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LIVING IN LIGHT OF ETERNITY

A PUBLICATION OF DAVE DRAVECKY'S OUTREACH OF HOPE

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> 13840 Gleneagie Drive • Colorado Springs, CO 80921 Phone: 719 481-3528 • Fax: 719 481-4689 E-mail: info@OutreachOfHope.org • Internet: www.OutreachOfHope.org

> > President...Dave Dravecky
> > Vice President...Jan Dravecky
> > Editorial Director...Kim Jones
> > Editor...Amanda Sorenson
> > Designer...Chuck Haas

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A MAN'S
GREATEST CARE
SHOULD BE
FOR THAT
PLACE WHERE
HE DWELLETH
LONGEST;
THEREFORE
ETERNITY
SHOULD BE
HIS SCOPE.

THOMAS MANTON

Dear Friends,

During the past year, *The Encourager* has dealt with a topic some of us think about from time to time but which all of us think about when we have to face our own mortality—that is, heaven!

Obviously it would take volumes to cover the whole subject in detail, and we would still be left with questions about heaven's wonderful mysteries. But we have explored the reality of our temporary life here on earth and taken a look at the wonderful reality of heaven. If you have not had the opportunity to read the first two issues, I recommend you go to our website, OutreachOfHope.org, and read them. You will then see the whole picture and begin to understand the eternal hope Jesus Christ offers.

This final issue on heaven is about living life with an eternal perspective. It is a perspective that makes a tremendous difference in how we live our lives and how we handle suffering, but it isn't one that comes naturally.

Trust me, it wasn't easy for me to learn to look at life with an eternal perspective. I first had to come to grips with my mortality. Then I could embrace the truth about my destiny in this temporary life and in the next life because of my relationship with God through His Son, Jesus Christ. Having that relationship has helped me keep an eternal perspective even in the midst

of life's storms. No matter what happens, I can look forward to a

I have come to believe that "life is a dream and heaven is reality." With this truth I can embrace an eternal perspective that truly gives me hope no matter what my circumstances. I hope that what we share in this issue provides encouragement, comfort, and hope as you face the uncertainties of your life too.

Dane

LEARNING TO SEE THE BIG PICTURE

by Jan Dravecky

Learning to focus on the big picture isn't easy. We are usually more comfortable focusing our attention on what's in our immediate view, or on what we can control. But sooner or later reality has a way of turning our world upside down.

My world turned upside down in the waiting rooms and hallways of Memorial Sloan-Kettering Hospital. All of my life I had avoided funeral homes and hospitals, but when Dave got sick, I got my wake-up call. I had no escape. I had to face what I had always avoided. Dave and I were still young—in our early thirties—when we sat in hospital waiting rooms in and amongst other patients, some of whom were dying. The reality that surrounded us every day shook me to the core. But as difficult as it was, it was a gift to realize on a deeply personal level that this life will not last forever.

When we face the reality of suffering and the shortness of life, we have only two options. We can grasp the best of what life offers, but the relief we get is only temporary. Or, we can learn to focus on the big picture—on what is eternal—and search for answers that resolve our questions forever. Choosing to focus on the eternal rather than on the temporary makes all the difference.

Barbie, a friend who lost two of her four children in tragic accidents and then had to deal with the loss of her marriage, discovered this the hard way. As she struggled to make sense of her losses, she tried everything: "reason, logic, running away, denial," and she says it almost killed her. The answers she pursued provided some relief, but they ultimately led nowhere.

Barbie has since learned that the relief she was looking for can't be found on this side of eternity; it is on the other side. Without an eternal perspective she had no lasting escape from "the mind games, the how, what, when, why." But changing her focus from her circumstances to the big picture made all the difference. Learning to view her life and circumstances from an eternal perspective is the only thing that gave her hope.

The same was true for me. When death became real and personal, I started to ask questions I had never before asked—questions about suffering, the meaning of life, heaven, and eternal life. I studied the Bible to find out what lasts beyond this life. I learned about God's promises and about heaven. My search caused me to turn my focus toward eternal priorities and learn to live by them.

As I started to set new priorities in life, I realized that my relationship with God had to be most important. I haven't always lived that way, but my life is different when I make time for Him and seek to please Him rather than to please everyone around me. When I focus on my relationship with God, I am focusing on what is most important, on what is eternal, and that allows me to be a better wife, a better mother, a better friend.

Studying Scripture became a very important—and life-changing—priority. I had become very aware of the terrible things that can happen in life and the fear of death had become a greater issue for me than ever before. But my study of Scripture brought eternity to me here and now. The more I learned about heaven and eternal life, the less I feared death. Although I still have some fears about the process of death, knowing that I am a child of God who will spend eternity with Him removes the fear that had gripped me for so long. Being set free from the fear of death enabled me to start living the abundant life Jesus came to give.

Looking at my daily life in light of eternity has relieved much of the stress of life and given me the freedom and passion to live a richer life. I often tell my kids that life is dirt, hair, and traffic jams. We can get as upset as we want, but traffic jams are going to happen, we're going to find hair in our food, and we've got to deal with dirt. That is life. But there is a bigger picture. And in that bigger picture dirt, hair, and traffic jams are small and temporary.

In light of eternity, we know that the daily inconveniences and even our greatest suffering are temporary, and this gives us the strength to endure. No matter what happens, we know how the story ends. We know that pain is not forever. No matter how horrific it is, it is temporary. We can rest safely in the promise that "Weeping may last the night, but joy comes in the morning." An eternal perspective doesn't always make us happy, but it gives us hope and joy in the midst of life.

Marie's Litmus Test

Marie, a caregiver, says her "eternity litmus test" is her most helpful tool for prioritizing where her already taxed energies should go. As she faces each setback, challenge, or problem she asks, "In the scheme of eternity, does this really matter? How much energy and attention should I give to this? Are there eternal consequences or is this simply a nuisance, a distraction, that will soon be forgotten?" Looking at the present in light of eternity enables her to say 'no' to the things that don't matter and say 'yes' to the things that do.

WHEN YOU UNDERSTAND THE TRUTH OF HEAVEN AND THE REALITY OF ETERNAL LIFE, YOU UNDERSTAND HOW TO LIVE LIFE TODAY. LIVING LIFE FROM AN ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE FREES YOU UP FROM SWEATING THE SMALL STUFF.

JAN DRAVECKY



FROM PAIN TO PEACE THE POWER OF AN ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE

Perspective. Her art training taught her how important it is in capturing the images of life. Her experience taught her how important it is in surviving life's trauma.

E arly in her art studies, Barbie Kolar learned about the fundamental principle of perspective. "You first have to look at something in perspective to the horizon," she explains, "then you can put it in its proper place and size."

Later in life, Barbie suffered a series of devastating losses that shattered her perspective on life. Within a short span of time she lost her 14 year-old son and 21 year-old daughter in tragic accidents. In the aftermath of her grief, her marriage ended. Her efforts to make sense of her losses exhausted her to the point that she says "death seemed like my only option."

During her darkest days of pain and grief, Barbie couldn't put anything in perspective. She couldn't even read her Bible because its reminders of joy, blessing, and answers were too painful to bear. But slowly, through God's gentle nudging and the faithful prayers of family and friends, she was drawn back to the Bible.

"I was drowning in human thought," she explains, "but God lifted me up to see His thoughts on life, death, and eternal life. I spent hours listening to Him through His Word and allowing it to heal my thinking." The Bible helped her move her focal point from her changing circumstances to that which is unchangeable and eternal. In time she began to see that in comparison to eternity her trials were brief and temporary—although they certainly didn't feel that way. "Now," she says, "I have the sense that I'm just passing through."

The process of learning how to look at her life from an eternal perspective helped Barbie put all the craziness of her life in order. It put everything in its proper place and gave her hope and peace. "Without an eternal perspective," she says, "I would be insane or dead. Without it, there isn't any hope, any reason."

Her hope comes not only from the relief of knowing that her suffering truly is temporary, but from the promise of Romans 8:28: "In all things God works for the good of those who love him." Although Barbie admits that this Scripture can seem overused and trite, it is a source of hope for her. She knows that when she stands in heaven she will see how God

has worked all things for good—not just a few things, not just the majority of things, but *all* things. Her losses, her pain, her tears—*everything* God will turn into something good. That is His promise. Everything we give to Him will be redeemed.

Barbie's hope isn't limited to the redemption of her suffering, however. The power of an eternal perspective extends even to the devastating pain of losing a loved one. Grief is not an option. We will grieve; we should grieve. But 1 Thessalonians 4:13 tells us that those who are children of God don't "grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope." Even in the darkest, most excruciating moments of grief, there is a flickering flame of hope that refuses to be snuffed out. That hope is in the promise that this life is not all there is. All is not lost. On this side of eternity, Barbie can only remember her deceased son and daughter; on the other side, she will hold them.

ETERNITY IS THE
FRAME AROUND THE
PICTURE OF A LIFE
THAT SIMPLY WILL
NOT MAKE SENSE
WITHOUT IT.

PAULA RINEHART DISCIPLESHIP JOURNAL

She experienced unexpected peace as she applied the promise of Isaiah 26:3 (NIT): "You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you, whose thoughts are fixed on you!" Instead of fighting God for answers or demanding a way of escape in order to have the peace she so desperately wanted (which she did for a time) Barbie found a better way. "You just have to get it through your head that there is no other way to escape the darkness of despair and find peace," she explains. "God is the only One who knows the way through this maze we call life. I can bang into walls until I am unconscious, but eventually I'm going to have to look up and seek God."

As she deliberately fixed her eyes on God, Barbie's perspective slowly began to change. Instead of focusing on "death, suffering and self, I began to focus on life, hope and Christ. I pondered life outside of myself, my suffering." As her perspective changed, God's peace began to replace her pain.

In time, Barbie discovered that the best part of having an eternal perspective is that you cannot arrive at and maintain that

perspective without connecting with God, the source of life. A relationship with Him promises true fulfillment, joy, contentment, hope, love, and peace. We don't have to wait until we step into eternity to experience these wonderful, lifegiving gifts from God. We can begin to experience them now.



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Need Encouragement?
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www.HopeforDepression.org
www.HopeforHurting.org
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FOR THE JOURNEY

TIME IS SHORT. ETERNITY IS LONG. IT IS ONLY REASONABLE THAT THIS SHORT LIFE BE LIVED IN THE LIGHT OF ETERNITY.

CHARLES H. SPURGEON

CHRISTIANITY ASSERTS THAT EVERY INDIVIDUAL HUMAN BEING IS GOING TO LIVE FOREVER, AND THIS MUST BE EITHER TRUE OR FALSE. NOW THERE ARE A GOOD MANY THINGS WHICH WOULD NOT BE WORTH BOTHERING ABOUT IF I WERE GOING TO LIVE ONLY SEVENTY YEARS, BUT WHICH I HAD BETTER BOTHER ABOUT VERY SERIOUSLY IF I AM GOING TO LIVE FOREVER.

C. S. LEWIS

THIS WORLD IS BUT THE VESTIBULE OF ETERNITY. EVERY GOOD THOUGHT OR DEED TOUCHES A CHORD THAT VIBRATES IN HEAVEN.

ANONYMOUS

STORE YOUR TREASURES IN HEAVEN, WHERE THEY WILL NEVER BECOME MOTH-EATEN OR RUSTY AND WHERE THEY WILL BE SAFE FROM THIEVES. WHEREVER YOUR TREASURE IS, THERE YOUR HEART AND THOUGHTS WILL ALSO BE.

MATTHEW 6:20-21 NLT

YOU CANNOT KILL TIME WITHOUT INJURING ETERNITY.
HENRY DAVID THOREAU

Live near to God, and so all things will appear to you little in comparison with eternal realities.

ROBERT MURRAY M'CHEYNE

An eternal perspective means taking several large steps back, outside of time, outside of this earth and life, and seeing my life from God's eternal perspective. I am His child, made in His image, with an eternal soul. I will live forever although now I live in a temporary body in a temporary world.

ANONYMOUS

We will have all of eternity to celebrate victories, but only a few short hours until sunset to win them.

AMY CARMICHAEL

PSALM 39:4 NASB

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PERSPECTIVE MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE by Dave Dravecky

When we're suffering, it's easy to lose sight of the big picture. It's easy to be consumed by the concerns of the day and lose the eternal perspective that enables us to go on. Once, when I was struggling to keep my head above water and focus on the eternal, a friend of mine greatly encouraged me. He asked me to imagine a scene in heaven and a conversation between God and me.

Suppose God said, "David, I am about to give you a choice. I'm going to let you go back in time and relive your life if you so desire. But before you make your decision, look over there."

As I look over to the spot He indicates, I see scores of people I met through my ordeal with cancer: fellow patients in the hospital, former teammates, amputees now made whole, friends killed by cancer made alive and vigorous once more but now sporting strong and incorruptible bodies.

"David," the Lord continues, "these are the people who were touched in one way or another by your life and your story. Some came to know me through what happened to you. Others were encouraged to stay faithful to me when they saw how you dealt with your own battle against cancer. Still others were motivated by your story to get involved with people who were hurting in order to bring them some measure of relief. They will all bring glory to my name for eternity, and the suffering you bore on earth is partly responsible for putting them here. Now, David, I want you to look over here."

And with that, He shows me another scene, one with far fewer people. I notice that some of the faces I had seen before are now not absent merely from the room but from heaven itself. The few people I see are happy enough, but... the room could hold far more than it does. It looks naked, and I do not like it.

"Lord," I ask, "what is this place?"

"This is the choice I told you about David," the Lord responds. "If you wish, I will turn back time and prevent you from getting cancer. You will suffer none of the pain, none of the anguish, none of the awful doubts or anxious moments you endured before. You will go on to a long and successful baseball career, then you will retire and live out your days in luxury and perfect health. You will die at a ripe, old age... but the room you see now is what will greet you when you get here. It is your decision; which room do you choose?"

My friend's illustration helped me put things back in perspective. I wouldn't have chosen any of the hardships that befell Jan and me, and I wasn't always the most



LET'S READ OUR OWN
OBITUARY, NOT AS WRITTEN IN
THE NEWSPAPER BY
UNINFORMED OR BIASED MEN,
BUT AS AN ONLOOKING ANGEL
MIGHT WRITE IT, FROM
HEAVEN'S POINT OF VIEW. LET'S
EXAMINE IT CAREFULLY.
THEN... LET'S USE THE REST OF
OUR LIVES HERE TO EDIT THAT
OBITUARY INTO WHAT WE
REALLY WANT IT TO SAY.

RANDY ALCORN,

stellar example of faith while I was enduring them. But knowing what I do now, I could never go back to the way I lived before cancer invaded my life.

I have learned that God is faithful, even in the midst of cancer. He is faithful, even in the midst of amputation. He is faithful throughout the pain, the suffering, the doubts, the worries, the sleepless nights. Even now I can see how He has chosen to use the difficult circumstances of my life for His glory and my benefit. Although some may view what happened to me as a tragedy, I can honestly say that the real tragedy would have been to live a life that resulted in a naked room in heaven and never to have known the difference.

Adapted from *Do Not Lose Heart*, published by Zondervan, used by permission.



MADE TO LAST FOREVER

by Rick Warren

This life is not all there is. At most, you will live a hundred years on earth, but you will spend forever in eternity. Your time on earth is, as Sir Thomas Brown said, "but a small parenthesis in eternity."

God made you to last forever, and you will spend far more time on the other side of death—in eternity—than you will here. His plan for your life involves far more than the few decades you will spend on this planet. His purpose for your life is more than the "opportunity of a lifetime;" it is an opportunity beyond your lifetime!

Just as the nine months you spent in your mother's womb were not an end in themselves but a preparation for life, so this life is preparation for the next. If you have a relationship with God through Jesus, death is not something to fear, rather it is the door to eternity. Death will be the last of your time on earth, but it won't be the last of you. It will be your birthday into eternal life. That is why the Bible says, "This world is not our home; we are looking forward to our everlasting home in heaven."

Adapted from *The Purpose Driven Life* by Rick Warren, published by Zondervan, used by permission.

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WHEN ETERNITY DRAWS NEAR

Late in his long life, Moses penned the words, "So teach us to number our days that we may present to you a heart of wisdom" (Psalm 90:12 NASB). This issue of *The Encourager* has focused on gaining the wisdom of living in light of eternity. That perspective becomes all the more important when we realize how quickly the end of life is approaching. What if we, as Moses suggests, numbered our days? How many days might that be? Consider the number of days in the average American's life:

- On the day I am born, I have 28,105 days left to live.
- When I graduate from high school, I have 21,535 days left.
- When I celebrate my 30th birthday, I have 17,155 days left.
- By the time I reach my 50th birthday, that number has been reduced to 9,855 days.
- At the time I enroll in Medicare, I have 4,380 days left to live.

So how does our view of eternity change as the number of our days runs down? Does our perspective of eternity change when we, as one hospice patient commented, "have one foot here and one foot in eternity?"

The passage from the present life into eternity is different for every person. For some it is relatively simple, characterized by an almost incomprehensible confidence and peace. For others it is unsettling, characterized by anxiety, doubt, or fear. Even for those who for decades have lived with an eye toward eternity, the passage can be very scary. It is not unusual for us to struggle to maintain an eternal perspective as the end of life draws near.

Focusing on the eternal is particularly important when we are enduring physical suffering because it is easy to lose perspective when we face pain. Consider, for example, Bill. A pastor for more than fifty years, Bill knew as well as anyone that God loved him. But during the last days of his life keeping in focus what he knew of God was a struggle. In the face of his physical pain, God seemed distant to him. He felt as if God "must not like me very much right now."

Many people share Bill's thoughts. It is not at all unusual to feel distant from God or even to fear being abandoned by God during our final hours. Others of us may doubt the reality of heaven. Our faith falters and we become afraid that death is the end of ourselves. No matter what our feelings may be, the truth is, we *can* count on God's eternal promises. We can cling to God's truth that never changes. But we may need some help to keep those truths in focus.



Bill's daughter stood by him during his most difficult moments and kept reminding him of God's promises. Psalm 23 was especially meaningful to him: "...Even though I walk through valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me..." This and other Scripture passages helped direct his focus and his faith on the truth of eternity. And during Bill's final hours, he and his family felt firsthand the comfort promised in God's Word.

Ultimately, faith is what keeps our focus on eternity. As Henri Nouwen says, "At the hour of our death, all becomes faith. Faith in God, who knows every fiber of our being and loves us in spite of our sins, is the narrow gate which connects this world with the next." That perspective helps us endure the journey.

If you (or a loved one) are struggling with a fear of death, the Outreach of Hope has a new resource that may help you: If Heaven Is so Great, Why Are We Afraid to Go? You may order a copy through our website, www.OutreachOfHope.org or by calling the ministry.

NURTURING AN ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE

The ability to view life, our losses, and our future from God's eternal perspective doesn't come naturally. It is a perspective we have to acquire. The best way to develop that perspective is to immerse ourselves in Scripture—to fill our minds with God's thoughts on life, death, and eternal life. Here is a sampling of favorite Scripture passages that help us "fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen."

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. - Romans 8:3839

Don't be troubled. You trust God, now trust in me. There are many rooms in my Father's home, and I am going to prepare a place for you. If this were not so, I would tell you plainly. When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am. - John 14:13 NIT

I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. - John 10:28

But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Savior. He will take these weak mortal bodies of ours and change them into glorious bodies like his own, using the same mighty power that he will use to conquer everything, everywhere. - Philippians 3:20-21 NLT

Happy are those who are strong in the LORD, who set their minds on a pilgrimage....They will continue to grow stronger, and each of them will appear before God....A single day in your courts is better than a thousand anywhere else! - Psalm 84:5-10 NLT

PUTTING IT IN PERSPECTIVE

The Milan Cathedral is a stunning architectural work. Those who visit it are so amazed that they often overlook some of the finer details. One such detail, the three inscriptions that span the magnificent arched doorways, puts the whole issue of eternity in perspective.

Above one arch is carved a wreath of roses with the words, "All that pleases is but for a moment."

Above the second is a cross with the words, "All that troubles is but for a moment."

Underneath the great central entrance to the main aisle is inscribed: "That only is important which is eternal."



THEREFORE WE DO NOT LOSE HEART, THOUGH OUTWARDLY WE ARE WASTING AWAY, YET INWARDLY WE ARE BEING RENEWED DAY BY DAY, FOR OUR LIGHT AND **MOMENTARY TROUBLES** ARE ACHIEVING FOR US AN ETERNAL GLORY THAT FAR OUTWEIGHS THEM ALL. SO WE FIX OUR EYES NOT ON WHAT IS SEEN BUT WHAT IS UNSEEN. FOR WHAT IS SEEN IS TEMPORARY **BUT WHAT IS UNSEEN** IS ETERNAL

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

STRAIGHT TALK DAVE

HOW DO YOU KEEP AN ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE WHEN YOU'RE SUFFERING?

E truth is, whether we are suffering or not, the demands of life can distract us and keep us from having that perspective. This often happens because we focus on our circumstances and forget who we are to look to for the strength to endure our journey through those circumstances. The Bible makes this clear in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 where Paul encourages us to not lose heart even when we are "wasting away."

Paul can encourage us in this way because he believes two very important truths. First, all the stuff we have to deal with, all the pain of life, is (and I am not in any way downplaying the pain of suffering) "light and momentary." Second, our suffering is "achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all." These truths are huge! They are at the core of keeping an eternal perspective.

The Apostle Paul is saying that as much as we like it here, there is something better than life on earth, and it's called heaven! So he encourages us not to put our focus on the circumstances of this life but to embrace His Son, Jesus Christ, and focus on what we can't see but what we know is there—our home in heaven!

Let me share why this is important to me. I was, and in some respects still am, afraid to die. At times I get caught up in my emotions and lose sight of the eternal reality. That's when I become fearful and begin to doubt my faith and question if God is who He says He is. I lose sight of the Bible's promise that "He who has the Son (meaning a relationship with Jesus) has life, he who does not have the Son of God, does not have life! These things I tell you so that you may *know* you have eternal life!"

This is God's promise: we can be assured of eternal life, and we can cling to that eternal hope no matter what! From time to time we're all in that place of questioning, doubt, or fear. If you're there, if you are feeling uncertain or overwhelmed, I encourage you to seek out the truth of God's Word, embrace His promise of eternal life, and focus on the certainty of what you cannot yet see. That will change your perspective!

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