

DEVELOP AN ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE

- A. Introduction: The Bible is a collection of 66 books that were inspired by Almighty God (II Tim 3:16). It's a supernatural book. Not only does it give information, it produces growth and change in those who read it.
1. Bible reading is difficult for people many reasons: It's boring and they don't understand what they read. It's overwhelming and they don't know where to begin reading, etc. In this series, we're working on helping you understand what the Bible is, what it will do for you, and how to approach reading it.
 - a. I've given you a simple but effective way to approach the Bible. I'm encouraging you to become a regular systematic reader. Regular means you read it for short periods of time (15-20 minutes) as often as you can (preferably daily). Systematic means you read each book from start to finish.
 - b. Begin your reading with the New Testament. First, it's smaller than the Old Testament so there is more chance that you'll be successful. Second, the New Testament records the completion of what the Old Testament anticipates. The Old Testament is therefore easier to understand once you're competent in the New Testament.
 1. The purpose of this type of reading is to become familiar with the text because understanding comes with familiarity and familiarity comes with regular repeated systematic reading.
 2. Don't worry about what you don't understand. Don't stop to look up words up and consult commentaries. Just read. You can utilize dictionaries and look up words at another time.
 2. In the last few lessons, we've been talking about the fact that regular systematic Bible reading will change your perspective or the way you see things which will help you deal with life more effectively.
 - a. We're examining something that the apostle Paul wrote. He endured many hardships as he served the Lord. Yet his perspective or view of his troubles was: They're temporary and don't weigh me down. They produce eternal results and compared to what's ahead, they're nothing. II Cor 4:17
 - b. Perspective is the power to see or think of things in their true relationship to each other (*Webster's Dictionary*). When you learn to see this life in proportion to you forever, it lightens the load of this difficult life. We have more to say tonight about the need for an eternal perspective.
 3. Paul had an eternal perspective. An eternal perspective recognizes that there is more to life than just this life—and that the greater and better part of life is ahead, after this life.
 - a. Humans are eternal beings. Although we have a definite beginning (we came into existence at the moment of conception in our mother's womb), we do not cease to exist when we die.
 - b. At physical death, we (the unseen immaterial portion of our makeup) pass into another dimension—either Heaven or Hell, depending on how we responded to the revelation of Jesus Christ that was given to us during our lifetime.
 - c. Paul developed this perspective by focusing his attention on things he couldn't see through the Word of God. The Bible shows us unseen realities—Almighty God with us and for us. II Cor 4:18
- B. To develop an eternal perspective you must first see the big picture—why we're here and what life is all about. Consider these brief points (each of which deserves its own lesson).
1. This is the big picture: God desires a family of sons and daughters with whom He can live in loving relationship forever. He created human beings to become His sons and daughters through faith in Christ, and He made the earth to be a home for Himself and His family. Eph 1:4-5; Isa 45:18; etc.
 - a. Both the family and the family home have been damaged by sin—beginning with Adam's sin in the Garden. Through his sin men and women became sinners by nature and no longer fit for sonship.
 1. Our bodies are now subject to sickness, old age, and death. The family home is infused with a curse of corruption and death that produces harm and destruction in the form of storms, earthquakes, corrosion, blight; etc. Gen 3:17-19; Rom 5:12; Rom 5:19; Rom 8:20; etc.
 2. Life in this sin damaged world is challenging. We have tribulation in this life—not because

- it's God plan, but because that's life in a sin cursed earth. John 16:33 (For a more in depth discussion of this point read my book: *Why Did This Happen? What Is God Doing?*)
- b. Jesus came to earth two thousand years ago to pay for sin at the Cross and open the way for sinners to be transformed into sons and daughters through faith in Him. He will come again to complete God's plan for a family by restoring the family home. John 1:12-13; Rev 21-22; etc.
2. Why talk about this? Number one, this is the message of the Bible. Number two, life on earth only makes sense in the context of the big picture. If this life in its current condition (filled with toil and trouble) is all there is, then life on earth isn't worth it for the vast majority of people who've lived here.
 - a. Meaning and purpose come from seeing the big picture—God's unfolding plan for a family on this earth renewed and restored. You matter and you have a destiny that is bigger than this life.
 - b. An eternal perspective informs and upholds your present perspective. Even if things don't work out in this life (and they don't), it not the end of your story. There is more to come and the good that is ahead far outweighs all life's troubles. This perspective gives hope and lightens the load.
 1. Neh 8:10 is a well known passage. It says that the joy of the Lord is our strength. Joy comes from anticipating what is ahead. This expectation, this hope, strengths and sustains you.
 2. The context of this verse (Neh 8:1-12) reveals that strengthening joy comes from comes hearing and understanding the Word of God. The Bible shows us the way things really are.
 - c. This is reality: Nothing can come against you that is bigger than God. Everything you see is temporary and subject to change by the power of God—either in this life or the life to come. Regular systematic reading of the New Testament will give you this perspective.
 3. Paul made another statement that bears repeating. In the context of the “calamity, trouble, persecution, hunger, cold, danger, death, angels, demons, fears, worries, and the powers of hell” that we all face, Paul wrote that nothing can separate us from God's love demonstrated through Jesus. Rom 8:38-39
 - a. This isn't a flowery emotional statement. It is a recognition of the fact that nothing can stop the plan of God for us. It doesn't mean we'll have no problems or that life won't temporarily harm us.
 1. It means nothing can stop God's plan for us from being fulfilled: relationship with Him and each other in a perfect world, with life the way we long for it to be—reunion, restoration, peace, joy, fulfillment, healthy relationships, meaningful work, no more loss, pain, or death. Rev 21:4
 2. Our destiny is eternal. God chose us for it before we existed—before He created this earth. Our destiny predates and will outlast this life. It is a plan conceived in, motivated by, and carried out in love. Rom 5:8; Eph 1:4-5; John 3:16; etc.
 - A. II Tim 1:9—It is God who saved us and chose us to live a holy life. He did this not because we deserved it, but because that was his plan long before the world began—to show his love and kindness to us through Christ Jesus (NLT).
 - B. Eph 1:4-5—Long ago, even before He made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. His unchanging plan has always been to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ (NLT).
 - b. Throughout the Scriptures we see this theme, that a man like the grass and flower that fades away. Ps 90:5; Ps 103:15; Isa 40:6; Isa 51:12; James 1:10; etc.
 1. This isn't a reference to man's worthlessness. It is a reference to the fact that life is transitory for all—rich, poor, famous, unknown, young, old, male, female. Death comes to us all.
 2. In our culture value and worth are connected to success, achievement, talent, intelligence, physical appearance, etc. But value and worth doesn't come from within. It comes from without—from what someone is willing to pay for an item. God was willing to pay the price of the blood of the Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ, for us. I Pet 1:18-19; Acts 20:28; I Cor 6:19-20
 3. Regular systematic reading of the New Testament will help you see your true worth. The Bible helps you see God as He truly is and yourself as you truly are in relation to Him.

4. The apostles Paul and Peter were both eyewitnesses of the Lord Jesus Christ. Both authored books in the New Testament (Paul wrote fourteen; Peter wrote two). Among other things, their intention when they wrote was to give fellow believers the same perspective they had.
 - a. Both men understood that this world as it is, this life as it is, isn't our ultimate destiny. We're only passing through this world as it is. Reading their words helps us develop an eternal perspective.
 - b. Paul and Peter were Jews, raised with the writings of the Old Testament prophets. The Old Testament shaped both men's view of reality or their perspective. Their interaction with Jesus further expanded their understanding of the big picture.
 1. Both men knew from the prophets knew that the Lord will one day establish His visible eternal kingdom on earth and restore this world to pre sin conditions. Isa 65:17; Isa 66:22; etc.
 2. They understood that death is a temporary departure from this world and knew their bodies will be raised from the dead so they can live on earth again. Job 19:25-26; Isa 26:19; Dan 12:3
 - c. The Old Testament men and women saw themselves as sojourners who were only passing through this life as it is. A sojourn means a temporary stay.
 1. When Pharaoh asked Joseph's father, Jacob, how old he was he replied: The days of my pilgrimage are 130 years. Gen 47:9
 2. When the time came for King David to turn his throne over to his son Solomon he prayed a prayer of praise to God. Note one statement he made: I Chron 29:15—We are here only for a moment, visitors and strangers in the land as our ancestors were before us. Our days on earth are like a shadow, gone so soon without a trace (NLT).
 3. David also wrote these words: Lord, remind me how brief my time on earth will be. Remind me that my days are numbered, and that my life is fleeing away...an entire lifetime is just a moment to you...For I am your guest—a traveler passing through (Ps 39:4-5, NLT).
 - d. It's not certain who wrote Ps 119. Scholars are divided over whether it was David or Ezra. Note one verse. It makes my argument for the necessity of becoming a regular Bible reader: Ps 119:19—I am but a foreigner here on earth; I need the guidance of your commands (NLT).
 5. Peter and Paul referred to believers in the Lord as pilgrims and strangers who are sojourning in this life (I Pet 1:17; I Pet 2:11; Heb 11:9). The Greek words they used are all related and mean a resident alien. Note some things they wrote about their view of reality and their perspective about this life.
 - a. Matt 19:27-29—Peter reported that Jesus told him and the other disciples that everything they had given up in this life to follow Him would be restored to them over and above what they lost in the life to come: in the new age—the Messianic rebirth of the world (Matt 19:28, Amp).
 - b. Peter, in his second recorded sermon preached a few weeks after Jesus returned to Heaven said: For (Jesus) must remain in heaven until the time for the final restoration of all things, as God promised long ago through his prophets (Acts 3:21, NLT).
 - c. Paul wrote to believers in the Greek city of Corinth: What I mean brothers is that the time is short ...for this world in its present form is passing away (I Cor 7:31, NIV).
 - d. Paul also wrote: Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will give us later. For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day...all creation anticipates the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay (Rom 8:19-21, NLT).
- C. Paul understood the positive effect that an eternal perspective has on believers as we face life in this fallen world. Paul wrote the Epistle to the Hebrews to people who were facing pressure to abandon their faith in Christ to urge them to stay faithful no matter what. Paul stressed the importance of an eternal perspective.
1. He reminded his readers that they had already experienced suffering in connection with their faith, including public ridicule, beatings, property loss, and imprisonment. Heb 10:32-34
 - a. Paul reminded them of their response to these hardships—When all you owned was taken from you,

you accepted it with joy. You knew you had better things waiting for you in eternity (v34, NLT).

1. This joy was not an emotional response to their situation—I'm so happy that this happened to me. Paul himself wrote about being sorrowful yet rejoicing in the face of hardship. II Cor 6:10
 2. The Greek word that Paul used for joy comes from a word that means to be (not feel) cheerful. When you cheer someone you encourage them with the fact that they are going to make it.
- b. Then Paul exhorted them: Do not throw away this confident trust in the Lord no matter what happens. Remember the great reward it brings you (Heb 10:35, NL).
2. The recipients of this letter were Hebrews (Jewish). Paul went on to make references to men and women well known to his readers from familiar Old Testament accounts—Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, David, Samuel, the prophets; etc. Heb 11:1-40
 - a. Paul recounted that through faith they overcame. (They) overthrew kingdoms, ruled with justice, received what God promised them...quenched fires, escaped death...weakness became strength... put whole armies to flight in battle, received loved ones back from death. Heb 11:33-34 (NLT)
 - b. But Paul made it clear that as well as faith for provision during their lifetimes, they also had an eternal perspective. Heb 11:13—All these faithful ones died without receiving what God promised them. They saw them from a distance, were persuaded of and embraced them. They recognized that they were strangers and pilgrims here on earth, only passing through this life as it is.
 1. It seems like a contradiction to say that they didn't received what was promised. It isn't, since God has made promises to us about this life and the life to come. If you don't understand this, you could end up disappointed when life doesn't go as you think it should.
 2. v16—But they were looking for a better place, a heavenly homeland. That is why God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he had prepared a heavenly city for them (NLT).
 3. Paul showed his readers how the lives of specific Old Testament men and women were positively affected because of their eternal perspective. Consider one example.
 - a. Heb 11:22—When Joseph died he made his family swear to take his bones with them when they left Egypt to return to their homeland (Canaan). They kept that promise to Joseph when God delivered them from Egyptian slavery several centuries later and brought them back to Canaan (Ex 13:19).
 1. Early in Joseph's life, God made two specific promises to him: greatness and a permanent home in Canaan (Gen 37:5-11; Gen 13:15; etc.). Greatness was fulfilled in his lifetime when he became second in command in Egypt. But Joseph never went back to Canaan in this life.
 2. When Jesus returns, Joseph will be with Him to be reunited with his body raised from the dead. Joseph will again stand in his ancestral land—never again to be removed. Promise fulfilled.
 - b. Paul closed his letter to the Hebrews with this statement: Heb 13:14—For this world is not our home; we are looking forward to our city in heaven, which is yet to come (NLT).
 1. This is an entire subject for another night. But the Bible is clear that in connection with the second coming of Jesus, this heavenly city will come to earth. Heaven and earth will come together on this earth renewed—the plan for God's family and the family home completed.
 2. (For an in depth discussion of this point read my book *The Best Is Yet To Come; What The Bible Says About Heaven.*)
- D. Conclusion: We have much more to say about an eternal perspective, but consider this point as we close.
 1. None of this means that there is no help now in this life, because there clearly is. But an eternal perspective informs and upholds your present life by giving you hope that sustains you in the face of hardship that doesn't go away.
 2. Not every mountain can be moved in a sin cursed earth. Some you can avoid. Some you must climb, and some you have to learn to live with. Regular systematic Bible reading will help you know which is which—and how to deal with each one. Lots more next week!