Sometimes these things take time. Continue with the treatment plan, and one day your healing will be complete."

She followed his advice and put her efforts into the attention and action prescribed. After all, she underwent the procedures and endured the difficulties for a reason: better vision.

## OH SAY, CAN YOU SEE?

As believers, better vision should be one of our perpetual goals also. We know the Bible teaches that we are to be transformed people (Romans 12:2). This transformation shapes our sight, view of life, the world, and truth in our thinking and, in turn, how we live. Our sight shifts and becomes more in line with God's eternal perspective.

However, the influences, attractions, and worries of this temporary life often supersede this goal of better vision. We can see this happen in Mark 8 when it becomes obvious to Jesus His disciples do not see

what He sees at all. Here He speaks to them as One with all power and no limitations. They respond by way of earthly concerns and limited abilities, so He asks them, "You have eyes, can't you see?"

Just like the disciples, we are often blinded by earthly/temporary matters that both paralyze our actions and inhibit us from seeing beyond them. As humans, we naturally see life from this perspective. However, we are to give attention and action to correcting and improving our sight, so we are fully transformed and begin to see as He does.

***Application: What earthly/temporary matter keeps you from having better spiritual vision?***

## FIRST THINGS FIRST AND SECOND THINGS SECOND

To make this improvement, it is important, first of all, to understand the purpose of sight. The Bible teaches in 2 Corinthians 5:7 that sight is not


for the purpose of "walking." In other words, what we see should not determine how we live. It should not be our guiding factor when making deci-



sions; it should not dictate how we respond to circumstances; it should not have any bearing on how we treat others; and it should not determine our steps. We cannot rely on it for understanding. What we see is not stable or reliable enough to offer us clarity and direction. Sight does not have enough

the blind," in Job 29:15.

Secondly, we need to recognize our sight needs our steadfast care. It can become weak and draw us toward matters of insignificance. Proverbs 4 (NLT) warns us to not only diligently "keep" our hearts or guard our hearts, but it also alerts us to continue to "look straight ahead



...these things 'crowd out  
God's message from our hearts.'  
(Mark 4:19).

power, knowledge, or strength to provide those things for us. As this Scripture teaches, sight is not to take the place of faith; what we see is not an adequate substitute for faith. Faith, believing, and living truth, are how we should walk, live, and experience life. Faith, not sight, is the mandate which provides our direction and the path we are to walk.

The purpose of sight then is to lead us to a higher, deeper relationship with Him and a greater knowledge of Him and His message. We then grow in our understanding of Him and can guide others to Him as Job acknowledges, "I was eyes for

and fix your eyes." We are to be paying attention to what is demanding our attention.

One of Jesus' lessons in the parable of the sower and the seed in Mark 4 pertains to this warning. He provides a list of concerns that could easily divert our attention away from truth, away from eternal matters. In verse 19, Jesus says, (1) worries of this life, (2) deceitfulness (or lure) of wealth, and (3) desires for other things "choke" the truth. One paraphrase puts it this way, these things 'crowd out God's message from our hearts.'

When we are looking at these things, we can quickly become obsessed with fixing, chang-

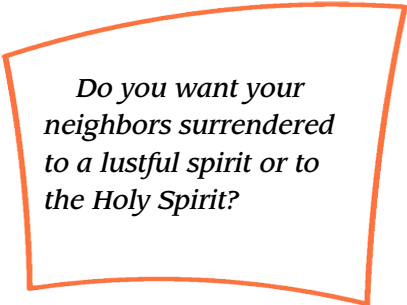
ing, moving, removing, getting, keeping, making, buying, posting, comparing, envying, consuming, fighting, winning, spending, or owning them. Because our natural self leans toward worldly matters, we must actively combat those tendencies by a fixed and intentional focus on Him.

The Bible provides antidotes for all three of these concerns. First of all, Peter encourages us to “cast all your care (anxiety) on Him for He cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7). Jesus says in Matthew 11:28-30 that we can give Him our heaviest burden, and by doing so, we can again see Him: the knowledge of Him, the hope of Him, the power of Him, the peace of Him, and the promise of Him.

The second concern addressed in Mark 4 is the deceit of money. Money can look like a viable solution for lots of difficulties. It can appear to have the power it simply does not possess. The reality is, money has limits. If you could put all the money in the world in your bank account, there would still

be things you could not buy. Rich people with more money than they could ever spend cannot purchase a security system that will eliminate all threats of danger. They cannot purchase contentment, joy, or peace. They will not avoid all the pains of life. People they love will die. They, too, will one day die.

Also, money, whether we have a lot or only a very small amount, has an uncanny ability to pull at our heartstrings and lure us into



*Do you want your neighbors surrendered to a lustful spirit or to the Holy Spirit?*

loving it. If we love something, we willingly pay a hefty price for it: self-sacrifice, undivided attention, complete devotion. Love is consuming. That is why Timothy (1 Timothy 6:10) warns believers that loving money can lead to erring from the faith and cause many sorrows.

The writer of Hebrews 13:5 tells believers that contentment isn't found in money or things but instead comes from the promise of God that says, “I will never leave you; I will never forsake you.” Read that again; God says to us, “I will never leave you; I will never forsake you.” This promise, this relationship

cannot be bought. When it either seems like everything is going our way or when we encounter a need that money can't buy, this promise needs to be the truth we allow to sustain us. This promise needs to be where we are looking and what we see.

The third threat from Mark 4 to "choke" truth is lust or desire for other things. According to Galatians 5, when we yield to the desires of lust, the manifestations can include adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, strife, jealousy, wrath, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revelings, and other such behaviors. Compare this list to that of the

characteristics of the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and self-control.

What a contrast! Do you want your neighbors surrendered to a lustful spirit or to the Holy Spirit? Which do you want guiding your community leaders or government officials? Which do you want your boss to follow? Which do you want at your Thanksgiving table? Which do you want to show up at your next church business meeting? To which do you allow control? Look where the finishing line is for both of these choices. They end up in entirely different places, yet they both begin at where they set their sight.

***Application: What are the three threats from Mark 4 that chokes truth? Which threat has you blinded to truth?***

## TREATMENT OPTIONS

When we detect poor vision, we must be mindful of how we treat it. As with other physical illnesses, we sometimes decide we are simply going to suffer through. Perhaps we don't like the treatment options, so we choose not to apply any of

them. We may think the "price" of poor sight is less costly than the "price" of treatment. Naaman comes to mind when thinking about this option. In 2 Kings 5 we discover he was diagnosed with leprosy. He then learns of a prophet who may be

able to cure him.

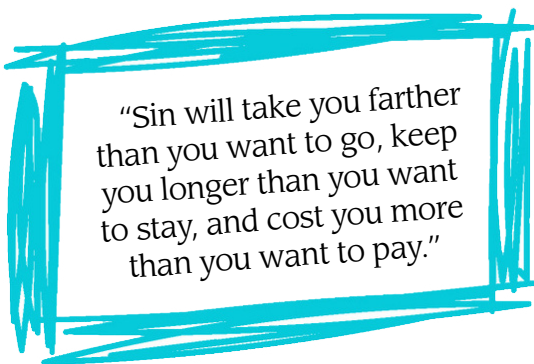
Naaman travels to this prophet and takes what he believes will bring about his healing and good health: money and possessions. After all, that's what people do who see money as a problem solver. Instead, the prophet tells Naaman his cure would be found in an act of humility and submission. Naaman's distaste for the cure caused

him to angrily walk away from the treatment (2 Kings 5:11).

It is obvious this choice was only going to lead to more suffering and potentially cost him his life. Why was he willing to do this? Because he viewed the "price" (humility and surrender) as too costly. When sight is fixed on self, humility and surrender are not allowed their rightful place, and then sight on Christ is lost.

The actions of the Israelites provide another example of choosing this option. They had an attitude of doubt and distrust when it came to total surrender and confidence in the

Lord. We know where that led them: 40 long years of wandering and worry. Not many days after the Israelites witnessed the miracle of the parting of the Red Sea (Exodus 15), they began 40 years of complaints and criticisms to the God who, many times over, had saved their lives.



Doesn't that make you wonder how they viewed the miracle that kept them from definite enslavement and

suffering? Did they see the Omniscience of God, the Omnipotence of God, and the Omnipresence of God? Instead of seeing God, they focused on the things they didn't like. Instead of surrendering, they chose suffering.

Another treatment option we sometimes choose is self-medication with home remedies. Instead of heeding the advice of educated, trained professionals, we use our own limited, flawed, inadequate knowledge to treat our infirmities. The Bible clearly states in Proverbs 3:5 (NIV) that we are not to "lean on your own understanding" because doing so means we are attempting to

direct our path. Big mistake.

David (2 Samuel 11) gives us an example of what it looks like when we rely on our wits to correct problems we have created. Logic, reason, and truth seem to fade away when we look inwardly for answers. Our senses tell us to hide the sin, cover up the sin, deny the truth, and rely on our schemes and limited powers to try and eliminate the sin. David's story illustrates this common saying: "Sin will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you want to pay." When we try to 'fix' ourselves, we have taken our eyes off God and, in essence, dismissed Him. David paid the price of trying to treat his blindness for the rest of his life.

***Application: How are you trying to 'fix' yourself? What do you need to do to improve your spiritual vision?***

## TREATMENT PRESCRIBED

Rejecting the recommended treatment doesn't work. Self-prescribed treatment doesn't work. However, a perfect treatment plan has already been constructed for us. Again, in the parable from Mark 4, Jesus clearly presents the plan for perfect sight when He says we are to hear the Word, receive the Word, and bring forth fruit (v. 20).

In John 3, Nicodemus provides an example of someone who spent his life looking for perfect sight and not finding it. He hoped to find it in either his position, wealth, respect,

education, fame, or authority.

After being in the presence of Christ, he recognized, even after accomplishing all those things, he still could not see. Unfortunately, for many of us, we have set as our personal life goals the same priorities as Nicodemus. They won't lead us to perfect sight either.

Do you ever feel defeated, discouraged, unavailable, useless, or empty? Are you allowing your worries and anxieties, the false promises of money, or our culture's influence of having more and getting more to




skew your sight? Jesus gives us an invitation saying, "If any man thirsts, let him come unto me and drink," (John 7:37). Maybe your sight has been affected by your lack of truly hearing the Word and truly receiving the Word. Perhaps you need to increase how often you are drinking the Living Water. Do you try to drink enough on Sunday to last the rest of the week? Are you trying to get by with a glimpse at His Word from time to time or a quick half-hearted prayer? Are you thirsty for truth?

In His message to the prophet Jeremiah, the Lord describes it as evil when His people neglect His Living Waters and build for themselves wells that can't hold water (Jeremiah 2:13). Lack of Living Water halts the trans-

formation process, the way to perfect sight.

A year later, my friend's prognosis is great. Little by little, step by step, after following the proper treatment plan, her sight has been amazingly restored.

Our vision can also become perfect by following His treatment plan. We need Him. We need to be in His Word. We need to spend time with Him daily. After all, can you remember a day when Satan didn't show up?

Jesus so lovingly invites us to have an intimate relationship with Him. When we accept that invitation, and we drink from the Living Well, we can say as the one He healed said, "One thing I know,...I was blind and now I see" (John 9:25). 

**About the Writer:** Tina Tolbert lives in Nashville, Tennessee. She is a member of Cofer's Chapel Free Will Baptist Church where she serves as a substitute Sunday School teacher, a "Grow Group" studies teacher, and a nursery staff worker. Tina has taught at the collegiate level since 1993 and at Welch College in Nashville since 1999.

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time I'm on a field or a diamond coaching, Amanda is sitting on the sidelines building meaningful relationships with the moms.

Youth sports is a phenomenal mission field in every community. I can't remember who taught me this, but I well remember the lesson: "Keep doing the hobbies you enjoy, just find someone who doesn't know Jesus and invite them to do it with you." Many people are being reached in bass boats, on baseball diamonds, around scrapbooking tables, and plenty of other places. The fields are ripe for harvest, but the budding plants are not growing in our sanctuaries. 