

# *SEEING THROUGH GOD'S EYES*

He was a hard-nosed fanatic, a man whose religion had made him violent and intolerant.

He set out down this road as a zealous persecutor. But he came back a different man.

This persecutor somehow became a gifted encourager, one of the most loving religious leaders of all time. His remarkable transformation shows us how we too can become whole in our relationships with others.

Saul of Tarsus was a brilliant young Pharisee, and he believed he was on a

mission from God. He was an expert in interpreting Jewish religious laws and expounding on Jewish tradition. He was positive he had the truth and nothing but the truth, and he was certain that everyone who believed differently was wrong, especially a certain sect that followed Jesus.

They claimed that Jesus was the Messiah. Saul vowed to destroy this heresy. He tracked down believers and had them dragged off to prison. One day, he set off towards the city of Damascus, determined to hunt down followers of Jesus Christ there.

But something happened to him on the road to Damascus. A bright light knocked him to his knees. Something supernatural had happened. Saul asked, "Who are you, Lord?" A voice answered, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting."

Suddenly, Saul had to confront the fact that he'd been persecuting the Lord of the universe. Blinded and helpless, he now had to rely on the very people he'd tried to destroy, to lead him to Christ. In the weeks and months that followed, Saul the fanatic acquired a radical new perspective. He had to discard his old prejudices. He had to see people through new eyes.

You catch this perspective in every one of Paul's epistles. You can see it in how he greets believers, how he encourages them, how he nurtures them. Paul is constantly thanking God for the wonderful qualities he sees in the people around him. His soul is constantly broadened because he catches glimpses of God's grace in the faces around him.

A big part of becoming a whole human being involves forming healthy relationships. It is these relationships which nurture our soul. Our spiritual

lives are broadened. This is what we're going to look at in this booklet: how to become healthier in the way we relate to others. The apostle Paul obviously found some soul-satisfying answers to this question.

Paul, the intolerant fanatic, acquired a radical new perspective that transformed his relationships. It's a perspective that can transform how we relate to others as well. Paul expresses it in Romans 15:7:

*Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God (Romans 15:7 (NIV)).*

How can we become more accepting of others? How can we break down the barriers that divide us? By understanding how Christ accepts us. He accepts us as His beloved children, despite our weaknesses. Because He accepts us freely, we can extend that same arm of grace to others.

Every human being has great value because Christ loves them, because Christ has died for them. And Christ's love compels us to look at people as God does. It's this perspective that can transform our relationships. We see them through God's eyes.

Here is Paul again, expanding on the theme in Ephesians 4:32:

*And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also forgave you.*

How can we become more forgiving? How can we prevent anger from seeping down inside us and turning into bitterness?

By plugging into the fact that God has forgiven us so generously, we can release others from our condemnation because God has released us from His. We can forgive because we are forgiven.

Jesus Himself laid down the same principle in His last discourse to His

disciples. In John 13:34, Christ very clearly sets forth a marvellous new relationship:

*A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another (John 13:34 NIV).*

Jesus is saying, "Love one another with the love I've given you". Do you see the pattern here in the New Testament? Accept one another as God accepts us. Forgive one another as God forgives us. Love one another as God loves us.

That's how it works. That's how we can start building healthy relationships with others. But we need a healthy relationship with God first! We need His input in our lives. We will never really be able to value others until we know in our own hearts how much God values us.

So, it's important to build our relationships with others on the basis

of the love, acceptance and forgiveness that we, ourselves, receive from God.

Let's look at a few examples of how we can do this, how we can overcome obstacles between people. Our most common problems revolve around basic personality differences.

Some people tend to be introspective. Others tend to be outgoing. Some individuals are laid back, while still others are very driven. We're all different. Unfortunately, we tend to react negatively to those who are opposite in temperament from us.

For example, let's say there are two roommates in college, Sarah and Kathy. Sarah tends to be spontaneous. Kathy is very controlled. One evening, Sarah breezes in and exclaims, "Hey, let's throw a party and invite some people over tonight!"

Kathy throws up her hands. Wait a minute! Things like this have to be

planned ahead of time. She has to have everything organised, everything. The cans in the kitchen cabinets are arranged alphabetically. She tells Sarah this is a horrible idea. Sarah, on the other hand, just wants her roommate to lighten up a little. But the more surprises Sarah pulls, the more controlled Kathy becomes. And the more controlled Kathy becomes, the more spontaneous Sarah tries to be to make up for it.

Each is trying to modify the other person's excessive responses. But they end up just reacting against each other. This drives each of them to more extreme behaviours to compensate, and they end up throwing accusations and talking past each other.

*"You're so scatterbrained and disorganised."*

*"You're incredibly uptight."*

But the interesting fact is: both girls need to move toward the centre.



Kathy needs to become a little more spontaneous and Sarah needs to become a little more organised. They actually need each other; each could learn valuable lessons from the other. Unfortunately, human nature tends to react against opposites, so it's very easy to push each other further and further apart.

But, when we see each other as God does, we get a different perspective. God's love, acceptance and forgiveness changes the picture. He's the One who created all these different personalities. And God doesn't make junk. We can't just write off someone who's different from us. They have value. They have potential. They have something to teach us.

When we look at others from God's viewpoint, we can learn from them, not just react against them. Sometimes the people who are most different from us are the people who have the most

to teach us. We can learn so much – when we look at people from God's perspective.

But, let's say your problem with someone is deeper than just a personality difference. Let's say you're having serious conflicts with someone at work, maybe someone at home. How does God's acceptance, love and forgiveness work in these cases?

Can it really make a practical difference?

Let's look at one of the major contributors to our quarrels and misunderstandings. Do you know what lies behind the vast majority of interpersonal conflicts? The win-lose mentality! This is the assumption that, whenever there's a conflict between two people, one is going to win, and the other is going to lose. One of us must come out on top, so that person must knock the other person down.

People with a win-lose attitude turn every little disagreement into a big battle. Every misunderstanding is a major threat. Every conflict has to be fought to the bitter end. A win-lose attitude pushes people to defend turf instead of finding common ground, to score points instead of resolving issues, to prove they are right instead of trying to understand.

Why do we fall into this trap? Usually, because it's so much easier to fight than it is to try to discover the solution to the problem. It's so much easier to fight than to discover what the real issues are. If anger or bitterness smoulder inside us, if we're struggling with negative emotions, then it's much easier to blame others than to deal with the emotions inside our own hearts.

But let's look at a healthy alternative to this win-lose attitude. There's an interesting case study on conflict resolution in the Bible. It revolves

around a character named Jonathan, the son of King Saul.

Saul had become insanely jealous of a young warrior named David. David had been anointed by the prophet Samuel as the next king. So, Saul adopted a familiar attitude. It's either you or me - this kingdom isn't big enough for the both of us. He spent a lot of his time chasing David all over the Judean countryside, trying to eliminate him as a challenger.

Saul's son, Jonathan, could easily have adopted his father's win-lose perspective. After all, HE was the prince who should have inherited his father's throne. But instead of concluding that the kingdom wasn't big enough for him and David, Jonathan did something else. He looked at God's covenant, God's plan for Israel. And he decided that God's covenant was wide enough for both of them.

Jonathan and David made their own separate peace, their own covenant. It's recorded in 1 Samuel 20:13-15. Jonathan made this pledge, an amazing example of how to resolve personal conflicts. It says:

*And the Lord be with you as He has been with my father. And you shall not only show me the kindness of the Lord while I still live..., you shall not cut off your kindness from my house forever.*

How's that for conflict resolution? Jonathan formulated a plan which would work for both him and David. He looked for the best solution to a difficult situation. In other words, he had a win-win attitude. Both can win if the aim is to serve God.

Whenever we find ourselves in a conflict, we have to remember one thing: God wants both of us to win. God loves both of us. God wants the best for both of us. He doesn't have to love one less in

order to love another more.

God's love is wide enough and deep enough and tall enough to take in the needs of all of us. So, when we have that love inside of us, we can extend it to others. We can adopt a win-win attitude. You can sense this in the epistles of Paul, the persecutor who became the great encourager.

Take his letters to believers in Corinth, for example. These people were struggling with all kinds of problems. Believers were suing each other. Some were even involved in incest. Many were criticizing Paul's leadership.

It would have been easy for Paul, the great Apostle, to put these people down, in order to build up his own credentials. He could have written them off because of their rebellious attitude.

Instead, Paul appealed to their conscience as a tender father. He pled

with them to face their moral problems squarely.

Paul was animated by God's grace. He was compelled by Christ's love. He wrote these remarkable words:

*I do not say this to condemn; for I have said before that you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together (2 Cor 7:3 NIV).*

Even in the midst of serious conflict with Corinthian believers, he wanted the best for them; he wanted them to win. He tried to find solutions. His letters to the Corinthians are full of that spirit.

We need a win-win attitude in all our conflicts. That's really how we resolve them; that's how we avoid turning every disagreement into a major conflict, a major battle. A win-win attitude focuses on solutions instead of on how to score points with the other person. You don't withdraw and pout, you don't try to manipulate, you focus on solutions.

Counsellors often suggest three specific steps we can use to turn quarrels into a dialogue aimed at solutions.

First, separate the person from the problem. Don't attack the other person. Don't say "You always...", or "You never...". Isolate the problem that you want to fix.

Secondly, focus on interests, not on positions. That is, instead of just defending your position, your side of the matter, look at the needs each of you is trying to meet, and what you really want to achieve from this.

Thirdly, think of options that benefit both of you. Brainstorm possible solutions that meet your needs.

For example, let's say one spouse wants the window open at night and the other spouse wants the window closed. Sounds familiar? People can create a long-standing conflict over this issue. Is a half-opened window the only answer?



Well, look at the needs. One person wants fresh air; the other person wants warmth. Maybe buying an electric blanket and keeping the window open would satisfy both people.

You can achieve a position of "win-win" more often than you think, if you just concentrate on solutions, instead of trying to come out the victor, instead of trying to make the other person lose.

You see, it's so important to recognise that we are all children of God. Sometimes, all it takes is one person to come up with a gracious answer to a problem.

Rodney Roberson was working at a homeless shelter to pay his way through seminary. He could tell it was going to be a rough night. It was very cold and raining hard. Soon all the cots and sleeping mats were taken. But the street people still kept coming in. Arguments broke out everywhere.

People were cursing angrily, and some began to fight over sleeping mats.

In the midst of this tension, a large man named Jose stumbled in and threw down his sleeping mat. After managing to yank off his boots, he collapsed in a drunken stupor. The stench from those feet quickly filled the air. People nearby to Jose insisted that Rodney do something about it, immediately.

Well, the obvious solution seemed to be to persuade Jose to take a shower. But Rodney couldn't rouse him. He was breathing, but it seemed that he was dead to the world. Rodney and two co-workers discussed hauling the man to the shower; but he weighed more than 90kgs.

Some of the street people demanded that Rodney drag Jose back out to the sidewalk. But others howled in protest. Tempers flared. It seemed that, for anyone to win, someone had to lose.

But then, Rodney got an idea: Why not bring the 'shower' to Jose? He found a wash basin and some lemon-scented dish-washing liquid. Then he knelt down by the drunken man and began to peel off those filthy socks. The stench was almost overwhelming.

But for several minutes, Rodney scrubbed Jose's feet with a soapy washcloth. He carefully dried them with a towel. Suddenly, he noticed that he was surrounded by people. Rodney stood up warily and looked around.

Everyone was grinning at him, even the ones who'd been complaining the loudest. In fact, people he'd never seen smile before were grinning – men and women of all races. One woman stepped forward with tears in her eyes, took Rodney's hands and kissed them.

A quiet hush had fallen over the place. There would be no more shouting, or threats, or intimidation that night.

People with sleeping mats gave them to others who had none. The conflict was over. It had been washed away by someone who didn't need to take sides, someone who didn't need to score points, someone willing to be, like Jesus, chief among them by becoming a servant.

When we know that God loves us, that we have God's acceptance and forgiveness, then we can resolve conflicts. When we know how God values us, then we can value others.

We can learn from people, instead of just reacting to them. We can turn conflicts from win-lose, to win-win. It all starts with a healthy relationship with the God who cherishes us. It all starts with understanding how wide and deep God's love really is. It all starts with a recognition that we need the Lord.

Why not open your heart to Him right now, wherever you are?