



Seeing

as

Jesus  
Sees

HOW A NEW PERSPECTIVE CAN  
DEFEAT THE DARKNESS AND AWAKEN JOY

ALAN WRIGHT

# Seeing as Jesus Sees

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DEFEAT THE DARKNESS AND AWAKEN JOY

**ALAN WRIGHT**



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# Introduction

*Jesus, how do You see this?*

Some years ago, I started praying that little prayer throughout the day, and it has changed everything.

Though most people focus on *doing*, it is *seeing* that matters. How we see ourselves, others, and the world shapes how we think, feel, and behave.

When we see things wrongly, it wreaks havoc in our relationships and wrecks our peace. And when we miss seeing the grace all around us, it snuffs out wonder and joy.

We don't have to wander around duped and distracted. Jesus promised, "Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness" (John 8:12 NIV). When we see like Jesus, we experience His peace and joy.

Some years ago, my friend mentioned that he wished there were a book about what Jesus sees—about *how* Jesus sees things. I not only couldn't find such a book, but I also realized how little attention I'd given to that profound question. That's when I began asking Jesus for His eyes throughout the day. That little prayer—*Jesus, how do You see this?*—is brief enough for a single breath but deep enough to unveil glory.

## Instant, Effortless Transformation

A businessman took his seat on a New York subway, exhaled, and unfurled his newspaper. Suddenly, three rambunctious boys boarded and broke his hopes of a tranquil ride. The unruly kids bounced about loudly, bumping into passengers, grabbing at their papers.

Only one thing irritated the businessman more than the uncontrolled kids—the passive father, who sat motionless. Inattentive. Unconcerned.

*Ugh, the businessman brooded. Doesn't this father care that his children are bothering everyone?*

Put yourself in the commuter's shoes. How would you feel? *This is so irritating. This is the problem with the world today—no one cares about others.*

Imagine the businessman's conclusions. *What a bad parent. So insensitive. How can he just sit there? I sure would do a better job if they were my kids.*

Imagine his misery. *This is going to be a horrible train ride.*

As the kids' rude behavior continued, the businessman's patience expired. He had to say something. "Uh, excuse me, sir, your children are really disturbing a lot of people. I wonder if you shouldn't control them more?"

As if emerging from a fog, the father responded quietly and apologetically, "Oh, you're right. I guess I should do something about it. We just came from the hospital where their mother died about an hour ago. I don't know what to think, and I guess they don't know how to handle it either."

Gulp.

The businessman might have longed to swallow back his words and melt into his seat. But something far more wonderful happened, something almost miraculous. His frustration and stress evaporated, and his heart began spilling over with authentic compassion for the bereaved man.

“Oh, I’m so sorry. What can I do to help?” he said, and he meant it.

That businessman was the well-known author of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey, who summarized the power of seeing a scene with new eyes: “Everything changed in an instant.”<sup>1</sup>

Impatience became kindness.

Frustration became compassion.

Judgment became mercy.

Bitterness became gratitude.

*Everything changed in an instant.*

## But Now I See

There’s almost no limit to how much we can change when our eyes are opened.

I think of the depressed disciples moping down the dusty road to Emmaus on the first Easter, unaware of the miracle of the empty tomb. When the risen Messiah mysteriously appeared alongside them, the oblivious disciples “stood still, looking sad” (Luke 24:17) because “their eyes were kept from recognizing him” (v. 16). But after a Bible study and a meal with Jesus, “their eyes were opened” (v. 31), and *everything changed in an instant*. When they realized that the Lord wasn’t dead in a grave but alive in their midst, their depression evaporated in a flash. Joy rushed into their hearts, and they sprinted to tell others what they’d seen.

Seeing things anew through Jesus’ eyes can change any of us like that—in an instant. And because revelation is a gift from Jesus, it changes us effortlessly. It’s grace at work when we see as Jesus sees. Truth is a gift that sets us free (see John 8:32).

The old hymn is right—it is only by “amazing grace” that I once “was blind, but now I see.”

Don’t you yearn for that sort of eye-opening grace? Aren’t you tired of trying to live better by your own strength?



Whether we identify with a frustrated businessman on a subway or despondent disciples on a lonely road, no amount of self-talk or willpower can change us if we are seeing things incorrectly. Our good intentions and vows to be better don't make us better. Telling ourselves that we "ought" to be more patient with unruly kids on a train will never make us more long-suffering, and vowing to be less discouraged will never make us less depressed.

Jesus offers a better way. He is the "light of the world" (John 8:12) who came to give "sight to the blind" (Luke 4:18).

### ***Jesus, How Do You See This?***

Seeing is what matters. *What* we see. *How* we see. *If* we see.

If a mom sees her spaghetti-splattered two-year-old as a messy miracle from God, she'll smile as she mops up the sauce. If she sees the toddler as an inconvenient nuisance, she'll shame as she scrubs. If a husband sees his wife as a heavenly gift, he'll adore her. If he sees her as a tiresome anchor, he'll avoid her. If a young man sees his life as valuable and important, he'll take care of himself and try to make a difference every day. If he sees himself as worthless and purposeless, he'll recklessly try to mask his pain or just give up altogether.

The impatient mother, the emotionally distant husband, and the unmotivated man might *wish* that they were more caring or loving or energized, and they might try hard to feel differently or develop new behaviors. But not much will change until they begin to *see* everything differently.

For Christians who want to grow spiritually, it seems natural to ask, "What would Jesus do?" But that's the wrong question for the same reason that trying to live by the law is the wrong pursuit—it's powerless. Trying to be a more patient mother or a more loving husband or a more motivated young man is noble, but it's futile and exhausting.

To want Jesus' eyes is to welcome a massive shift of focus. Instead of grabbing for happiness by doing more or getting more, we let joy arise by seeing what we've been missing or misunderstanding.

Years ago, my middle brother, Mark, and I met to play a round of golf and were teamed up with a third player we had never met. Mark and I weren't playing very well, but we seemed like Tiger Woods and Phil Mickelson compared to the stranger. He was terrible. He hit balls into the water and woods and bunkers—but he was jubilant. He was far happier than we were. Finally, my brother had to ask.

“You might not be playing the best golf ever,” Mark the Brave said, “but you sure seem happy.”

“Oh, I am!” the man exclaimed. “I just came from the doctor. They thought it was advanced cancer, but the report is benign. It's so good just to be out here playing.”

He hit a ball in every lake and every forest the rest of the day and had the best time I've ever seen a golfer have.

What if you are only one revelation away from a new kind of joy that transcends your circumstances?

As we'll discover, life through Jesus' eyes isn't a mere pleasantry—it is a gateway to power over the darkness. Miracles happen when we see as Jesus does. Do you yearn for more of God's supernatural power at work in and through you?

## **Admitting Our Nearsightedness**

Because there's so much at stake, the devil has, from the beginning, sought to blind us spiritually. The enemy will use anything available to deceive us, to distort our view.

I loved my TV newsman dad, who I remember holding me as a toddler in the Myrtle Beach surf during childhood summer vacations. I remember the scratchy feel of his stubbly vacation face as he held me tight in the taller waves. I remember feeling

proud that the coach of my peewee football team was my dad. I remember the spy adventure stories he crafted for my brothers and me at bedtime.

But I also remember watching him sit in his green recliner and drink beer instead of spending time with me. I remember worrying about the prospect of a friend coming over and seeing my dad at his worst. I didn't know that his problem was marring my perspective. As a child, I saw my life through the lens I had. My vision of authentic value was distorted: *I am less important to Dad than the alcohol.* My life vision was marred: *I should be more than I am, then I will be noticed . . . then he will be proud.*

To pray, *Jesus, how do You see this?* is to admit that sin—our own and others'—has marred our vision.

When I'm honest with myself, I admit that for too much of my life, I was held back by a lens of shame that convinced me I had to do more and be more to be fully loved. I was too hasty in my judgment of others. I was too quick to feel angry or despairing about the idolatrous, lost world.

What about you? Where do you need fresh vision in your life?

I hope you'll feel safe in these pages and be honest with yourself. What might have impaired your perception of life? A deep disappointment? A shaming parent? A humiliating defeat? A great grief? A gradual abandonment? A woeful regret?

Do you struggle sometimes to believe God really loves you and has a beautiful plan for your life? What if you saw your life from Jesus' perspective? Imagine your self-imposed limits melting away through the lens of Jesus' perfect love.

Do you strive too much in your relationships—trying hard to change yourself or to get someone else to change? What would happen if you could let go of judgmental perceptions rooted in old hurts and begin seeing your mate or your friend or your coworker through the Savior's eyes?

And what about your fears and frustrations with this morally broken world? Are you sick and tired of dwelling on bad news? Wouldn't it be liberating to see the world through Christ's eyes of hope rather than despair?

## Meet Your Tour Guide

Before we had kids, wonder-full Anne convinced me to break open the piggy bank and take a whirlwind tour of Europe on a budget. A lot of the museums and archaeological sites cost little or nothing to visit, but without a tour guide, we felt like we were just looking at old rocks and broken bowls. Without someone who knew the history and significance of the sites, we were *looking at* treasures but not *seeing* them.

People with tour guides were different. We saw them nodding, gasping in awe, and pointing at old rocks and buildings. Unfortunately, the tour guides were pricey, and I was already in a bad mood about the amount of money we were spending. So we developed a sneaky habit.

We'd find a group being dazzled by their articulate tour guide, and we'd wander in their direction. Slowly, we'd inch toward the group, pretending we were looking at the artifacts on our own. Gradually, we'd lean in closer until, finally, we were hearing all the good stuff and gawking and gasping with fascination like the paying tourists.

I have some beautiful stories to tell and some miraculous sights to show you, but I'm not your ultimate tour guide in the pages ahead—Jesus is. When we become hungry for His perspective on everything, we're like curious tourists looking for revelation. When we want Jesus' revelatory insights, we start posturing our hearts in His direction. When we practice praying, *Jesus, how do You see this?*, we are leaning in to connect with Him and see as He sees.

## **Learning to See as Jesus Sees**

The best way to learn to see as Jesus sees is by walking side by side with Him. That’s why the chapters ahead offer a different sort of Bible study. We won’t study Jesus’ teachings from a distance. We’ll look at everyday life through His eyes. We’ll let our imaginations transport us to the hillsides of Galilee, the cliffsides of Caesarea, and the courtyards of Jerusalem, where we will draw near to Jesus and peer through His eyes. I want us to experience Jesus’ vision in the Gospels because, as we look through His eyes in the stories of Scripture, we’re training our hearts to look at life through a whole new lens.

In addition to showing you a new way of reading the Bible, I also will show you how spiritual unveilings follow a pattern much like the experience of the Emmaus Road disciples. Though spiritual vision is a gift, we certainly can create the environment for Jesus to do His eye-opening work in us.

Like the Emmaus Road disciples, who “stood still” when Jesus began speaking to them (Luke 24:17), we can learn to pause in the midst of life’s worries. We need a spiritual tool that helps us pause, at least for a moment, when life comes fast and hard. The path to new spiritual eyes starts with stopping amid life’s swirling distractions.

Like those despondent disciples who joined with Jesus for a meal, we can learn to connect to Christ spiritually, attuning our hearts to His. Our breath prayer is addressed to Jesus because it focuses us on the author and finisher of our faith. To address our request to Jesus is to become Christ-centered and to invoke the power of His redemptive work that has secured us a share in “the mind of Christ” (1 Cor. 2:16).

After we pause and connect to Christ, this profound little prayer helps us turn, as if shoulder to shoulder with the Savior, to look in the direction He is looking, to see as He is seeing. When we look at life through the truth of the resurrection, we

become like those Emmaus Road disciples who suddenly saw everything in a whole new light. Turning and looking with Jesus is a daring and thrilling inward pivot that poises the eyes of our hearts to be enlightened.

Pause. Connect. Look.

This pattern is at the heart of revelatory experiences. Abraham paused from his journey to experience God's blessing and look to the stars to see the number of his descendants. Moses paused from tending sheep to connect to a voice from a burning bush and watch his staff turn into a snake. Weary Galilean fishermen paused from washing their nets to hear from Jesus and see a new school of fish in the deep.

Practicing this simple, powerful little prayer—*Jesus, how do You see this?*—by no means replaces the classic spiritual disciplines like intercession, worship, meditation, fellowship, and Bible study. But this simple, new spiritual practice of asking Jesus for His eyes causes us to slow down, link our hearts to Christ's, and expect revelation from God.

## **You Gotta See This!**

We'll discover how Jesus can correct blurry vision through my own candid journey from shame-clouded vision to unveiled glory and grace. But I'll also introduce you to a beautiful teenage girl whose life hangs in the balance after a blinding demonic attack. I won't give the devil a platform, but I will expose hell's game plan. And we'll draw near to Simon Peter, Jesus' most fun and fickle disciple, as Christ opens his eyes to truth and wonder.

We'll discover new lenses for the eyes of our hearts, but this book is about more than correcting spiritual nearsightedness—it's also about seeing all the wonder we've been missing!

There's a big difference between reading a brochure about the Grand Canyon and seeing it with our own eyes. Jesus wants

to show us the canyon of His grace. He yearns to fill us with His Spirit and show us the beauty He sees.

That's why He was eager to take the cross, bear our sin, and make us right with God. He longed to send His own Spirit, promising, "He will guide you into all the truth" (John 16:13). It's why He inspired Paul to pray, "Having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe" (Eph. 1:18–19). God delights to open our eyes to wonder.

When we see something that makes us feel alive, don't we want those we love to see it too?

When we vacation at the beach, my wife likes to start unpacking immediately, but I like to throw off my shoes, dig my toes into the dunes, and greet the surf as if embracing an old friend. A few years ago, we arrived at the beach at sunset, and the horizon over the western end of Ocean Isle was on fire with red streaks and orange swirls that turned the sand to gold and made the sea glow amber. I stood there for a moment, my breath taken, cheering God's handiwork. Then, urgently, I sprinted inside and beckoned my beloved.

"Anne, you have to see this sunset! It's glorious!"

"OK," she said. "I'll be there in a little while. Let me unload these groceries."

"All right, but come quick," I yelled as I dashed out the back door to watch God's fireworks from the deck.

She didn't come.

Rushing back inside, I cried louder, "Anne, sweetie, come now—sunsets don't last. You'll regret missing this one. The milk and eggs and suitcases can wait. Please, honey, come. PLEASE!"

My pleading worked. Soon, I was holding hands with wonder-full Anne in the dunes and staring at the sky as the

## *Introduction*

sea oats danced and the palm trees clapped in appreciation of God's artistry. And I was happier because the one I love was seeing the wonder with me.

I think Jesus invites us into discipleship the way I invited my wife into the sunset. "Come and you will see," He says (John 1:39). Can you feel the Savior's excitement? He has beauty to share!

"Behold what I behold," Jesus says. "Look through My eyes. See what's real, what's important, what's beautiful . . . and discover joy in the vision. Take My hand. Let Me show you what you've been missing."



**PART ONE**

# **Unseeing**

# 1

## MISPERCEIVING

### *Seeing the Dangers of Spiritual Blindness*

It's impossible to overstate the dangers of seeing ourselves, others, and the world incorrectly.

The blurring of our spiritual vision is hell's deliberate, diabolical strategy designed to rob us of wonder, send us down dead-end roads, and ruin our relationships. From a wrong, distorted perspective, we can feel like failures, curse our kids, judge people we don't know, and lose hope for life.

Of course, none of us believes a lie on purpose. It's illogical. The only reason any of us believes a lie is because we think it's true.

Once we believe a lie, it distorts everything. No amount of behavioral modification or psychological empathy can fix us. That's why the spiritual battle is a fight for our vision. Jesus called the devil "the father of lies" (John 8:44) because his aim is to smear our vision.

For our eyes to be opened to new wonders, we first need to expose the eye-blurring strategies of hell. How did we wind up so deceived?

## Meeting Joy

I'll call her by her middle name, Joy. It's fitting because, when I met the thirteen-year-old in 2009, I saw joy dancing in her eyes. I met her dad, Richard, first at a conference, and I connected with his spiritually hungry soul. Meeting Joy's mom, Jenna, was like meeting sunshine. She was vibrant and passionate for all things Jesus. When Richard and Jenna and their four girls joined our fellowship, we loved them all.

But Joy, the firstborn, was special. I don't remember meeting a middle schooler more pure, selfless, or delightful. Joy loved music and horses and sports and art and people. Mostly, she loved God, and she wanted to love Him even more.

Joy's dad was a strong, smart, devoted Christian businessman who had lost a lot in the 2008 recession out West and had moved his family to North Carolina to start afresh. One night at our small Wednesday night Encounter worship gathering, my wife and I prayed for Richard. I placed a hand on his head and Anne placed a hand on his shoulder, and we asked the Lord to fill Richard with healing grace and power in the Holy Spirit. We sensed the presence of God, our hands trembled, and Richard's eyes pooled with tears—a holy moment.

After this life-changing experience, Richard asked, "Who was the third person who had his hand over my heart? I felt something warm and powerful."

"There was no third person praying," we informed him.

Joy and her three younger sisters were all growing more excited in the Lord when Richard met a young Bible teacher and businessman named Bill who quickened their thirst even more. Bill began leading Friday night Bible studies in their home, and

Joy's heart was delighted by wonderful new experiences of the Spirit of God.

If you'd met Joy, you would have loved her like I did. Everything within her wanted to serve God. She longed to live purely. She only wanted to do good. Joy was very nearly perfect, and that was the only problem.

## **Losing Joy**

Some months after Bill started the dynamic Friday night gatherings, he went for an early morning run and collapsed dead on the street—a massive heart attack. The bizarre death came so suddenly, so strangely, that it felt like a cosmic mistake, like something God wouldn't allow.

Bill's cousin, a deeply spiritual woman who lived nearby, was distraught. "We must pray for God to raise him," she proclaimed.

"But his body is already at the morgue," others said.

"I don't care," she said emphatically. "God is going to raise him from the dead."

Joy's parents, Richard and Jenna, were unsure. Though lifelong believers, they were new to experiences of God's miraculous power. Yet Richard knew that God had touched him supernaturally with an unseen hand on his heart. He and Jenna had seen God at work in powerful ways on Friday nights in their home. And they were grieving hard over the death of their friend. So they agreed to go to the morgue and pray with Bill's cousin.

They regret what happened next.

"Joy, you're young and childlike and full of faith," Bill's cousin told the thirteen-year-old. "We need you to come pray over the body. God is going to use your prayers—you must come with us."

Full of faith, Joy wanted to go. It proved to be a mistake, but isn't it hard to fault someone for believing great things of God?

“I held the dead man’s hand. We were praying so hard,” Joy said. “I was weary and hungry, but I kept going. But as we were praying, something happened to my eyes. Things became dark. I felt weak and had to sit down. I thought maybe it was just the hunger or exhaustion, but I realized this was different—it was worse.”

She didn’t know it at the time, but it was a spiritual attack. Though the notion of demonic oppression offends modern rationalism, the Bible makes it clear: “We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against . . . spiritual forces of evil” (Eph. 6:12).

“I didn’t know what it was. I had never experienced darkness,” Joy said. “I had only known light and life.”

When it was clear that God wasn’t raising the young man from the dead, the manipulative cousin’s behavior became even more odd. She spent the night at Richard and Jenna’s house, borrowing Joy’s room for the night as Joy bunked in a sister’s room.

When Bill’s cousin left and Joy returned to her room, the dark presence she’d sensed at the morgue returned more palpably. In the middle of the night, Joy was attacked with a horrible, dark dream that not only terrified her but also left her feeling violated and defiled.

Had it been an isolated nightmare, it would have been bearable. But the demonic heaviness and the traumatizing dreams continued, and beautiful Joy’s soul was ravaged and fractured. Richard and Jenna felt the darkness too. They prayed and covered their daughter in love and faith. But the spiritual attacks continued, and Joy began shrinking into hopelessness and fear.

I was out of town when Joy sank into depression. Her condition became dire. She quit eating and drinking. She quit speaking. Her eyes became fixed and dilated.

Finally, Joy’s parents hospitalized her lest she die.

Skilled pediatricians and neurologists and gastroenterologists could find nothing wrong physiologically. After extensive

examinations, psychiatrists determined conclusively that Joy hadn't been physically assaulted or abused. The trauma wasn't physical—it was emotional and psychological.

The darkness had come upon her so strongly that Joy could no longer see the truth. Everything grew dark. She felt taken. She believed her “uncleanness” was a danger to others, so she withdrew from people and life.

I've not shared this story until now because it's so stark and sad that we might dismiss it for being too much, too odd, too bizarre. But I share it to demonstrate what's at stake in seeing like Jesus.

Do you see the ultimate power of perspective? When we're deceived, it leads toward death. When we see the truth, we're set free.

I share Joy's story also to expose hell's tactics. What made Joy vulnerable to the horrid spiritual attack? Was there a hidden sin in her life or a secret tinkering with the occult? No. Joy's attack came through a manipulative voice: *You are the one God will use. It all depends on you. You need to pray harder. You need to be better. You need to do more.*

Thankfully, most of us have never (and never will) experience the level of deception that came upon Joy, but every believer has heard that manipulative dark voice that attempts to blind us by telling us we need to “do more” if we are going to be accepted.

When I heard about Joy's descent, my heart broke for her, and I had a fatherly desire to adopt her spiritually. Somehow I understood her. In a different way, under different circumstances, I too had once heard a hellish voice telling me I needed to be perfect.

## **I'll Take One of Those Books**

Many years ago, in my first church, a parishioner asked for an appointment to “give me something.” I couldn't have imagined how great the gift.

His eyes misted as he spoke. “Pastor, I’d give everything I have in exchange for just ten minutes with my kids being little again.”

The weight of his words arrested me. He was a prosperous, middle-aged businessman with a sweet wife and three great kids. I was a childless, married, twentysomething solo pastor serving my first church.

“I’ve been successful in my work,” the beloved parishioner said soberly. “But I’ve missed too much. Now God has opened my eyes through a book I recently read. I brought you ten copies for you to give to people who need it.”

He handed me the books, which were coauthored by three Christian psychiatrists. The cover offered a promise: “Discover freedom from the need to DO more and BE more.”

“While my girls were growing up,” he said, “I was mostly away from home, working all the time. Something was driving me to accomplish more and more, but I never saw it until now.” His voice cracked, tears pooling. “I was trying to make my father proud. That’s why I’ve been so driven. He wasn’t one to openly affirm me, so I’ve been too preoccupied with success, longing for his approval. Though he died some years ago, I think I’ve still been trying to make him proud.”

I felt the holiness of the moment as he spoke with raw candor about his regrets and how his eyes had been newly opened. After we prayed and he left my office, I decided who to give the book to first—myself.

I was two years out of seminary, pastoring a congregation of less than two hundred people and working sixty to sixty-five hours a week. I wasn’t aiming to be a good pastor—I was trying to be a perfect pastor. Wonder-full Anne was growing weary, worried about my drivenness and whether I’d continue to neglect her and, in a future day, our children, all for the sake of being Rev. Super Pastor.

“Do you really have to be at every parishioner’s second cousin’s funeral?” Anne once asked me. “Do you have to sit with

the parents for the *whole* day at the hospital for their child's tonsillectomy? Why are you working all the time?"

I took home the book, *We Are Driven: The Compulsive Behaviors America Applauds*,<sup>1</sup> and wondered, "What is driving me?" I didn't know it yet, but God had sent me a seer. Like Scrooge's Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come, my parishioner prophesied my path if my vision remained unchanged.

I had eaten of the forbidden tree and didn't know it.

## Blinded by the Lie

Because we enter earth "darkened in [our] understanding" (Eph. 4:18) and "sinful at birth" (Ps. 51:5 NIV), we need supernatural light to see spiritually. Without a work of grace, Paul says, we are "blinded" by the "god of this world" (2 Cor. 4:4).

How did Satan blind humanity in the beginning? How does the tempter still taint our spiritual vision? How could Joy have become so deceived? The answer is as old as the garden of Eden.

Despite bad press to the contrary, God isn't restrictive—He's lavish. Behold the garden: "The LORD God made . . . every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food" (Gen. 2:9). *Every* pleasant and good tree! Perfectly ripe bananas. Savory artichoke hearts. Fresh pineapple chunks. And my choice—the cacao tree (and a Ghirardelli factory, please).

Adam and Eve had it all until the great deception came.

The serpent initially tried a blatant lie: "Did God say you aren't to eat of any of the trees?"

Eve didn't fall for a deception so bald-faced. "We are only forbidden from the tree in the middle," she said. (See Gen. 3:1–3.)

Satan discovered a ruse that day that he would go on to practice a thousand billion times: *No need to deceive the humans into wholesale rejection of God's words—a subtle twist of the word of God is more likely to succeed.*



“God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil,” the snake lied (v. 6).

What painful irony! Eve wanted her eyes to be opened, but the forbidden tree did the opposite.

## The “Do to Be Tree”

My mentor, Dudley Hall, calls the tree of the knowledge of good and evil the “do to be tree.”<sup>2</sup> *If I will do, then I can be. If I will just eat of this tree . . . If I will just make a little more money . . . If I will just perform a bit better . . . Once I “do,” then, and only then, can I “be” like God—secure and free and happy.*

This one deep deception still blurs the vision of even the sweetest saints: *If you will . . . , then God will . . .*

*It’s up to you, Joy. If you’ll pray until you nearly faint, God will raise Bill.*

This is a ruse that blinds and blurs because it shifts us from a relationship with God to a transaction with God. Whenever we believe that we will be more blessed (more like God, more loved by God) because of something we do, we become much less like God, and we lose sight of our ultimate purpose—to love and be loved, to glorify and enjoy God.

Hall says it succinctly: “We are blinded by the need to ‘do something.’”<sup>3</sup>

You could call the forbidden tree “moralism,” “legalism,” or “conditional love.” By whatever name, it blurred Adam and Eve’s vision:

Of themselves—by producing insecurity that asks, “What must I do to be accepted?”

Of one another—by producing judgment that assumes, “Others are the problem.”

Of the world—by producing despair that concludes, “All is lost, so what’s the point?”

God made us to be secure in His love, to have faith for others to flourish, and to have hope for the world, but the serpent’s lie stole it all, and God grieved. He cried out to His image bearers, “Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” (Gen. 3:11).

When an all-knowing God asks you a question, it isn’t for His learning but yours.

*“Have you eaten . . . ?”*

Can you hear the heartache of the Creator, anguished by the tragedy of sin?

*“Have you eaten . . . ?”*

If you want to be filled with the Spirit of God, rediscover joy, and see new wonders, then get honest when God asks that question.

*“Have you eaten . . . ?”*

Yes.

Yes, Adam and Eve had. Yes, I have. Yes, we all have. In one way or another, we have all eaten of the blinding do-to-be tree.

## **Calling Out in the Dark**

In the years of writing this book, my sweet mother began suffering worse in a four-year fight against pancreatic cancer. As she approached her eighty-eighth birthday, her abdominal pain intensified, and an ambulance took her to the hospital on an icy January weekend. I thought perhaps she had an infection and that, as many times before, she would rally. Instead, sixty hours later, she lay dying as I held her hand—the same hand that once held me and fed me and diapered me. As Mom’s breathing slowed, I kindly asked the nurse for the room, leaving just me, Mom, and wonder-full Anne. I needed to call my

big brothers, David the Benevolent and Mark the Brave, and I needed to sob and groan and sing and mourn.

My grief ran deep because Mom brought me into the world, and she brought me into the kingdom of God.

I don't know much about my mom and dad's meeting or romance at Lenoir–Rhyne College, and I don't know much about where their marriage went wrong. As an elementary school child, I just knew that Dad drank a lot, Mom cried a lot, and I would have given anything for it all to be better.

But it didn't get better. Dad left and Mom cried even more. One night, she couldn't sleep, and she got on her knees at the foot of the lonely king-size bed and cried out, "God, if You are real, I need You to open my eyes because I'm sinking down, and if You don't show me the way, I'll probably take these three boys with me."

She was the daughter of a Methodist minister and had been in church all her life, but whatever spiritual vision she'd known previously had become thoroughly obscured by the shame of abandonment and the fear of the future. So she did all she could do—she cried out in the pitch-dark like a blind beggar. And as she did, the Lord woke up an intercessor in a nearby neighborhood.

The next day, an acquaintance of my mother's who lived several miles away knocked on the door. "Mary Ann," she said, "I haven't seen you in a while, but last night, I was awakened in the middle of the night and couldn't get you off my heart. I felt like there was something troubling you, and I spent a long time praying for you. I've come today to see if you are all right and ask if there is anything I can do for you."

After explaining the pain of her life, my mother told her acquaintance about her nighttime cry to God, and the dear saint introduced my mom to the reality of Jesus and the healing wonder of the gospel. She invited my mother to her Christ-centered, Spirit-soaked church. Soon, my mother assembled

her three boys in the den and told us that God loves us, Jesus is alive, the Bible is the Word of God, and there is hope. We all believed her.

What do a frustrated businessman on a train, a demonically afflicted teenager, a perfectionistic pastor, and a weeping single mom have in common? The same spiritual battle.

Misperceptions. Lies believed in the darkness.

And the need for the same Savior. Truth much greater than the liar. Light that can dispel the darkness.