

## Through the Eye of the Beholder

In general my primary disposition is of the “sunny” variety. But I must admit that the increasingly stressful situations in this life can lead all of us to a few partly cloudy days! Especially in the midst of winter when the days are shorter and activities are sometime limited!

So what’s my point? Well, I’ve noticed that often in such times, whether it’s the weather, global stressors, political tensions or any other upsetting factor in our lives, it can influence our mood. We become at risk of focusing our eyes and hearts inward to see and feel only our distress. But I suggest that at times like these in our own lives we might learn to resist so much inward gazing and train our eyes and hearts outward to see and feel God’s much bigger truth.

One example I’ve used in this little spiritual experiment is to think about this...have you ever thought about buying a new car? And have you noticed that when you think about what kind of car you want to purchase you begin to see the model you’re thinking about everywhere? It’s like you never noticed there were so many of them on the road until they took a spot at the forefront of your thinking. This phenomenon is not unusual and I think it illustrates that when we train our thoughts on a particular thing; we begin to have a keener vision for whatever it is we are thinking about.

We can learn to see the hope and joy of God at work in the world in the same way. But, I think we have a propensity for fear that leads us to train our eyes to see more darkness than light. I know when I watch too much television news I realize that this activity trains me to see so much despair, sorrow, division, and pain in the world.

And there is certainly enough of that to go around---we do live in an unperfected world and sometimes this can seem overwhelming and we can begin to think that there is no hope for the world. But watching the brokenness of the world in such a concentrated fashion while being battered by a 24- hour news cycle that only amplifies anxiety can skew our vision.

It might seem too simplistic a thing to say that we just “need a sunnier outlook” so that is why I’m not going to say it! Training ourselves to see God’s saving mercy and compassion flowing into our lives each and every day does not deny the hardship and challenges of our world or in our lives, what it *does* do is provide us tremendous courage and hope in the face of these challenges.

Seeing God at work in all things enables us to stay in touch with hope in the midst of a complex, puzzling and confusing situations in our lives and world because it puts us in deep contact with the truth that we are not alone in this dismay. God is always close working on behalf of the world and once we start to train our eyes to see it we can look up with expectation and hope no matter how bleak things may look to our wearied hearts.

So, how do we do it? Well, first of all just expect it. If we expect to see something—like just one more tragic incident after the next, that is precisely what we'll see because there is in fact a large supply of tragedy in our world, but there is also more than tragedy.

Conversely, if we expect to see some wonderful display of thoughtfulness or kindness---I promise you we will see that too, because goodness exists in abundance too! If we place God's loving care for us and for the world at the forefront of our thoughts, just like seeing the cars that I mentioned earlier, we will be astounded and wonder why we never noticed how much of God's grace abounded before!

This spiritual practice is not about creating a pair of rose colored glasses that will help us pretend that the sorrows of our world like racism, war, hunger, poverty or any other painful condition doesn't exist. Nor does it deny that fractured relationships aren't a mournful reality or that people can't absolutely break your heart. It IS about seeing the beauty and compassionate possibilities that also exist in our lives and world and gaining the hope and courage to celebrate and advance them wherever we discover them!

Know this: Our God is one who cares for the welfare of all people. No matter what the conditions---God is *always* working on our behalf and inviting us to see, magnify and spread God's beauty, justice and hope. I promise you, we are not powerless in this life; behold this world through the eyes of God, and you will see possibilities for hope and joy is *everywhere*.

Faithfully, Stephanie+