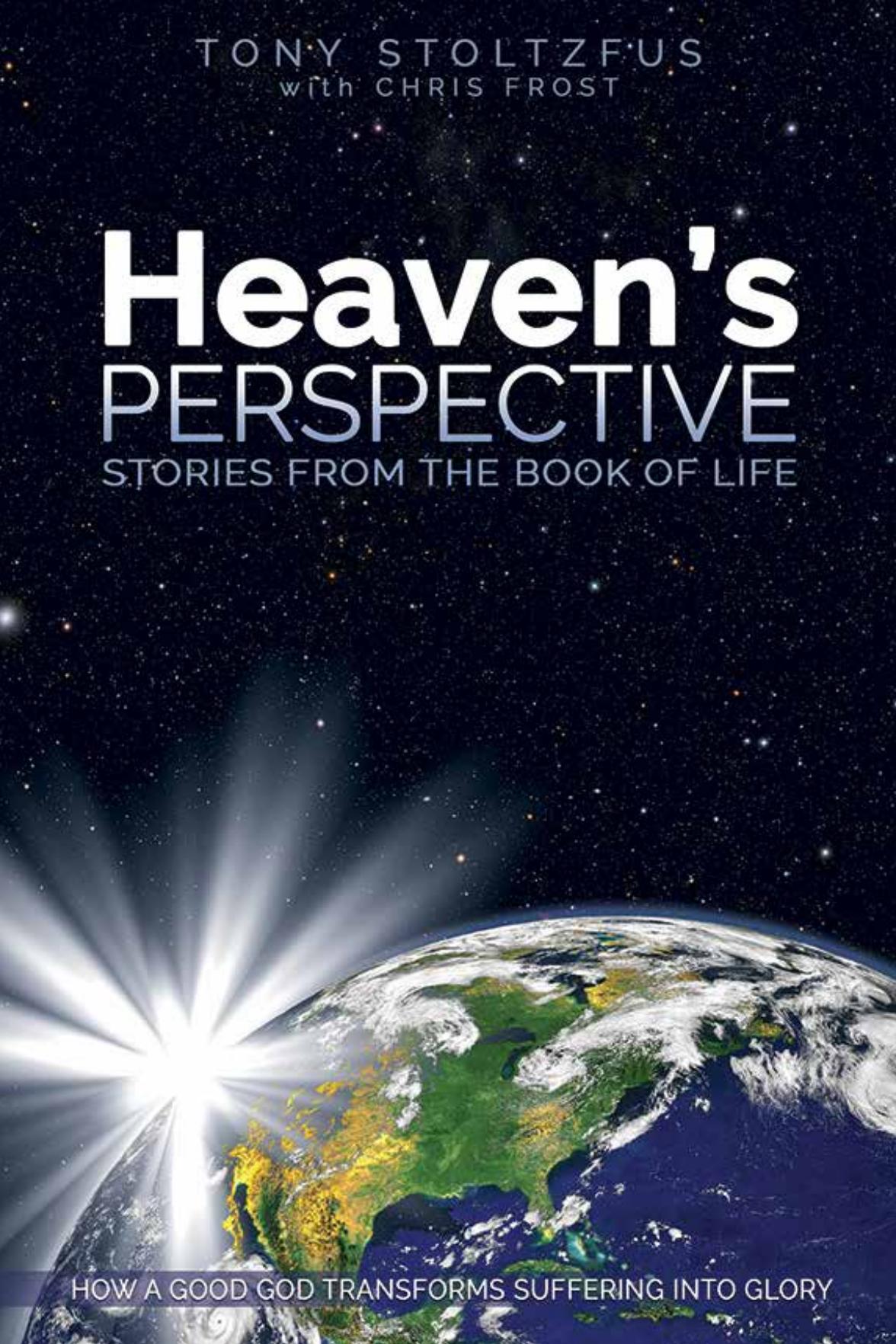


TONY STOLTZFUS
with CHRIS FROST

Heaven's PERSPECTIVE

STORIES FROM THE BOOK OF LIFE



HOW A GOOD GOD TRANSFORMS SUFFERING INTO GLORY

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Chapter 1:

GETTING PERSPECTIVE

“And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, by what they had done” (Rev. 20:12 RSV).

The story of your life is being written down in heaven. Each day a new page is penned in this *Book of You*, carefully prepared for that ultimate moment when it is read out in full before the throne of God. But get ready for a jaw-dropping surprise on the day you first hear heaven’s story (Jesus loves surprises!), because the way you remember your life is far different than what is written about you in heaven. Your own memories are like snapshots of a fading past, taken through the blurred lens of earthly vision. Even your best memories are tinged with the brokenness and pain of humanity. But the *Book of You* wipes away the dirt of earthly life and instead views you through the eyes of a Good Father, your Creator. You will look on yourself through this lens of glory and see yourself

just as he sees you—from heaven's perspective.

Reading THE BOOK OF YOU

What would it be like to settle into a comfortable chair with a cup of java, open heaven's book and absorb a God's-eye view of your life story? The first thing you'd notice is how much of your own tale you never knew. Instead of a hidden future of blank pages, you'd read right to the end of the *Book of You* and see how Jesus gloriously redeems all your fumbles and failures. Relationships you thought were irretrievably broken are somehow put better-than-right. Assignments you left unfinished in your time on earth miraculously appear in heaven fully completed—and fully rewarded. The redemption Jesus pulls off in your story is so utterly all-embracing that *every* word God spoke over you “will not return to [him] empty, but will... achieve the purpose for which [he] sent it” (Is. 55:11 NIV). Beyond hope, heaven has made all things well.

Flipping back toward the beginning of the book, you encounter whole chapters written before you were born, recounting how your Good Father arranged people and circumstances to bring you to life and shape you into the person he designed. The wonder of how he took the brokenness of those who came before you and used it to create the beauty of your destiny would leave you in awe. And each page of your history would be filled with Father's delight in little things long forgotten: a sunrise painted just for you, flowers blooming on your breakfast table, or a simple act of kindness worthy of an incredible eternal reward.

Another huge revelation would be the connections between your own destiny and the destinies of others. On earth, the only story you are truly familiar with is your own. But in the heaven's book you'll see deeply into how your calling is entwined with the destinies of hundreds of those around you, thousands who came before you, and generation upon generation of those who came after you. With astonishment, you'll perceive how every other life has touched yours, and fully understand how your life has touched all others. You'll know, to the same degree you've been fully known by your Father in heaven, the full impact of everything you've done. In that moment, every yearning you've ever felt for meaning and purpose in life will be filled to overflowing.

Each new insight from heaven will explode how you understand reality. For example, just reading a story written from a perspective outside of earth's time will be a mind-bender. On earth, you've lived trapped within time, chained to being present in just one moment, and then another, and then another. Time marches on, and you cannot change it or step out of it.

But time is not the master of eternity. Father is the great I AM, dwelling outside of created time, experiencing every individual moment of our time all at once. All of earth's history is swallowed up within his eternal now, so that all moments are this present moment to him. As you read the *Book of You* in Father's house, you are not recalling past events or looking forward to future times, but entering into and *living* each page now, present in each story you read. Heaven's books aren't a dead record of things past, but a living experience of what was and is and ever more shall be.

However, the best is yet to come. The most heart-stopping, worship-inducing shift will be experiencing how you impact the Author's heart. The *Book of You* doesn't merely recount the facts of what happened in your life. It is the record of the Author's thoughts toward you. When you see yourself through his eyes, you also get to actually *experience* Jesus' thoughts, emotions and desires as he watches your life unfold. You will step into the mind of Christ toward you and experience the tremendous pride he feels when he thinks of you. You'll be captivated by his deep longing to bring you home to him, and romanced by the intensity of his affections. Here on earth, you see him through a mirror dimly, even in your holiest moments grasping a mere sliver of his power, grace and extravagant love. In heaven, the full weight of his glory passes into your being as he shares his glory with you, transforming you forever. From that moment on, you will always, only see yourself as he sees you. Doubt and fear will die forever, and everything you ever desired will be yours, always.

Then your eyes open, and a flicker of disappointment grazes your heart as you peer around your familiar, darkened living room. You are still in your old chair, a cold cup of coffee on the side table and a Bible in your lap, still waiting for a Kingdom that is yet to come. You haven't died and gone to heaven—you've just been given

a fleeting taste of what's to come. Bummer.

A few deep breaths settle your racing heart, and you begin to make your peace with going back to normal life. But something is different. You suddenly realize that you actually brought a piece of heaven back with you. You have heaven's perspective. Until today, you've interpreted your life through the words of many voices: the voice of God, but also the disapproving words of your inner critic, the pain of your past wounds, the opinions of those around you, and your anxieties about the future. Until today, those voices have filled in much of the unknown in your story with dark doubts and nagging fears.

But now you've seen you through Jesus' eyes, and everything is illuminated by the light of heaven. You *know* the truth: that you are extravagantly loved by the only One that matters, and no failure or fear can pull you apart. Your Jesus is proud of you, satisfied with you, pleased as punch, and can hardly wait for you to come home to his house and read the rest of the God-story he's written just for you. He passionately longs for you to see him as he really is, in his glory, and for you to see yourself through his eyes.

Yes, you've seen heaven's perspective. You'll never look on life the same way again.

APeek INTO HEAVEN

What would happen if you could read your own biography today—the one written through Jesus' eyes? Could it be possible to actually get a sneak peek at the *Book of You* hidden in heaven? I believe you can.

This book is about seventeen ordinary people who got the chance to read a page of their stories from the books of heaven. It wasn't just any page—the curtain was pulled back on one of their most painful experiences in life. In the midst of real tragedy and deep loss, they witnessed the Author of life writing their redemption story. He dipped his pen in his own blood, crossed out every line of pain and grief, and wrote in joy and glory instead. These seventeen individuals read the final end of their story from the perspective of heaven. And they were transformed.

Kathy's journey (see chapter five) is a powerful example. Her life was turned upside down when her first child, Kait, was born se-

verely autistic and severely mentally disabled. Now 24, Kait is happy and physically active, but never developed the ability to care for herself or even to speak. Kathy went from a productive, recognized leadership position at her church to 24 years of full-time care for just one person—a person who is largely unable to give back. Her story is one of beautiful service, but also of pain. “That’s one of my deepest desires,” Kathy related to me tearfully. “I’d just like to hear my daughter say the word, ‘Momma.’”

But then heaven spoke. Kathy discovered how a good God took that meaningless suffering and employed it to deepen the love between her and her daughter, so their relationship in heaven would be deeper and more satisfying than it ever would have been had evil not tried to interfere. She saw redemption triumph over that physical disability, and understood how heaven would put all things better than right at the end. In heaven, Kathy will hear a lifetime’s-worth of those words she’s longed to hear, spoken by the daughter she has loved so well for so little in return.

“Having my story reframed from heaven’s perspective was deeply impacting and life-altering,” Kathy affirms. “My heart and head aligned. It left me feeling known, accepted and empowered.”

The Power OF PERSPECTIVE

However, reading her story in heaven’s book didn’t change a single thing about Kathy’s circumstances. Knowing the God-story doesn’t alter your outward situation at all. So how can something be life-changing without bringing any concrete change to your life?

The past cannot change, but what *does* change is our perspective: what we believe about what happened. Changing the belief system we use to look at our history makes an enormous difference. As Natalie puts it, “I was so caught up in my ‘wrong’ decisions in my life that I couldn’t see that God was with me in them. I saw him working his purpose for my life, but I still lived in the sense of right and wrong. But now I am free!”

I’ve coached hundreds of leaders through their most difficult moments in life, and I’ve come to an important conclusion:

Much of your pain (or your peace) comes from your perspective.

What you believe alters what you experience. The death of your child is a terrible thing—that pain is real. But when you believe it is because God is punishing you, it hurts that much more. Losing a limb is painful physically and emotionally, but if you believe it makes you less of a person, that hurt will remain long after the physical pain fades. Getting fired from your job isn't fun, but when you are afraid it will mean losing everything you've worked so hard to save over the last 20 years, unemployment becomes that much more ominous.

But now look from a different perspective: what if you knew that two weeks from now you'd get a great job offer, for much more than you are making now? Or even better, what if you fully believed that leaving this position was the thing that would launch you into your destiny? Would things still seem so grim? No! In fact, you might even take a family vacation and *enjoy* your two weeks off instead of worrying the entire time.

Perspective is a powerful thing. And getting a window into how God sees your life unfolding can radically change how you experience your situation.

Learning THROUGH STORY

So how do we learn to see from heaven's perspective? New perspective means new beliefs. Our brains need to be rewired to believe differently about who God is and how he works in our lives. To displace the religious pictures of an angry, distant God we picked up along the way, we'll need to experience a Good Father who loves us lavishly and longs to be good to us.

Experience is the key. Our core beliefs don't form through rational thought or reading words on a page, but through experience. *So to change those beliefs, we have to have different experiences.*

Let me demonstrate. Pick up a pen or pencil off your desk and hold it out in front of you. What will happen if you let go of it? We all know: it will fall to the ground due to the force of gravity. Okay, so here's the important question: where did you learn that? It wasn't in school. Scientists have discovered that babies understand that unsupported objects will fall at only a few months old. You learn about gravity by *experiencing* it. Only much later do you figure out how to explain what you've observed. In fact, one way to think about be-

iefs is that they are *the explanations we develop for our experiences*.

Our brains work the same way when it comes to God: what we believe is formed much more by our experiences than our theological explanations. For example, you may know about the love of God from reading Scripture, but still find yourself feeling afraid that he'll punish or reject you if you screw up. Your gut-level beliefs line up much more with how you experienced punishment and grace in the past than they do with what you've read.

Still don't believe me? Here's a great way to experience firsthand where beliefs come from. (Note: you have to actually put yourself into this and *do this exercise* to get the point.) First, think of an area of your life you are not proud of, something about you that needs to change, or a place where you feel you are really falling short. Jot it down below:

Did you write something down? Good. The next step is to pray this prayer: "Father, send me the circumstances I need to change in this area." I'll give you a moment to do it.

The exercise here is not praying that prayer—it is observing what happens inside you when you are asked to do it. So, what emotions did you experience in that moment?

I've done this exercise repeatedly with groups of mature Christian leaders, and the near-universal reaction is fear—even panic or terror. Why? Because our interpretation of our past experiences (our belief) is this: "If I ask God to send me the circumstances I need to change, they'll be bad ones." In our head (our rational brains) we know God is good. It says so in scripture. However, the part of us that learns by experience (our emotional brains) believes the opposite. When the pressure is on, how we see God is determined more by our experiences (and what we believe about them) than by our Bible knowledge.

Since your beliefs are formed by experiences, they change when you have different experiences. So the best way to learn to see from heaven's perspective is to experience it in your own life. The next best way is to watch God at work in the lives of others. So let's dive

into a story!

Cami is a friend and co-worker whose story is a good example of this perspective shift. Her tale (like all those in the book) is presented in three parts:

1. Cami's story of her painful experience seen through her own eyes.
2. The God-story, told by Jesus from heaven's perspective.
3. Finally, Cami's account of how experiencing heaven's perspective impacted her life.

As you absorb her story, pay attention to how God employs broken vessels to bring his wholeness into her life.

Cami's STORY

Meet Cami and you'll see that her happy, effervescent energy spills over all around her. You'd never know she spent the first several decades of her life under repressive communist rule in Romania. Gymnastics was her life until she was 14, when the State suddenly removed her coach and shut down the program, leaving her distraught and completely lost. It was the first of a series of traumatic incidents that led her to close her heart to God and other people, until she met the great heart-opener, Jesus.

"I grew up in an Orthodox church," Cami recalls. "I didn't know the loving God, only the God that would punish me if I did something wrong. I was afraid of him. That fear stayed in my life even after I immigrated to the United States in 2002.

"Six or seven years ago, a friend invited me to a charismatic church. I thought God would be pissed at me if I went—like I was betraying the God I knew by going to a different church—so I kept putting her off. She pursued me for years, just kept asking and asking, so I finally went just to get rid of her. They worshipped with hands up, singing and dancing. I had never seen anything like that in the Orthodox church, where everything was very strict and in the service nobody moved. Part of me wanted to run out of this strange, new place, but my spirit was extremely happy—something came alive inside me. So I kept going back. One Sunday someone preached about what it means to have Jesus in your heart, and I

went up and rededicated my heart to Jesus. I had been running away from my emotions for years, but now I could not stop crying. I cried day and night for months. I still cry in worship to this day.

“But it was a long journey to that point of reopening my heart. After gymnastics ended I rebelled and ran away from home for several months. I married my first husband basically thinking of it as revenge toward my dad, to show him that he couldn’t control me and I could do whatever I wanted.

“My second marriage started off better but got worse and worse over time. It was just after my first divorce. I was not attracted to him at first; he was attracted to me. He kept calling and calling. He called me every day when he was in the country. He was one of those guys that people are drawn to—he was very charismatic, very intelligent—and we could talk for hours. But I didn’t really want to be with him. It wasn’t love. I just had compassion for him because he was a train wreck.

“When we first met, the compassionate part of me kicked in as he talked about losing his mother. He had all these hurts from his dad, he didn’t really have friends—he was grieving and I was his counselor. He kept saying that I was his medicine.

“Since I was hurt in the same way, it gave me someone to talk to as well. The way he reacted made me feel valued. I thought, ‘I *am* good for something. I am good at something with guys. I’m not completely rejected.’ Comforting him gave me comfort. With two wounded people... I guess my needs will get filled in one way or the other, in a healthy way or unhealthy way.

“We were together for eight years and married for three. After we got married in Romania, I came to the U.S. where he was living. When I got off the plane and saw him waiting, I thought, ‘This is a stranger. What am I doing here?’ Things went south from there.

“I discovered that he was having trouble with drugs. He was very good at hiding. These awful guys kept coming to collect money from me, and I got scared. There was a lot of threatening and intimidation—and I was paralyzed by fear. He threatened to write to Homeland Security and report me, and I didn’t want to be in trouble with the government. I kept having to call 9-1-1 about him yelling and fighting and throwing stuff. Finally, I mustered up the guts to talk to an attorney about filing for divorce.

“A cop eventually told me I really needed to get out of there and that to be safe, I would have to leave the house until the divorce was final. So I left for four months and lost the house. After that second divorce, I completely withdrew from people. I didn't even realize I was in pain. I was just shut down.

“I guess my biggest question now to God in all of this is, ‘What am I doing wrong that these things keep happening to me? And why did I not see the red flags?’

“I got entangled in a controlling relationship again right after I got saved. There was this girl at church who was very wounded and very prophetic, and she used her gift to manipulate me. I got so wrapped up in helping her that I was basically a puppet. I bought food for her and did all these things for her. I even gave her over \$10,000.

“She was the first girl I opened up to after I got saved and came out of hiding. It took me two years to warm up to her and actually become friends. At first, I would talk for two minutes and then withdraw. At that point, I still wasn't interested in connecting with humans ever again. I didn't have friends at all, but she was the one that kept insisting and trying to connect. I finally allowed her in, and even invited her to my house, which was huge because my house was my sanctuary. It was a big thing for me to go on a spiritual quest with people, and even bigger to allow her into my heart.

“She had seven kids and all of them were autistic. The younger ones were affected by it the most. Because she had just gotten miraculously healed of her own Asperger's and autism, she didn't know how to live as an adult. She would come to me and ask about the basics—how to eat, how to use utensils, getting a phone, or balancing your checkbook. I allowed her to be dependent on me because she was a baby in a 38-year-old body, and my compassionate side wanted to help. I had no boundaries. If she would call me at 2:00 am, I would get up and go help her. I was in awe of her ability to hear God speak, so she could use that on me.

“It's funny: I could not stand kids before meeting her. I had had two abortions, and ever since the second abortion I was terrified by kids. If I saw one coming, I would run the other way. But her kids would love me and love me and love me. As soon as I would get to the house they would come running to hug me, play with me,

and tell me they loved me. The genuine love that came from them was very new to me. I had never experienced somebody loving me without an agenda before. You could count on your two hands the number of times I said ‘I love you’ to my two husbands. I just did it because I was supposed to—I didn’t know what it really meant.

“In 2012 I heard an actual, audible voice for the first time—at work!—and God told me to go to this ministry school in California. I said, ‘Yeah, right.’ That place seemed so spiritual and I wasn’t. I couldn’t imagine how I could ever fit in. But I did go, still talking to my friend by phone every day. It was when I started doing inner healing sessions that it slowly became obvious how much that was a controlling relationship. When I began talking to her about setting healthy relational boundaries, ‘click!’ She hung up on me. Then she started talking bad about me to people I was in class with. People would come to me and say, ‘I heard you did such and such.’ And I would reply, ‘Do you really think I would do that?’ Then later they would find out the truth and come and apologize.

“My dogs—I call them ‘the boys’—were a big part of my life during that journey. I have had them for so long and they have brought constant love and acceptance to me. I have lots of short-term friends but haven’t had long-term ones. But the boys have always been there. My dogs represent my place in the world.”



Cami, darling,

We are going to have so much fun when you meet me up here and get to see the movie of your life that's produced in heaven! So much of what I have done to heal you is unusual and custom-made for your journey—you are truly one-of-a-kind. The angels keep coming back to watch the process, just so they can ooh and aah at seeing me operate in new and amazing ways and see your heart transform into my image. I get a lot of satisfaction out of working together with you!

I am very proud of how Jesus wove autism and Asperger's syndrome into your healing process. You pretty much had a social disorder like that yourself—you had completely withdrawn from people and vowed not to open your heart to them again. So when my Son proposed using friends with social disorders to heal your autism of the heart—perfect! What an elegant solution, and what a hoot! I just loved watching those little children—children that Satan believed he had marred and damaged—love you so effortlessly and unconditionally. What power there is in love! We laughed in pure joy. The elegance of heaven is that redemption takes everything the enemy attempts to destroy and grows flowers from it instead.

You must understand—connections like this that seem tenuous and obscure to you are seen by every eye and heard by every ear in the spirit realm. The song of redemption, of which your life is a part, is written on the sky and sounded from every loudspeaker in heaven. So when my Son reached out his wounded hand to heal you, and employed children carrying the wound of autism to love you unconditionally, and used seeing their wounds to reactivate the well of compassion in you, it galvanized every inhabitant of heaven! The angels and the saints gathered in awe to see the magnificent symmetry of how I brought healing from woundedness and good from evil on so many levels at once. And every denizen of hell understood that their terrible end had been brought one day closer.

On earth you know in part, but in heaven my purpose is clearly seen. Your life is shot through with my purpose to do good to you. No evil and no mistake or failure on your part can thwart it.

Daughter, do not take away as your lesson that the relationship with your friend failed and something must have gone wrong. It did not fail! It broke open the locked

doorway to your heart—a tremendous redemptive work! Instead, look with awe at how I can take the raw material of broken, unhealthy, hurting, manipulative people and still flawlessly execute amazing plans with them.

Your friend will be rewarded with great credit in heaven for what she did for you. You will be admired and celebrated for what you did for her. And all the hurt and manipulation will be wiped away, as if it never happened. You two are great friends up here, sharing freely in the glory you helped build in each other's lives. Be comforted! My purposes never fail, and heaven truly makes all things well.

And think of your “boys”—another of my Son's creative miracles. When your wounded heart could not receive from people, I used dogs to fill your deep desires for comfort, belonging and companionship. You love your boys for what they are, because all of my creation deserves to be loved. But you also love them because through them I touched your heart. They are my gift to you, and will continue to be my gift. But now, as you perceive how Jesus has come to you through them, turn your heart toward him and he will give you all your desire to the full. Desire fulfilled doesn't lessen love, but increases it. You are going to have plenty of love for both me and the boys.

Cami, you have done so, so well in your journey to me! You have run halfway into my arms already. And I will never stop running to you and never stop making your heart come alive. It is my joy, my pleasure and my crown to do it. I love you so!

With delight,

Your Father in Heaven



The OUTCOME

“I had no clue back in the days when I was shut down that I was socially autistic,” Cami states seriously. “When I read the story, though, it made complete sense to me. I was present physically with people, but emotionally I was often totally withdrawn. The creativity of Jesus to use autistic kids to love me—that blew me away completely! I would never have thought of doing that in a million years! I am in awe of how he chose to break through to my heart.

“Another thing that impacted me deeply was the idea that he used children, the very ones I had been afraid of. Back then it was a big turning point for me to go from being resistant to kids to allowing myself to experience them.

“The story took the concept of God taking what was bad (what the enemy tried to mar and destroy, like in those kids) and turning it to good—that became much more real to me. God really, really is still using his *all* of his creation to accomplish his purposes. Even after the enemy tried to steal it away, the Lord still perfectly employs it all in his plan—even the dogs! That was one of the biggest perspective shifts I got from the story.

“When I read about ‘the boys,’ that touched me deeply. All along I thought it was me taking care of them, but it was actually God using them to get to my heart! It was me who needed the boys, not the boys who needed me. Seeing how the Lord provided for my heart through them in such an unexpected way reinforces for me that the matters of the heart are actually far more important than anything else. Over the last few years I went from, ‘I just care about tasks,’ to ‘I am looking at the people in the process and paying more attention to them than what is accomplished.’ I always, always used to say, ‘I am not a people person.’ But now my whole desire is to see people walk in wholeness, more than anything else.”

Contact Cami at Cami@HeavensPerspective.com.

Heaven's PERSPECTIVE

From a human perspective, Cami's life story is one of surviving mistakes, failures and great loss. When we look with human eyes, we tend to focus on what happened to her and how she felt about it. Heaven's perspective, by contrast, is about how *God* felt about

what happened to Cami, and what he did to bring life to her places of brokenness. It shines a light on how he has been working behind the scenes to bring life out of death and make what was broken whole. Heaven's perspective shows off God's love as relentlessly hopeful, irresistibly good and masterfully strategic.

Seeing like heaven sees first of all requires soaking ourselves in that view of God. We must believe he is for us, he redeems all things for our good, and he is constantly growing us up into him. The belief system we hold is one of the three main components of heaven's perspective:

1. **Focus:** What is the main thing in this story?
2. **Beliefs:** What is the belief system you see life through?
3. **Connection:** Who writes your story and what is your relationship with him?

What's THE FOCUS?

Let's look first at focus. Pain has a way of getting your attention. When you suffer deeply, it is hard to focus on anything else...



Get THE BOOK

The full *Heaven's Perspective* book includes the rest of Chapter 1, plus seventeen more powerful stories like Cami's and an in-depth look at a perspective change tool called *The Seven Frames*. Get it direct from the author here:

Coach22 Bookstore
www.Coach22.com

You can also find it on Amazon, Kindle or iBooks.

Get Your STORY WRITTEN

Would you like to have **your** story rewritten from heaven's perspective? Visit www.HeavensPerspective.com to find out how!