

The Encourager[®]

Hope for Those Who Hurt

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The Power of Perspective

A PUBLICATION OF DAVE DRAVECKY'S OUTREACH OF HOPE

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HAVING COME
FACE TO FACE
WITH A LIFE-
CHANGING
ILLNESS, I HAVE
A DIFFERENT
PERSPECTIVE
ON LIFE.
I APPROACH
MY HOURS AND
DAYS WITH A
DIFFERENT
ATTITUDE.

The mission of Dave Dravecky's Outreach of Hope is to serve suffering people, especially those with cancer and amputation, by offering resources for encouragement, comfort and hope through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. *The Encourager* is free, a gift from us to you. When you've finished reading it, don't throw the gift away, pass it along!

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*A higher standard.
A higher purpose.*

DAVE DRAVECKY

WELCOME

Dear Friends,

Although we may not realize it, each of us has formulated opinions on what life is supposed to look like and how it is supposed to work. When life is going well, we may not be aware of those perspectives or recognize how much they shape our responses to life. But those perspectives have a powerful impact, and when adversity strikes, many of us find that our perspectives are shaken to the core.

When I was first diagnosed with cancer, my perspective on life was pretty limited. Life had been going my way and it was good. I knew pain and suffering happened, but as an athlete I felt that I could conquer anything. I was in great shape. I was living my dream. I thought pain and suffering would happen to the other guy—not to me.

Now I know better. As is true for many people, my cancer diagnosis blew apart my naive perspective on life. It forced me to realize that life wasn't what I had assumed it would be. I held onto a few nuggets of truth, but I began to question much of what I thought I believed. It was scary to realize I didn't have life figured out quite as well as I thought I had. It was tough to abandon the expectation that everything would always be fine and to accept that I no longer lived in that world.

Over a period of time, however, I evaluated my assumptions and gained a new perspective on life. That new way of thinking became essential in dealing with what had happened to me.

It helped me learn to take life one day at a time, to dream and plan for the future but not to take the time I have for granted.

I hope this issue of *The Encourager* will help you and those you love recognize the adjustments in perspective—the new ways of thinking about life—that times of suffering and adversity often require.



Dave

THE POWER OF PERSPECTIVE by Kim Jones

Be careful how you think; your life is shaped by your thoughts.

Proverbs 4:23 (TEV)

I had been enduring an extremely difficult trial in life. For months there seemed to be no improvement or resolution in the situation I faced. It seemed as if my prayers for a way of escape were being ignored. Finally, I decided to create my own mini-escape. I lived fairly close to the Pacific Ocean, so, hoping for at least a few hours of refreshment, I headed toward a favorite spot high above the crashing waves.

After parking my car, I walked toward a large, glass-enclosed observatory perched on the edge of a bluff overlooking the ocean. As I stepped inside, my eyes were immediately drawn to the north window. There, in the distance, I saw an approaching storm. The scene was spectacular, but the clouds, fog and restless ocean made my heart sink. A powerful rainstorm was on its way. So much for my outdoor plans.

I quickly moved to the east window. Although it was quiet in the observatory, I looked out onto a noisy scene of wind-swept chaos in the parking lot. Kids, cars and carriages scurried in all directions. Dads hastily unloaded the family gear—backpacks, cameras, binoculars and picnic baskets—as moms frantically tried to bundle up their children to protect them from the chilling wind. I couldn't hear their frustrated words, but their faces told the whole story. I didn't watch this scene too long; it made me tired.

With relief, I stepped over to the south window. Seemingly oblivious to the brisk wind and incoming mist, a young couple wrapped in a blanket sat on a small patch of weathered lawn. Their obvious affection for one another must have driven away the discomfort of the biting wind. They weren't just taking in the view; they were experiencing it. From my sheltered viewpoint, I found myself experiencing it with them.

Other observers moved in my direction, so I felt compelled to leave that heart-warming scene and take in the view from the west window. Standing alone, overlooking the immense expanse of the Pacific Ocean that stretched to the horizon, I felt unbelievably tiny. The reflection of the sun lay like a

CHANGING YOUR
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A DIFFERENT LENS,
LIKE PUTTING ON
A DIFFERENT PAIR
OF GLASSES.

ANONYMOUS

glimmering golden path on the water. I'd never seen the ocean quite like this, and it brought tears to my eyes.

I closed my eyes to thank God for the awesome beauty of that place. At that moment, He spoke to my heart, showing me something I had never realized before. As I visually immersed myself in each view, I had experienced a multitude of emotions—some positive, some not. I had experienced frustration, elation, sadness and awe, yet I had not set foot outside the observatory. The only change was on which view I had chosen to focus.

How humbling it was to realize that in dealing with my personal trial I had been focusing on only one view. I had looked at the situation from only one viewpoint—finding a way out. I had not yet considered any other possibilities. That day I realized that God was far more interested in changing my perspective than in changing my circumstances.

No wonder my trial had been overwhelming. I needed a different view, a new perspective. And God, in His mercy, showed me that it was only a few steps away.

One ship drives east and another drives west

With the self same winds that blow.

'Tis the set of the sails,

And not the gales,

That tells us the way to go.

Like the winds of the sea are the ways of fate;

As we voyage along through life,

'Tis the set of a soul

That decides its goal,

And not the calm, or the strife.

ELLA WHEELER WILCOX

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WHEN PERSPECTIVES SHATTER UNDER THE PRESSURE OF SUFFERING

If we live long enough, broken bodies, damaged relationships or tattered dreams will eventually lead us through the valley of suffering. Many of us who sojourn through that misty lowland find that our perspectives on life, God and suffering are shattered along the way. What we believe as we descend into that valley is often not what we believe when we finally emerge.

Consider the story of Job, for example. Job's story was probably the first portion of the Bible to be written, and it reveals the drama of one man's traumatic journey through suffering. Despite his horrific loss of family, fortune and health, Job entered the valley with a noble perspective on suffering. He didn't resign himself to bitterness. He didn't

succumb to his wife's advice to "curse God and die." Initially, his perspective on God's sovereignty in the midst of suffering was firmly intact: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised" (Job 1:21).

But as his suffering wore on without resolution, Job started asking questions—questions that revealed the growing stress cracks in his perspective on life.

Job was widely revered as one of the most godly men in the land. He walked with God daily and trusted God to take of him. So when the circumstances of his life continued to go from bad to worse, Job didn't know what to make of it. How could a good God allow such terrible suffering to continue? Why wasn't God taking care of him? "If I have sinned," he cried out, "what have I done to you, O watcher of men? Why have you made me your target?" (Job 7:20).

For chapter upon chapter, we can read Job's questions regarding what he had believed about life, righteousness, relationships, justice, mercy, wisdom—and yes, even his relationship with God. Job's perspective on life and the reason for his suffering was completely shattered. Try as he might, he could not make his beliefs about suffering line up with his experience. What a devastating blow! He easily could have become callous and hardened toward God—prolonged suffering and unanswered questions can do that to a person.

**THE HUMAN SPIRIT CAN
ENDURE A SICK BODY,
BUT WHO CAN BEAR IT
IF THE SPIRIT IS
CRUSHED?**

PROVERBS 18:14 (NLT)

But interspersed among Job's wrestling with the questions, we also see the rock-solid elements of a perspective that held up under the pressure. Listen to the precious nuggets he shouted out across the valley of suffering:

"His wisdom is profound, his power is vast. Who has resisted him and come out unscathed?" (Job 9:4).

"Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him" (Job 13:15).

"I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth" (Job 19:25).

No matter how dim his view of what he experienced on earth, Job had one perspective that never shattered: Job knew that God was God, and he revered and feared God's awesome power and authority. Despite all he did not

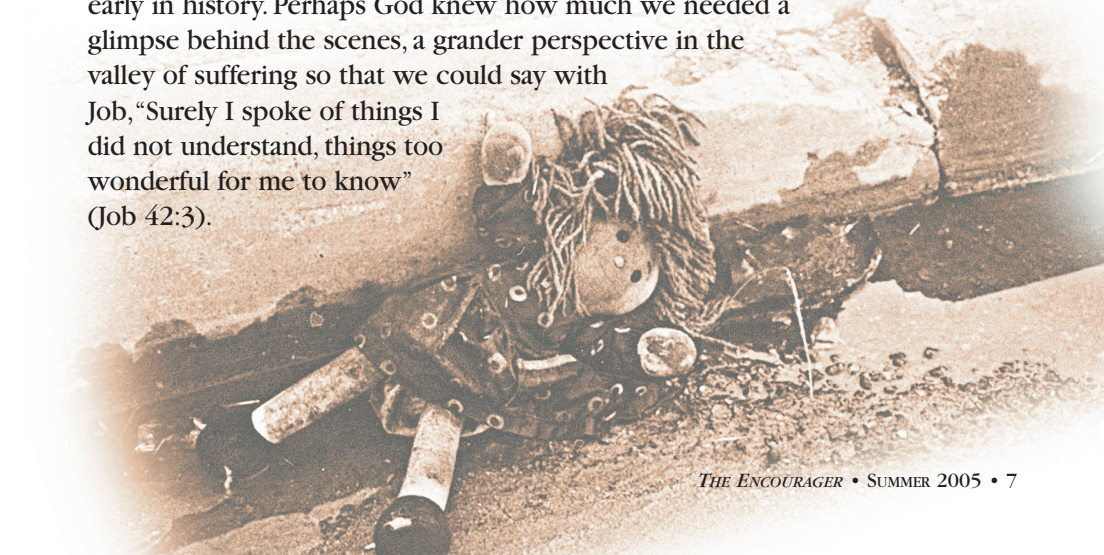
understand, Job knew without a doubt that God was the only one who could redeem him.

God honored Job's perspective. In time, God delivered him from his suffering and blessed him beyond what he could have imagined. And in a stunning twist of perspective, we can see that Job's experience of suffering was more an expression of God's confidence in Job than His contempt.

Job had no idea that his response to suffering made him a key player in a heavenly battle, but God has revealed the whole story—the reason for Job's suffering—to us. Perhaps that's one reason God gave us the book of Job so early in history. Perhaps God knew how much we needed a glimpse behind the scenes, a grander perspective in the valley of suffering so that we could say with Job, "Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know" (Job 42:3).

**PERSPECTIVE IS
IMPORTANT BECAUSE
WHAT WE BELIEVE
ABOUT GOD, HIS
CHARACTER, HIS LOVE
FOR US, AND HIS PLANS
FOR OUR LIFE WILL
DETERMINE TO A GREAT
EXTENT HOW WE
INTERPRET AND
RESPOND TO THE
SUFFERING WE
EXPERIENCE.**

KIM JONES



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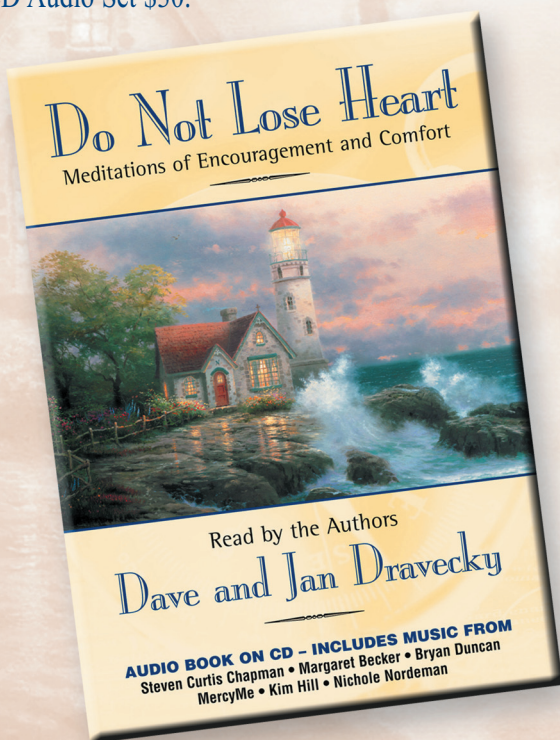
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FOR THE JOURNEY

TO CHANGE YOUR LIFE, YOU MUST CHANGE THE WAY YOU THINK.
BEHIND EVERYTHING YOU DO IS A THOUGHT. EVERY BEHAVIOR IS MOTIVATED
BY A BELIEF, AND EVERY ACTION IS PROMPTED BY AN ATTITUDE.

GOD REVEALED THIS THOUSANDS OF YEARS
BEFORE PSYCHOLOGISTS UNDERSTOOD IT.

RICK WARREN

WE SEE THE WORLD NOT AS IT IS, BUT AS WE ARE.

STEPHEN COVEY

WE WHO LIVED IN THE CONCENTRATION CAMPS CAN REMEMBER
THE MEN WHO WALKED THROUGH THE HUTS COMFORTING OTHERS,
GIVING AWAY THEIR LAST PIECE OF BREAD.

THEY MAY HAVE BEEN FEW IN NUMBER, BUT THEY OFFER SUFFICIENT PROOF
THAT EVERYTHING CAN BE TAKEN FROM A MAN BUT ONE THING;
THE LAST OF HIS FREEDOMS—TO CHOOSE ONE'S ATTITUDE
IN ANY GIVEN SET OF CIRCUMSTANCES, TO CHOOSE ONE'S WAY.

VICTOR FRANKL

A SIMPLE MAN BELIEVES ANYTHING,
BUT A PRUDENT MAN GIVES THOUGHT TO HIS STEPS.

PROVERBS 14:8

WISDOM IS SEEING THINGS FROM GOD'S PERSPECTIVE.

BILL GOTHARD

I THINK SUFFERING, ADVERSITY AND TRAGEDY ARE SUPPOSED
TO CHANGE YOUR PERSPECTIVE. MY ILLNESS SOUNDED AN ALARM THAT CAUSED ME
TO REACT AND TAKE ACTION SO THAT I CAN GIVE THE GREATEST
AMOUNT OF ATTENTION TO WHAT REALLY MATTERS.

DAVE DRAVECKY

THE REAL VOYAGE OF DISCOVERY CONSISTS NOT IN SEEKING NEW LANDSCAPES,
BUT IN SEEING WITH NEW EYES.

MARCEL PROUST

WHEN SUFFERING EXPOSES OUR FLAWED PERSPECTIVES

We all have beliefs about what life will hold for us, of who God is and what He will do for us, of how life is supposed to work and we assume those perspectives are true. When we endure times of personal suffering, however, those expectations often suffer the fate of Humpty Dumpty—they are shattered into so many pieces we think there is no hope of putting them back together again.

When that happens, we may feel that all is lost, but there is good news in the midst of our pain. Often it isn't until our perspectives are tested in the heat of suffering that we discover the distortions in our perceptions or the flaws—the weak, twisted, misplaced threads—in our beliefs. Although we may enter the valley of suffering with fault-ridden perspectives, we can walk out of the valley with perspectives that are closer to the whole truth and will better stand the test of time.

Consider Wayne and Sally DeReu, for example. A few weeks prior to Wayne's retirement from 30 years of military service, he was diagnosed with a type of cancer that offered little hope for recovery. That diagnosis was the last thing Wayne and Sally expected. After all, they were good people. For years they had sacrificed to serve their country. And during the previous ten years, they had been growing stronger in their faith. They had never been closer to God or to each other. They believed more strongly than ever that God was in control of their lives and they looked forward to a bright, hopeful future.

GOD WANTS TO REBUILD
OUR SHATTERED
PERSPECTIVES BECAUSE
HE KNOWS THEY ARE
ONLY A STEP AWAY FROM
A GRANDER, MORE
FITTING ONE.

So what went wrong? Why did a life-threatening cancer suddenly take center stage and destroy everything they expected life to be? It all seemed so unfair, so senseless. For a time, Sally couldn't reconcile the tragedy unfolding before her with her belief that God was in control. Like many others in similar circumstances, she began to doubt if God really was in control. *If God is in control*, she reasoned, *then why is this happening?* She didn't expect a perfect life, but she wondered how God could let it be as bad as it was.

Part of the challenge Sally and others who encounter times of adversity face is that our beliefs often are based on truth but not the whole truth. There may be a weak, twisted or misplaced thread in our perceptions. Or, we may focus on one thread of truth but miss out on the bigger picture.

Sheree, another sojourner through suffering, has observed that “the thread of truth woven through our shattered perspectives can just make you crazy!”

That's why Sheree turned to her Bible and literally wore it out in the dark confusion of her valley. "The reason I even survived is that God's Word guided me step by step as I sorted out truth from half-truth." Her Bible is marked up, worn and creased, and the binding is barely intact. It is a visible testimony of the truth of Psalm 119:105: "By your words I can see where I'm going; they throw a beam of light on my dark path" (THE MESSAGE). The words of Scripture helped Sheree build a new, shatter-proof perspective.

Once the shock of his diagnosis subsided, Wayne and Sally began picking their way through their shattered perspective. They realized that while being "good people" certainly prevents some bad experiences in life, it doesn't exempt anyone from serious suffering. With that twist in their perspective straightened out, they were ready to enlarge their view of their circumstances. "We knew God doesn't allow His children to suffer without reason," Sally explains, "so we knew that some good was going to come out of what was happening." Instead of asking, "Why us?" Wayne and Sally began to ask, "How will God use us?"

It was in those small, simple steps that Sally and Wayne's perspective began to change. They began to look for signs that God was in control, that He was orchestrating events and encounters. "I really started seeing a lot of little miracles," Sally says, "and they gave us hope because we could see that God was working."

One of those miracles was Wayne's need to travel to a distant military hospital for treatment. Although being far from home had its downside, it also enabled them to cross paths with military friends who lived all over the world. Wayne was able to say good-bye to friends he otherwise would not have seen again. "If God was in control of all of these small things," Sally explains, "then surely He was in control of the larger ones. I still didn't understand it all, but I knew everything was in God's hands."

AS I GREW UP, I FASHIONED AN IMAGE OF GOD OUT OF BITS AND PIECES OF THE BIBLE.... TIME AND TIME AGAIN GOD HAS TAKEN ME THROUGH EXPERIENCES THAT CAUSED MY FALSE IMAGES OF HIM TO CRUMBLE SO I COULD SEE HIM AS HE REALLY IS. THE IMAGE I HOLD OF GOD HAS CHANGED DRAMATICALLY OVER THE PAST FIFTEEN YEARS, AND EVERY TIME I SEE HIM MORE CLEARLY, MY PERSPECTIVE CHANGES AND I AM CHANGED TO BECOME MORE LIKE HIM.

JAN DRAVECKY

WHEN PAIN DISTORTS OUR PERSPECTIVE

Lucy was no stranger to the deep valleys of suffering. She grew up without a father, and her mother died while Lucy was still a teenager. So Lucy knew what it was like to trudge along lonely, dark pathways of pain. As a counselor who works with people in crisis, she frequently had encouraged hurting people during their most desperate hours. Many times she had shared the promise of hope offered in one of her favorite passages, Psalm 34:18: “God is near to the brokenhearted.” So when she found herself overwhelmed by adversity, she counted on God to be close by her side every step of the way.

But God did not “show up” in the way Lucy expected. “When my world was falling apart, I kept saying to myself, *God will be there. He will carry me through. I know He will be with me.* Yet I couldn’t feel God’s presence. I kept looking for Him, but I couldn’t feel Him at all. I even began to wonder, *Was what I had been telling people true?* At the time, it didn’t feel true at all!”

When Lucy’s expectation that she would feel God’s nearness in the midst of her suffering shattered, her faith shattered, too. “My inability to feel God’s presence shook me to the foundation. It caused me to question everything I believed about God. Other people who go through suffering may never experience a disconnect with God, but I sure did.” Lucy’s experience is not unique. Job expressed a similar sentiment in the midst of his time of suffering: “When he passes me, I cannot see him; when he goes by, I cannot perceive him” (Job 9:11).

The depression and sorrow Lucy felt as a result of the difficult circumstances she was facing was painful enough, but the perception that God had abandoned her in her brokenheartedness was unbearable. In her journals during that time, Lucy asked the same question over and over again, “God, where are You? I don’t feel You. I don’t feel Your presence. I don’t feel.”

Eventually she realized that her lack of feeling was the key. “My emotions were so out of whack that I was dead to feeling. I couldn’t have seen or felt God if He were tapping me on the shoulder!” Part of the reason Lucy didn’t feel God’s presence was that she was severely depressed, so she sought treatment in order to restore her ability to feel.

Lucy had expected her feelings to match up with what she believed about God, and when that didn’t happen, she discovered something she

GOD PROMISES THAT HE
WILL NEVER LEAVE US OR
FORSAKE US, BUT HE
DOESN’T PROMISE THAT
WE WILL ALWAYS FEEL
HIS PRESENCE.

hadn't realized about faith. She needed to follow the instruction of 2 Corinthians 5:7 to "live by faith, not by sight." She needed to sink her faith roots down deep—beyond what she could feel, see or experience—into what she knew to be true.

Lucy also realized that if God had said He was near to the brokenhearted, He was—even if she felt disconnected from Him. So she renewed her efforts to reconnect with God by reading His Word. In her reading she came across Proverbs 4:23: "Be careful how you think; your life is shaped by your thoughts." Suddenly her disconnect with God made sense. "My

thoughts had been focused on everything but God. I had put God on 'retainer' because I was focusing my thoughts on sorting out my crisis. My thoughts focused on *Why? Why is this so bad? How did this happen? How can I fix it? When will it end?* When God didn't give me an immediate answer for my rapid-fire questions, I didn't stick around. I was running so fast, looking for answers, that I ran right past the One who had them all!"

When Lucy finally gave up trying to make sense out of her circumstances, when she stopped racing after answers, she found out that God had been with her all along. He showed up in a powerful and unmistakable way. He didn't give her a single answer. He gave her Himself—and that put everything in perspective. Lucy could echo the words of Job, who, at the end of his trial, when God finally broke through the fog and made His presence known to him, said: "I had heard of You only by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You. I take back everything I said" (Job 42:5-6 NLV).

I FELT LIKE I WAS ON ONE OF THOSE
OLD CARNIVAL RIDES WHERE YOU
SPIN SO FAST YOU'RE FLATTENED
AGAINST THE WALL, THEN THE
FLOOR DROPS DOWN AND YOU'RE
SUPPOSED TO STAY PLASTERED TO
THE WALL. THE PROBLEM WAS, I FELL
WITH THE FLOOR!

LUCY MCINTOSH

WHAT DO YOU SEE? *by Ron Mehl*

The peaceful world of King Jehoshaphat of Judah was shattered when a messenger suddenly appeared at his palace. Second Chronicles 20:1-30 describes his dire warnings about a massive army of Moabites, Ammonites, Syrians, and others marching toward Jerusalem. It also describes Jehoshaphat's response to the terrifying crisis.

Jehoshaphat had no advance notice of battle, nor did he have an army that was up to the challenge. The threat on his doorstep shook him to the core, but he didn't fly into a blind terror or tumble into despair. Instead, he immediately focused his attention on the God of his fathers. He humbly poured out his heart in prayer: "For we have no power against this great multitude that is coming against us; nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are upon You."

Now that's the prayer of a man who is completely overwhelmed, overmatched, over his head—and willing to admit it! Jehoshaphat knew who he was, and he knew who God was. He knew that God was the one with the perspective and the power to deal with the situation. He knew he needed to see what God had in mind.

The messenger told Jehoshaphat exactly what he was facing. He told him of the vast army of allied enemies and where he had last seen them. Jehoshaphat had certainly seen enemy armies and close combat before—in fact, he had probably been closer to the action than he ever wanted to be! In his mind's eye, he could picture it all: the dark mass of humanity, tens of thousands of grim-faced warriors marching toward Jerusalem.

That's a picture that could burn into your retinas and not let you see anything else. But Jehoshaphat needed a different perspective, so he deliberately turned his eyes toward heaven. What was true for Jehoshaphat is also true for us. When we see God and begin to pray, our perspective changes. We see things differently. So I think the question for you and me when we face impossible situations or difficult, frightening experiences, is, "What do I see?"

As I think back on the stories of great heroes in the Bible, I always ask myself, *What did they see?* What did David, just a young teenager

OUR PRAYER SHOULD ALWAYS BE, "LORD, HERE ARE THE FACTS AS BEST AS I CAN SEE. BUT I KNOW THAT MY VISION IS POOR AND DIM AND SOMETIMES I DON'T SEE VERY FAR AT ALL. LORD, OPEN MY EYES TO THE TRUTH."

RON MEHL

at the time, see when he stood against Goliath? Did he see a nine-foot, blaspheming monster in armor plating... *or did he see a huge God, who made Goliath seem vertically challenged?*

What did Daniel see when he was thrown into the lion's den? Did he see ravenous, man-eating lions... *or did he have a vast vision of his God that made the lions look like tabby cats?*

Obviously, David and Daniel and Jehoshaphat saw the enemy. But they also saw God. In order for God to do something, it is essential that we see both.

The fact is, when we see God, everything else seems smaller. The situation we face seems less intimidating and overwhelming. The odds against us don't seem to matter so much. If we focus on God, the obstacles will always shrink because of our changed perspective.

PASTOR RON MEHL battled cancer for 22 years. During that time he was intimately aware of our need for God's perspective as we endure times of suffering.

Adapted from pages 13, 21, 40, 45, 46 of *A Prayer that Moves Heaven*, by Ron Mehl, Multnomah Publishers, Inc. ©2002. Used by permission. Available through the Outreach of Hope.

APPEARANCES CAN BE DECEIVING *by Ron Mehl*

Early one morning, Gehazi, servant of the prophet Elisha, decided to take a walk around the city of Dothan. He was greatly dismayed to discover that during the night a huge army of troops and chariots had encircled the city. Terrified, he cried out to Elisha, "Oh, my lord, what shall we do?" (2 Kings 6:15).

The prophet calmly told him not to fear. He assured him that "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them" (2 Kings 6:16). How confusing those words must have seemed! After all, anyone could see there was no escaping the army that surrounded them. But Elisha saw something Gehazi could not; Elisha saw the situation from God's perspective, so he was not deceived by appearances.


Then Elisha prayed, "O LORD, open his eyes so he may see" (2 Kings 6:17). And suddenly Gehazi saw something he never imagined was there: the enemy was itself surrounded by the Lord's army of horses and chariots of fire! Like Gehazi, we need to remember that what we see isn't necessarily the whole truth. We need to see the truth from God's perspective.

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DIFFERENT.

JONI EARECKSON TADA