

A Proper Perspective

Preview

Have you ever expected a class to be really bad, but it turned out that it was actually pretty good? Or have you ever met someone who was much nicer than what their reputation led you to believe they would be? How about a time you read through a chapter in the Bible and gained a new, exciting insight? Every one of these examples is the result of a changed perspective. If you can change your perspective, you can change your outlook.

Praise

Even though we may not understand everything that's going on in our lives, we have a perspective that God gives us through His Word. Romans 8:28 says, "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose." All things—that's quite a perspective!

Parable

There was a man named Paul in the Bible who was an apostle. One of Paul's ultimate goals was to preach the good news of Jesus Christ in Rome. He eventually got there, but he arrived as a prisoner, having first been arrested in Palestine. Jews religious leaders had stirred up violent public emotions against Paul because of his stand that Jesus was resurrected from the dead. The Romans arrested Paul, even though they didn't think he had done anything wrong. They just didn't want the riled-up Jews to kill him. After several years of imprisonment in Palestine, Paul was no nearer being released, so he appealed to Caesar and was shipped out in the charge of a Roman centurion. In Rome, he was allowed to live in a rented house, but under constant guard, possibly even chained to a guard. He may have thought, God, I asked You to open a door for me to be a preacher and share the gospel in Rome, but I didn't expect it to turn out like this. How can I spread the gospel while I'm under house arrest? I imagine most of us would be just as frustrated.

However, Paul had a different perspective. We know this

because of what he wrote to one of the churches: "Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ" (Philippians 1:12–13, NIV). Wait a minute! How could he advance the gospel as a prisoner? The reason is that on the other side of his imprisonment people came to know why he was imprisoned—because of his stand for the gospel Christ.

Instead of moping and crying all day, Paul shared his testimony with every one of his guards. His goal was to reach some of the most powerful leaders in Rome with the gospel, and God gave him the opportunity to do just that. The gospel even penetrated Caesar's household: slaves, freedmen, and palace guards (Philippians 4:22). Paul couldn't necessarily change his circumstance, so he changed his perspective. He knew with confidence that God was working behind the scenes. He knew with confidence that all things work together for good because he loved God and was called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28).

Present

Paul was chained to a Roman guard. What are you chained to? What kind of situation is out of your control? Perhaps it's a family dynamic like a divorce. Maybe it's sickness. Maybe it's relationship challenges. When you go through difficult times in life, ask God to give you a fresh perspective so you can be productive in His kingdom. After you get through this difficult time, you will be able to look back and see how God was preparing you and growing you and using you.

Let's remember a couple of things:

Be on the lookout for reasons to praise God: "Let all that I am praise the Lord; may I never forget the good things he does for me. He forgives all my sins and heals all my diseases. He redeems me from death and crowns me with love and tender mercies. He fills my life with good things" (Psalm 103:2–5, NLT).

God has great plans for you: “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope” (Jeremiah 29:11, NKJV).

Practice

- What is God teaching you in this season of life?
- What situation or person requires a fresh perspective on your part with God’s help?
- Is there an example where you have had a perspective change?
- How can you encourage someone going through a difficult time?

Pray

Lord, we thank You that Your Word tells us that all things work together for the good of them who love you and are called according to your purpose. We know there are many things in our lives that aren’t good, but we trust in Your promise that good can come out of them. We ask today that You will help us to have a proper perspective so we can see things the way You see them. And help us to trust You completely for the things we cannot understand. We ask these things in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Plus

[Note: The following exercise also appeared in the lesson “Dealing with Stress.”]

Here’s a unique challenge I’d like each of you to consider. Divide a piece of paper in half. On the left side of the page, write down reasons you’re stressed. On the right side, write down reasons you’re blessed. You have to be honest for this exercise to work. The goal is to help you have a change of perspective.