

# Seeing Through God's Eyes

*Discerning Biblical Wisdom*

*for Faithful Living*

*Chapters 6–10 with Reflection Questions*

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## 6. Seeing as God Sees (Part 2)

### (i) Persevering Love

I attended a church service one fine Sunday morning. The worship and the subsequent small prayer went exceptionally well. Then, a member of the church took to the stage to announce the upcoming programs and events for that week or month. Before leaving the stage, he encouraged the congregation to look around from their seats, introduce themselves to someone new, and share a high-five. As everyone engaged in this activity, the guest speaker arrived on stage and prepared to deliver the sermon.

As a newcomer, I found it refreshing to meet new people and learn about them during that brief interaction. I thought to myself, "What a wonderful ritual." Once the congregation settled back into their seats, the speaker promptly asked, "How many of you are children of God?" Everyone, including myself, raised their hands without hesitation. Oh, how confident we were! The speaker then inquired, "Did everyone meet at least two to three people while I was getting on stage?" Some in the congregation responded with a loud "yes." He then took a few steps back from the podium, paused, surveyed the room, and asked, "How many of you, children of God, believe you will remember the name of the person you shook hands with by the time you lay your head on the pillow tonight?" There was a profound silence; no one responded.

"Is everyone alright? Would you like me to repeat the question?" the speaker asked. From my vantage point, I noticed some individuals nodding slightly, indicating they had heard him. "Why do you think you won't be able to remember the name of someone you just met moments ago? Is it due to the diminished attention span that many of you possess these days? Or is it because you felt compelled to participate? Do you shake hands or give a high-five out of a sense of duty, merely to please the announcer?" he asked in a firm tone.

"You all raised your hands confidently, claiming to be Children of God, correct? Do you think that if Jesus were among you, sitting beside a few of you, He would forget whom He exchanged a high-five with once He returns home?"

He approached the podium, began flipping through the pages of his Bible, and asked everyone to turn to Isaiah 49:16. Then he looked at everyone and said, "Look! Our God, whom you all profess to be children of, has inscribed the names of each and every one of you on His palms!" He then took a sip from the glass of water placed on his podium, looked up at the audience gathered in the hall, and said, "You don't need to inscribe the names of everyone you meet onto your palms, but as individuals claiming to be children of

God, you must at least strive to imitate Him – exuding love that perseveres. Some of you have young children here. Observe them; they imitate their parents. As children of God, we should emulate Him as well. But are we doing this wholeheartedly? I know some of you may approach me later and say something like, ‘I’m not good with names, but I can remember faces.’ However, I would argue that both you and I possess approximately 1500 grams of brain in our skulls. That’s not a valid excuse.” The audience then erupted in laughter. He paused until the laughter subsided and continued, “I have a principle I follow when getting to know someone: ‘Invest five minutes to learn their name, how they look, etc., so that you won’t be a fool for the rest of your life.’ I personally make an effort to know whom I shake hands with. I sometimes ask them to spell their name and pronounce it aloud once so that my mind can register it and not forget their name later, as it would be embarrassing for me if I did.”

“Love perseveres,” the speaker remarked with a smirk as he quoted 1 Corinthians 13:7. “The drive, the intention, the effort, and eagerness matter to God. Jesus embodied all these qualities; He was willing to die for each of us without hesitation. He shed His blood for every human who has ever existed on this planet, both past and present,” he continued.

“Imagine an old friend arriving at your home unexpectedly, bearing a gift on your birthday. You would feel deeply cherished because that friend remembered you. Their thoughtfulness would demonstrate genuine concern. You would be amazed that someone beyond your family cares for you. This, in turn, can inspire you to be intentional towards others, initiating a chain reaction.”

“Can the body of Christ remain unified if its members ignore or are indifferent to one another? Loving each other is not merely a feeling; it is the action you take as a Christian to know one another and to be *genuinely concerned* for each other. When driven by unconditional love, you reflect God's very own characteristics. If the current Christian community does not care for one another, they may not even notice if one of their members has drifted away from the light and ultimately become lost. Similarly, it would be challenging to keep track of those who leave immediately after the church service concludes.”

He then continued, “The Bible does not elaborate on what the 99 sheep were doing while the shepherd left them in the wilderness to search for the one lost sheep. Many individuals who merely read their Bibles might assume that these sheep were perfectly fine, enjoying the green grass beneath the blue skies, perhaps watching their shepherd frantically searching for the lost sheep. However, those who meditate on the word of God understand that the mother sheep, father sheep, friends, and relatives of that lost sheep are among the 99, likely bleating so that the lost sheep can hear their cries, find its way back, and rejoin the flock.”

“That is what a true church does when it senses, much like the human body, that one of its members is exhibiting signs and symptoms of wavering faith. As the true church is part of one body (Christ) with various parts, each fulfilling its unique role, they come together to pray for that individual, express concern, offer financial assistance, visit their home, and pray over them.”

“Our bodies respond in a similar manner.” He then raised his left arm to display his left index finger and stated, “If I were to inflict a deep cut on my left index finger while chopping vegetables, my body reacts immediately to the pain and the blood loss, dispatching cells to the site of injury to seal it and form a clot, preventing excessive bleeding. Over time, during the healing process, additional cells are sent to the area to combat infection and other pathogens that may enter my body.”

“How much more should a church do to care for one another? How much more do you believe the church is capable of achieving?” he concluded while adjusting his wristwatch.

It was one of those brief, rare yet incisive sermons that I had the opportunity to attend, where the guest speaker focused more on correction than encouragement for the hosting church. Naturally, some in the congregation may have felt as though the log in their own eyes was being highlighted, but all I know is that a great physician often overlooks minor risks or discomforts caused by medication in light of its life-saving benefits. The benefit versus harm ratio is significant!

## **(ii) Hearts and Motives**

How you interact with people, how you contribute to the church, how you engage in activities, how you negotiate with your peers or colleagues, and even how you manage work-related matters – it is all being observed by God.

The intentions, the motives, and the decisions made in our heart are all significant to God.

Caiaphas was a self-serving individual who had served as High Priest for several years. As a leader of the Sadducees, he maintained a favorable relationship with Rome. The Sadducees opposed Jesus, as His teachings challenged their lifestyle, which they could not accept. Feeling that his power was threatened, Caiaphas conspired to orchestrate Jesus' murder (John 11:49-57). He chose to secure his authority and position by sacrificing Jesus, revealing his selfish motives. Moreover, he was involved in bribing the soldiers to conceal the news of the apparent resurrection (Matthew 28:11-15).

However, this man's malicious plan was part of God's overarching design for Jesus' sacrifice for humanity. God can utilise the devious schemes of individuals to fulfil His purposes.

It becomes evident that Caiaphas did not find security in his powerful position. He believed that once Jesus was put to death, he would attain peace, yet Jesus rose from the dead on the third day.

In a similar vein, in 1 Samuel chapter 16, we see the prophet Samuel, sent by God to anoint one of Jesse's sons, David, as the next king of Israel. In verse 6, Samuel initially assumed Eliab was the Lord's chosen one based solely on his outward appearance, which seemed kingly or warrior-like. However, God informs him that while people judge by outward appearances, He looks at the heart.

James addresses issues of prejudice in chapter 2, questioning how one can claim to have faith in Jesus while favouring some individuals over others. He states in verse 4 (GNT) that such discrimination reveals our "judgements are based on evil motives." He encourages the church to love their neighbours, regardless of their wealth or moral standing, emulating Jesus' example during His time on Earth.

Furthermore, we see Paul encouraging Christians in Corinth to determine in their hearts the amount they should give. He emphasises that cheerful giving is more pleasing to God than contributions made out of reluctance or compulsion. In doing so, God promises to generously provide all that we need (2 Corinthians 9:6-10).

In the beginning, we observe God rejecting Cain's sacrifice (Genesis 4:3-7). The Bible does not provide clear details as to why this occurred, but it is evident that God detests the sacrifices of those with evil intentions, particularly when offered with improper motives (Proverbs 21:27). God evaluated not only Cain's sacrifice but also the condition of his heart.

It is essential to guard our hearts and maintain a clear conscience. We should earnestly seek God's assistance in creating clean hearts and renewing our spirits, as David implored in Psalms 51:10, for we serve a God who knows and examines all our hearts and motives.

### **(iii) Entropy**

Entropy, in simple terms, refers to the degree of disorder or randomness within a system—a lack of order or predictability that leads to a gradual decline into chaos.

Some time ago, I encountered an intriguing e-book titled "The Universe, Science and God" by Katie Lynn Daniels, which presents a unique perspective from the author.

In one chapter, she discusses the second law of thermodynamics and explains how it sheds light on the events that transpired in the Garden of Eden.

For those interested, the first law of thermodynamics states that energy can change forms but is neither created nor destroyed, while the second law asserts that entropy (disorder) consistently increases over time.

The author provides a relatable example: if you do not clean your room, it becomes increasingly dirty over time. Disorder escalates the more it is neglected. To reverse this disorder (entropy) in the room, one must exert energy coupled with intelligence. According to the author, “Intelligence by itself will talk, but never work, and energy by itself simply dissipates into the atmosphere.” It is necessary to dedicate time to harness both energy and intelligence to establish order in the room or reverse its entropy.

The author further notes that time progresses in one direction—from the past to the present and into the future. As the second law of thermodynamics states, a teacup that falls to the floor and shatters does not magically return to the table and reform into a teacup. Disorder always increases.

The author cites Genesis 3:14-15 (GNT), which states, "Then the Lord God said to the snake, 'You will be punished for this; you alone of all the animals must bear this curse: from now on you will crawl on your belly, and you will have to eat dust as long as you live. I will make you and the woman hate each other; her offspring and yours will always be enemies. Her offspring will crush your head, and you will bite her offspring's heel.'"

The author asserts that this passage reflects the curse associated with the second law of thermodynamics. With our disobedience, everything fell into disarray. Prior to this event, there was no death, no pain or sorrow; existence was vibrant, but it is now governed by death, leading to a transformation in the laws that dictate the very fabric of the entire universe. This demonstrates the profound destructiveness of sin, which altered the laws pertaining to order and disorder.

"Eden was a world where shards of porcelain jumped up onto a table and formed a teacup. Eden was a world where you cleaned your room, and it stayed clean. Eden was a world where the Second Law of Thermodynamics did not exist – where there was no entropy, no increase in disorder.”<sup>4</sup>

#### **(iv) Test and See**

We are currently in the end of days, and the return of Jesus could occur at any moment. It is imperative to remain vigilant; we are witnessing the emergence of false prophets and various doctrines. These individuals operate like snake charmers, enticing some to sway endlessly to their mellifluous messages.

They are false shepherds leading unsuspecting sheep towards thorny bushes, cliffs, pits, and deep wells for their own benefit.

Peter, John, Jude, and many other apostles warned the churches and communities they led through their epistles about false teachers, their destructive tactics, and the importance of testing their claims.

I am grateful that their epistles are included in the 66 books of the Bible, allowing us to meditate on them today and ultimately helping us guard our hearts against the evil one.

In his first letter, John writes to some of the Gentile congregations to “test (them) to see if the spirit they have comes from God” (1 John 4:1, NLT).

The term "test" itself carries significant implications. Upon closer inspection, it becomes evident that only certain individuals within society possess the capability to test, examine, or investigate. Professions that come to mind include teachers, electricians, private investigators, doctors, and nurses who conduct and evaluate tests on patients, as well as food inspectors and quality analysts. When we consider these professionals individually, we observe that they possess a level of expertise in their respective fields, granting them the authority to conduct tests, evaluate outcomes, and draw conclusions.

Could it be that John is urging his congregation to engage deeply with His Word, meditating on it day and night to attain the expertise necessary to safeguard themselves against false prophets, who are like hyenas and vultures?

Might the apostles be encouraging their congregations to acquire knowledge of Christ to such an extent that they can independently evaluate teachings and assist their fellow believers in remaining steadfast in their faith?

Certainly, they have provided us with a blueprint to assess teachers and determine whether their messages align with God’s word. This involves examining whether their teachings correspond with the teachings of Jesus as found in the Bible, evaluating their commitment to the body of Christ (the believers), scrutinizing their lifestyles, and assessing the fruits of their ministries. A crucial criterion for such evaluation is whether these teachers acknowledge Jesus as both fully God and fully man.

In contemporary society, however, false teachers are gaining traction by delivering messages that cater to people's desires. Many individuals today are reluctant to have their spiritual condition illuminated; they resist correction and are disinclined to change their behavior. They may believe they possess the freedom to act as they wish, yet they often become enslaved to whatever governs them. It is essential to recognize that failing to follow Jesus leads to the pursuit of our own sinful desires, resulting in bondage to our

physical appetites. As stated in James 4:4, when we align ourselves with the world, we become enemies of God.

Prior to testing and determining whether someone is misinterpreting the word of God, it is advisable to grow in the knowledge of Jesus, who is our Lord and Saviour, so that we may come to know Him increasingly well. Peter, an impulsive individual during Jesus' time on Earth, made mistakes he later regretted. However, now filled with the Spirit, he begins and concludes his second and final letter by urging his readers to acquire as much knowledge as possible about Christ, who lived among us, in order to be better equipped to combat false teachings (2 Peter 1:2, 3:18, NLT). We all have room for growth, and learning is a lifelong journey. Regardless of our current stage in our spiritual lives, whether we are “milk drinkers” or “meat eaters,” we must care for one another, and every day we should strive to draw closer to Christ, being well-prepared to stand for the truth and defend the faith.

### **Reflection Questions:**

- When was the last time your heart's motive surprised you? How might asking God to search it bring fresh peace?
- In a world of growing disorder, what one small act of order could you bring to your daily routine this week?
- Think of someone new you met lately. What one thing could you do this week to remember and reach out—like a high-five that lasts?
- Where do you sense God inviting you to know Jesus more? Pick a Bible passage to read slowly, then share one insight with a trusted friend.



## 7. S. A. D. and the Light that Lifts

*‘At that time Jesus said, “Father, Lord of heaven and earth! I thank you because you have shown to the unlearned what you have hidden from the wise and learned. Yes, Father, this was how you wanted it to happen.... No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son.... “Come to me, all of you who are tired from carrying heavy loads, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke and put it on you, and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble in spirit; and you will find rest. For the yoke I will give you is easy, and the load I will put on you is light.” Matthew 11:25-30 (GNT).*

*“...anyone who hears the words of mine and does not obey them is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain poured down, the rivers overflowed, the wind blew hard against the house, and it fell. And what a terrible fall that was!” Matthew 7:26, 27 (GNT)*

The acronym in the title, S.A.D, stands for **S**tress, **A**nxiety, and **D**epression (the products of darkness in this world).

According to the Oxford Dictionary of English, the above three words are defined as follows:

**Stress** (noun): a state of mental or emotional strain or tension resulting from adverse or demanding circumstances.

**Anxiety** (noun): a feeling of worry, nervousness, or unease about something with an uncertain outcome.

**Depression** (noun): feelings of severe despondency and dejection.

As I am very passionate about studying therapeutics and the management of various disorders of the human body, I am tempted to discuss the science behind them and their treatment algorithms. However, I will refrain myself from taking that route and focus primarily on a spiritual viewpoint rather than a psychiatric one, as there are many medical textbooks available for those who wish to educate themselves. I do not wish to replicate that here.

I acknowledge that human wisdom on subjects like these is considerably vast, evidence-based, and continually updating, with promising research on the horizon. However, I also firmly believe that human wisdom is trivial and negligible in the eyes of our Father in heaven, especially considering that science is still attempting to comprehend God and His marvellous works while being constrained by human beliefs based on science, thereby hampering its progress.

Oh, how I sometimes wish that science would one day discover God, acknowledge all His works, and give Him the credit He deserves! Could that day ever arrive? Some of you may think I am being overly ambitious. While there is no harm in this, the sad fact is that humanity often attempts to theorise everything and seek evidence. If one fails to provide strong and convincing evidence, they tend to not believe in it.

*“God in His wisdom has made it impossible for people to know Him by means of their own wisdom,”* says Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:21 (GNT).

Most of the world's population today behaves like Thomas, one of Jesus' disciples, who did not believe in the resurrected Jesus until he touched His wounded palms. A certain degree of skepticism is healthy, as it encourages individuals to ask questions and seek answers. However, excessive doubt can lead to stubbornness and hinder the growth of faith. This is why I see Jesus expressing concern for us, as we often possess very little faith and tend to live by sight rather than by faith. It is essential to allow our doubts to deepen our faith by remaining with our questions longer and not giving up on seeking answers. After all, the great Albert Einstein himself once stated that he likes to “stay with the questions much longer”.

We often allow our minds to dominate our thoughts, neglecting to ponder the Great Helper who lives among us! The worries, tensions, apprehensions, and fears we experience are all products of our lack of faith in the God who intricately created everything around us. It is absurd to claim that everything that exists is merely a product of chance. By believing this, individuals tend to rely solely on their own limited capabilities, thereby bearing unbearable burdens that lead to stress and ultimately overwhelm them.

Why do we do this? Why do we attempt to control what we cannot manage? The uncertainties in our lives can be quite bothersome, can't they? A sense of unease and jitters can fill our hearts because we cannot see the future. Most importantly, we expect God to provide what we want, despite the fact that it is often us who restrict Him from intervening in our lives. We do not prioritise Him, we do not pray for His guidance throughout the process, we do not cultivate an intimate relationship with Him daily, and we do not allow God to assist us, yet we expect the unexpected while crossing our fingers!

Here is another curious behaviour we exhibit: when everything seems to fall apart (often due to our own actions), and we can no longer control the situation, we turn to God to “repair and restore” things back to how they were! Joshua and the Israelites did not consult God before going against the small city of Ai; they relied on their military prowess (Joshua 7:2-3). Only after their defeat did they turn to God to inquire about what had happened. Similarly, we often turn to God only when obstacles seem insurmountable. This is the unfortunate reality for many Christians today.

Jesus reminds us in the Gospel of John, chapter 15, that He is the true vine and emphasises the importance of remaining united to Him. He states in verse 5 (GNT): "...Those who remain in me, and I in them, will bear much fruit; for *you can do nothing without me.*"

It is crucial for us to remain in Him first, and then He will remain in us. This is where obedience plays a key role in a Christian's life. His principles and commands must dwell within us. We must not only listen to His words but also obey, follow, and implement them. Then, whatever we ask in His name, we will receive!

Dear friends, you must recognise that the world you currently inhabit is filled with darkness and is ruled by the evil one. Everything here is a product of that darkness. All the pain, suffering, temptation, apprehension, disappointment, fear, and negativity that you encounter arises from our choice to pursue our will rather than God's will. We were created to obey Him and made for more. Adam and Eve heeded the Evil One by disobeying God's direct command, leading to the introduction of sin and death into existence.

God instructs us to follow His will through the guidelines recorded in the Bible, which act as a protective boundary He has set around us. This boundary exists not because God is strict, but because He desires to shield us from the evil one, who is always seeking to devour us (1 Peter 5:8). God understands the devastating effects of sin on His children and does not want us to be lost. The only way to please Him is by adhering to His commands, and He rewards us immeasurably for doing so. Conversely, when we disobey and stray away, we cross the boundary set by God and become influenced by the sinful nature of this world. Darkness gradually consumes us through suffering, leading us into temptation, which encourages further sin and causes us to ignore His words calling us back to reconciliation. While we may hurt ourselves, we often cry out, "Where are you, God, when I need you?" or "Why did you leave me, Lord?" But it is we who have wandered away; He has never left us, not even for a moment.

If you are reading this, I urge you to stop dwelling on your past and how irreparable it may seem. Leave it as it is. You are loved by the God of heaven and earth, whose mercy endures forever. Come back to Him. Do not heed the harmful words of the Devil, for they are vicious and self-inflicting. You may perceive them as the voices in your head, but they are his. He seeks your soul. Do not listen to him; he will always aim to steal, kill, and destroy. Avoid being like the foolish man who does not obey God's words and builds his house on sand; if you do so, you will lack stability, as Jesus warns in Matthew 7:27 (GNT).

You see, He yearns for you to listen to Him. He has always been gentle and compassionate. Following Him wholeheartedly must be your priority. In doing so, we demonstrate our love for Him, just as innocent

children do for their parents. When we obey His commands, we are then called His own children. Yes, God's own children. It should not be difficult for God's children to obey His commands, just as it was not difficult for Jesus to obey His Father God's command to shed His own blood on the cross. This is how we will achieve victory over the world and everything in it!

Therefore, learn to let go and leave all consequences to Him so that you may live peacefully. Every star in the sky was placed there by Him, and He likely knows each one by name. It is impossible for Him to forget who you are, as He is the one who created you. He provides assurance by stating, "...even the hairs of your head have all been counted. So, do not be afraid; you are worth much more than many sparrows" in Matthew 10:30, 31 (GNT).

Just as a child lacks nothing under the protection of a father who provides for him, we too must not allow our minds to wander and fill us with life's apprehensions. If we worry, we demonstrate very little faith in our Father. He requires us to seek Him alone and His righteousness so that He can provide for all our needs.

### **Reflection Questions:**

- What is one "shadow" weighing on you today? How might whispering Jesus' yoke invitation lighten it, even a fraction?
- Recall a time when doubt took deeper root—what question did you linger on, and what flicker of faith emerged?
- In a tangle of "fix it now," where could a simple "your will" prayer shift the soil beneath your feet?
- Picture abiding in the vine—what one small act of obedience feels like fruit budding this week?

## 8. Building Habits That Last

The start of a new year always brings a sense of renewal. Almost everyone devises plans or resolutions to pursue throughout the year, although some may struggle to adhere to their commitments. Common resolutions include losing weight through gym attendance, learning a new language, quitting alcohol or smoking, or increasing social engagement. Everyone aspires to improve upon their previous year's performance.

You might be reading this in the middle of the year and feel as though you have lost all hope and interest in sticking to your resolutions, teetering on the edge of giving up. There are myriad reasons why we lose momentum and abandon our goals.

According to the devotional *One Word That Will Change Your Life* by Jon Gordon, Dan Briton, and Jimmy Page, 50% of those who make resolutions fail by the end of January, and 9 out of 10 abandon them by March.<sup>5</sup>

Martin Meadows, the author of *365 Days with Self-Discipline: 365 Life-Altering Thoughts on Self-Control, Mental Resilience, and Success*, cites a meta-analysis conducted by researchers at the University of Victoria in British Columbia and the University of Amsterdam, which revealed that among individuals making fitness-related New Year's resolutions, 46% quit by June. Additionally, gym membership statistics from the International Health, Racquet & Sports Club Association present even more alarming figures – 67% of individuals with gym memberships never utilise them.<sup>6</sup>

Personally, I have never understood the concept of making resolutions at the start of the new year. When asked about my plans for the upcoming year, my typical response is, “I don't know,” as I tend to be more of a “live in the moment” person. I prefer to decide (often spontaneously throughout the year) when I genuinely want to make a lifestyle change, outline everything necessary to implement the resolution (or execute the plan), establish small goals to achieve, and immediately immerse myself in it until it becomes a habit.

Many individuals who resolve to begin their chosen activities on the first day of the new year are taking a significant first step. While I commend this effort, I question whether they possess the requisite level of interest, resources, and commitment to sustain their resolutions throughout the year or into the future. Their motivation does not simply materialise at the dawn of 1st January; rather, it is influenced by their mindset.

Thoughts lead to decisions, which in turn lead to actions. Effective planning involves addressing potential “what if” scenarios. It prepares you to be adaptable and have contingencies in place to remain on course. Consider questions related to your journey, the path ahead, and your ultimate destination. For instance, “Do you envision how you want to look in a few months or years? Have you anticipated the obstacles you might encounter as time progresses? Have you considered dietary changes or acquiring resources to learn a new language? What if adverse weather conditions arise on a particular day? Will you be able to maintain your routine while on holiday?”

We must recognise that making resolutions is straightforward, but preparing for them in advance and remaining committed, regardless of the passage of time, requires a considerable level of focus and determination. Adhering to our resolutions involves habit formation. In essence, we are striving to establish habits that could potentially transform our lives.

How do we cultivate good habits? Consistency is the foundation of effective habits. We require self-discipline to form a habit.

Research indicates that to establish a habit, we need consistency and self-discipline for at least 66 days. Only then can we perform that activity consistently, such as waking up early and going to the gym, or brushing our teeth daily without needing self-discipline.<sup>7</sup>

Many individuals give up either because they do not enjoy what they are doing, lack support or an accountability partner, or both. If one does not relish the idea of sweating it out at the gym, consider walking, cycling, jogging with a dog, or taking up a new sport. Movement is essential; any form of physical activity is beneficial. We were never intended to be sedentary. Forming friendships with individuals who share similar interests can also be advantageous. Support and accountability can motivate us to achieve our goals.

If it involves refraining from consuming high-calorie foods, such as pizza or cake, substituting them with healthier options like fruit or nuts can be effective. Visualizing how we wish to look in the future aids in exercising self-control. When we repeatedly engage in the necessary actions, we witness the emergence of good habits, which begin to take root.

In his book, *365 Days With Self-Discipline*, Martin provides three tips for making resolutions stick, which I have summarized below:

### 1. *Do not fall in love with the idea of starting*

It is perilous to share with everyone what we intend to do; we may become enamored with the notion of embarking on something at the expense of actually doing it. In other words, we can declare our resolutions as long as we ensure that we are doing so to garner support rather than admiration. Action is more significant than mere words.

### 2. *Employ self-discipline to stay positive*

A predominantly negative mindset can lead to laziness and a lack of discipline. Many individuals do not observe the results they desire after several months of gym attendance due to not adhering to a new diet plan, struggling with muscle soreness, or simply lacking time. Actively working to overcome our default negative reactions and replacing them with a more positive attitude can uplift our spirits and provide the necessary impetus to engage in activities.

### 3. *Focus on today*

The enormity of a task can often feel overwhelming. Setting small, attainable goals can facilitate progress and alleviate feelings of anguish. The question should always be, “What’s on the agenda for today?” The most effective way to maintain consistency is to tackle tasks one at a time, gradually progressing until we reach our destination, similar to the tortoise in Aesop’s fable. As we achieve small goals day by day and week by week, the larger task diminishes until we ultimately reach our goal.

In an article published in the *Deccan Chronicle*, life coach Khyathi Birla observes that “people in the New Year spirit choose goals that are unattainable in a short span of time, and so as a result, their interest and enthusiasm for the resolution dissolves quickly.” Another life coach, Priya Kumar, states, “One way to avoid falling into the same cycle again is to ensure that your resolution is sustainable and your goals are attainable.” To achieve them, she advises to “be tolerant, patient, consistent, and persistent.”<sup>8</sup>

As mentioned earlier, it is unnecessary to wait for the New Year to make a fresh start by formulating new resolutions. This approach often proves ineffective. Time is precious. The Bible states in Ecclesiastes 11:4 (GNT): “If you wait until the wind and the weather are just right, you will never sow anything and never harvest anything.”

Moreover, prioritise God. Express your desire to enact change in your life to glorify Him in all that you do, as stated in 1 Corinthians 10:31 (GNT). Most importantly, refrain from boasting about what you will

do tomorrow, as “you do not know what your life will be! You are like a puff of smoke, which appears and then disappears,” according to James 4:14 (GNT).

Seek God’s permission, His divine guidance, and ask Him to instill you with determination and support you throughout your journey while maintaining a clear conscience. Learn to embrace and enjoy the process. Endure any discomfort with a positive mindset. Stay consistent. Cultivate good habits and track your progress. Ultimately, start now.

**Reflection Questions:**

- What is one small "win" from your past that built a habit? How could it inspire a fresh start right now?
- Picture a hurdle you’re dreading—what’s one backup plan that feels doable and kind to yourself?
- If God whispered one bit of guidance for your next step, what do you sense it might be?



## 9. Living to Give

*“For God loved the world so much that He **gave** His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not die but have eternal life.” John 3:16 (GNT)*

*“This is how we know what love is: Christ **gave** His life for us. We too then ought to **give** our lives for our brothers and sisters!” 1 John 3:16 (GNT)*

If you are a parent, you can understand how excruciatingly painful it can be to even imagine giving your only child to be sacrificed for the salvation of the whole world. You wouldn't even consider doing it to save one person! The sacrificial love of God truly knows no bounds when we reflect on it. We might think to ourselves, “Well, God knows the future. He knew Jesus would rise from the dead after three days, so He was sure of it and gave Jesus up for us.” But what if God wanted to teach us how to be *sacrificial* just like He was? What if He wants us to *love* like He does, without knowing what the future holds or expecting anything in return, thereby teaching us to live by faith and think eternally by solely seeking His Kingdom?

### Why God Gives So Freely

The primary reason God created us was to have an eternal relationship with us. Since God is Love, as it says in 1 John 4:16, He wanted to share His love with us so we could love Him and each other. He loves us dearly and in an incomprehensible way because He chooses to—solely out of love and not out of necessity. However, true love exhibits its grandeur through action. He didn't rush off to create humans immediately; first, He had to establish the basic elements for us to exist, thrive, and sustain our lives, such as oxygen in the air, light for warmth, water, soil, the environment, and energy that changes from one form to another. As fragile and delicate as we are, He had to do certain things carefully and intricately before rolling out the red carpet for our grand entry!

Fast forward, we observe Him sending manna, quails, and water from a rock, His strong arm defeating His people's enemies, and sending ravens to feed His servant, among other acts. Ultimately, we witness the zenith of His divine, incredible love in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus on this planet—God descending from heaven, living as humans do, laughing and crying, suffering, experiencing pain, joy, inconveniences, and unfortunate events, performing miracles, and then bearing the weight of humanity's sin to die on the cross once and for all. As I write this, I find myself, teary-eyed, reflecting, “What wondrous love is this!”

The two reasons for writing this chapter are to elaborate on the “He gave His only Son” part of John 3:16 and to discuss the significance of how love and giving are interconnected.

### **Examples of Giving from the Heart**

The widow who gave the two small copper coins comes to mind when I reflect on the “He gave His only Son” part of John 3:16. In Mark 12:41-44, a crowd was putting their money into the temple treasury. Jesus sat across from them, observing everything, and noticed what this widow did. He told His disciples that she had given everything she had to live on. Her giving was a sweet-smelling, acceptable sacrifice that pleased God. It distinguished her from the crowd and became exemplary and iconic. Her act of giving served as a teaching point for His disciples. It had such a profound impact that it was recorded in the Bible. Her small, seemingly insignificant offering, which might appear laughable to human eyes, was the only sacrifice that held true value in the Creator’s eyes. It is safe to say that she gave just as God did—I assert this because God had no other but Jesus, who did not come in a blazing chariot of fire with all the accompanying pomp and menacing thunderous noise. He arrived on Earth like the rest of us, born to an ordinary human on a cold, silent night—just another grain of sand by the seashore!

How can we emulate the sacrificial spirit of this widow? While we typically give a percentage of our income to God, she offered everything she could live on. This distinction is significant. We often resemble the crowd—contributing only a portion of our earnings. It is important to recognise that giving is not solely about finances. We can dedicate our time to listen to someone share their struggles; we can invest our energy by volunteering in our communities; we can donate blood to save lives; and we can give away clothes, possessions, and items we no longer use. The Bible teaches that when we perform these acts of kindness for strangers, we are ultimately serving God (Matthew 25:34-40). God observes our spirit when we give. Are we giving cheerfully or begrudgingly? Are we giving with overflowing gratitude in our hearts, or are we seeking recognition?

### **A Life of Giving That Lasts**

William Colgate’s friend, a canal-boat captain and a Christian, advised him, “Be a good man. Give your heart to Christ. Give God all that belongs to Him. Someone will be the leading soap maker in New York. It may be you!” William had already experienced failure in the soap manufacturing business at the young age of 19, but he was determined to try again in New York City after moving with his family from a small town called Shoreham, near London.

William made a vow similar to that of Jacob in Genesis 28:20-22, committing to place God first in his life. He also promised to give a tenth—a tithe—of his profits to God. In 1804, at the age of 21, William found employment with Tallow Chandlers Slidel & Co., where he gained further insight into the soap-making industry. When, two years later, the company ceased production, William was prepared to try again. William Colgate & Company achieved success from the outset. Within six years, he expanded his laundry-soap business to include the manufacturing of starch. Later, he also produced hand soap and a variety of toiletry and shaving soaps.

As Colgate's business expanded, so too did his family. In 1811, he married Mary Gilbert, and they became the parents of 11 children, many of whom were given biblical names. They regularly attended church, held family worship, and read the Bible together. William became known as Deacon Colgate within his church community. He generously supported missions and Christian education, donating significant sums to several educational institutions, including Madison College in Hamilton, New York, which is now named Colgate University in his honour. William never forgot his promise to God; from the first dollar he earned, he devoted 10 percent of his net earnings to charitable causes. As his prosperity increased, he instructed his accountants to raise this amount to 20 percent and later to 30 percent. Remarkably, it seemed that the more he gave, the more he prospered.<sup>9</sup>

His legacy endures to this day through various cosmetic products, including toothpastes, soaps, and shampoos. This stands as a testament to God's faithfulness towards a man who continually gave and did not withhold. At one point, Colgate amassed considerable wealth and could have succumbed to greed, hoarding his riches. Instead, he chose to continue giving and engaging in philanthropy.

Certainly, William Colgate exemplified a deep love and service to God in ways that were pleasing to Him. His motivations were not solely self-serving; his personal care products were genuine and offered value that encouraged repeat purchases year after year. His commitment to God is evident through his charitable endeavors throughout his life. In essence, his heart was focused on Jesus and generosity, and therein lay his treasure. That is where he found contentment in life, filled with gratitude.

### **Learning to Give with a Thankful Heart**

Basic human nature, or worldly nature, inherently desires more. Once something is acquired, the pursuit of the next best thing begins, perpetuating a vicious cycle. It consistently questions, “What will I gain in return?” Where there is discontentment, we see no gratitude. To satisfy our desires, we often pray but do not receive our wishes due to our motives (James 4:3). In contrast, Godly nature is characterised by a lack

of grumbling or complaining and embodies contentment. Those who are content and filled with gratitude tend to give lavishly, demonstrating generosity and love. The poor widow, having lost her husband, likely relied on him as the sole provider for her family. Nevertheless, she chose to give all she had—not out of sadness or obligation, but from a heart of gold, a heart inclined towards giving. She could have waited until she earned more money to contribute to God, as many of us often do, but her faith in God’s provision led her to the treasury. She believed that it was God who would always supply her needs, much like a shepherd tends to his sheep.

When Jesus died on the cross, He paid the ultimate price for us and redeemed us with His own blood, granting us the opportunity for eternal life with Him; thus, we do not belong to ourselves but to God (1 Corinthians 6:19, GNT).

It is essential to understand that true satisfaction comes when we believe and live in such a way that allows God, the creator of everything around us, to provide for all our requests, in faith and according to His perfect timing.

As I write this, two verses come to mind:

1. “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as though you were working for the Lord.” Colossians 3:23 (GNT).
2. “...whatever you do, whether you eat or drink, do it all for God’s glory.” 1 Corinthians 10:31 (GNT).

The underlined phrase “whatever you do” does not have to pertain solely to activities for which you are compensated. It can be as simple as helping your mother in the kitchen or assisting someone in carrying their grocery bags from the store to their car in the parking lot.

We Christians must move beyond self-centeredness and actively embody one of the greatest commandments: to love one another. True religion extends beyond worship and attending church every Sunday. As James reminds us in James 1:27, “What God the Father considers to be pure and genuine religion is this: to take care of orphans and widows in their suffering...”

Tony Robbins, one of the most influential motivational speakers of our time, states, “Life is not about me. It is about we (us). People are suffering because you are obsessed with yourself. You are fixated on something that happened, and now you have less, or you’ve lost something. When you realise that all suffering is an obsession with self, you can snap out of it. All you must do is stop expecting and start appreciating. If you are going to wait until you think you’re going to have something, you’re never going to have something of any size or scope. It is when you have nothing that you need to give.”<sup>10</sup>

Regarding the importance of giving, Jesus said in Luke 6:38 (GNT): “Give to others, and God will give to you. Indeed, you will receive a full measure, a generous helping, poured into your hands – all that you can hold. The measure you use for others is the one that God will use for you.”

So, my friends, I encourage you to reflect on this question: “What is the measure I am using for others?” “Am I fully committed to Jesus and those around me?” We are living in the end times; we must recognise that the people of this world are observing how we live, and God observes everything as well! He tells the Israelites in Isaiah 43:12 (GNT): “...you are my witnesses.”

*“As dedicated disciples of Jesus, absolutely everything we do in public—from social media posts, business websites, and blog content to our language, attitude, and the way we treat everyone we encounter—is a witness and testimony to our true relationship with God!” - Larry L. Nichols.<sup>11</sup>*

Therefore, we must lead lives on this earth that reflect the awe and wonder of whom we worship. Let us strive diligently to do something for others, always placing our neighbours before ourselves without expecting anything in return during our time on this planet. Our promised grand reward awaits us above.

As Paul states in 1 Corinthians 10:33 (GNT), “...I try to please everyone in all that I do, not thinking of my own good, but of the good of all...” we must embody a spirit of passion and eagerness to fulfil our divine calling, much like Jesus did on His journey to the cross, which ultimately led to the reward of the eternal crown of glory.

**Reflection Questions:**

- Reflect on a time when you sacrificed something for someone else. How did this experience alter your perception of God's care for you?
- Identify one way you can offer something other than money this week—such as time or a kind word—to someone in need.
- Consider a recent instance when you assisted someone. Did your actions stem from a grateful heart, or were you anticipating something in return? How might a Bible verse help you to view the situation differently?
- Envision your daily life as a "witness" to others (Isaiah 43:12). What minor adjustment could you make in your speech or behavior to demonstrate Jesus' love more clearly?

## 10. The Tenth Commandment

*“You must not covet your neighbour’s house. You must not covet your neighbour’s wife, male or female servant, ox or donkey, or anything else that belongs to your neighbour.” Exodus 20:17 (NLT).*

The Ten Commandments listed in Exodus chapter 20 serve as a set of prohibitions. Some are straightforward, while others possess deeper meanings.

When I encounter verses in the Bible that state, “Do not,” “You must not,” or “You shall not,” my immediate response is to ponder, “What can I *do*?” or “What must I *do*?” or “If not this, then what else?” By asking myself these questions, I engage my curiosity, inviting God to teach me and guide me towards uncovering the hidden treasures within His Word.

From this verse, when God instructs us not to covet, I infer two key principles:

1. To be satisfied and content with what you have, to express gratitude, and to refrain from comparison.
2. To avoid envying or feeling jealous of what others possess.

This sentiment is reminiscent of Jesus’s response to Peter: “If I want him (John) to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?” as recorded in John 21:22 (NLT).

Reflecting on the dialogue between Jesus and Peter in John 21:18-23, it is evident that Jesus implies to Peter, “Why does it matter?” or “What is that to you?” or “What’s that got to do with you? Everyone is different and has a unique purpose. Mind your own business. Stay in your lane.”

Peter was not coveting or yearning for what John had; he simply wished to know John’s fate, and Jesus admonished him not to be concerned.

Throughout my life, I have encountered the Ten Commandments numerous times—as a child, a teenager, and an adult. From memorising them in Sunday School to hearing them discussed during sermons, devotionals, prayer meetings, and Bible studies, I have been exposed to them extensively. Growing up, I became accustomed to the New International Version (NIV), followed by the Good News Bible UK and Today’s English Version (GNBUK/GNT) at my mother’s recommendation, for at least 25 years.

I needed an update. Recently, my mother and my sister presented me with a New Living Translation (NLT) study Bible. While going through the book of Deuteronomy as part of my daily Bible reading from this newly acquired NLT version, I encountered the word “covet” in 7:25. Now, English is not my first language, but I had come across that word before. I was aware that it is seldom used in daily conversations

and understood the general meaning of the verse, but something prompted me to investigate further, leading me to the tenth commandment.

I consulted a dictionary to ascertain the precise meaning of the word "covet." According to Google, it means to “yearn to possess or have (something),” which can be interpreted as having a deep desire, craving, fancying, or obsessing over something.

This concept is echoed in Achan's statement: “I wanted them so much that I took them,” found in Joshua 7:21 (NLT), which illustrates how his sin led to Israel's first defeat at Ai on the western side of the Jordan.

The pertinent question is: “What drives someone to covet?”

Reflecting on Genesis 4, where the first murder in the Bible is recorded, we see Cain's fury and scowl of anger when God rejected his offering in favour of Abel's. Despite God's warning that sin was crouching at his door and that he should overcome it, Cain disregarded His words.

Consequently, we witness the first instance of the phrase “comparison is the thief of joy” in the Bible, culminating in a murder!

Cain and Abel were brothers, not mere strangers. They were expected to embody brotherly love and care for one another. However, jealousy consumed Cain, leading him to take a tragic step. Cain was supposed to do what was right in accordance with God's will, but he faltered. All he needed to do was reevaluate his approach, seek Abel's assistance, or at the very least, emulate his brother. Abel likely offered Cain consolation, guidance, or encouragement to improve, yet it is evident that Cain did not love his brother; rather, he envied him. 1 Corinthians 13:4 (GNT) states, “Love is not jealous or conceited or proud.” It was Cain's hatred towards Abel that ultimately drove him to commit murder.

I have pondered why God included “do not covet” as one of the Ten Commandments. Perhaps it was not solely because it led to the first murder, but because it is associated with a cascade of other sins and negative behaviours, such as stealing, adultery, greed, discord, restlessness, ungratefulness, and discontentment. This creates a seriously debilitating chain reaction of evil—one sin leading to another, akin to opening a can of worms. It resonates with James 3:16 (NLT), which states, “For where there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there you will find disorder and evil of every kind.”

In the New Testament, we also observe the elder brother of the prodigal son becoming angry when his father killed a fattened calf to celebrate the return of his younger son (Luke 15:28-30, NLT). He tells his father, “All these years I've slaved for you and never once refused to do a single thing you told me to. And in all that time you never gave me even one young goat for a feast with my friends...” This reaction is indeed surprising. Instead of sharing in his father's joy at the return of his younger brother after such a



long absence, he responded with anger. The mere comparison he made in that brief moment ignited his resentment.

The disciples were not pleased with James and John too when they requested Jesus to allow them to sit on either side of His throne. They desired the same thing that the sons of Zebedee sought. (Mark 10:41, GNT)

It appears that no one is immune to the detrimental effects of comparison; it is ingrained in our human nature. The writer of Proverbs aptly stated, “Peace of mind makes a body healthy, but jealousy is like cancer.” (Proverbs 14:30, GNT).

It is undeniably accurate that we completely lack peace of mind when we constantly look to our left and right to measure ourselves against those around us. Furthermore, upon examining this futile game of comparison, we find that it has no winners.

Sandra Stanley, in one of her devotionals discussing comparison, notes that when we feel we do not measure up to those around us, envy and jealousy take root. Conversely, when comparison seems to favour us, pride and arrogance take hold. She further explains that the most insidious form of comparison leads us to take pleasure in the misfortunes of others. Indeed, there are individuals who have admitted to feeling a sense of satisfaction upon hearing of a friend's breakup or witnessing a colleague's failure to secure a promotion.<sup>12</sup>

So, how do we rid ourselves of this stubborn evil that binds us and prevents us from reaching our full potential?

Firstly, we must recognise our uniqueness.

Consider us all; we each look different. Moreover, no two individuals in this world possess the same fingerprints. How intricate is His creation! At times, I pause everything I am doing and, in the stillness, I marvel at the magnificence of His workmanship. I do not need to seek out beautiful scenery characterized by mountains and valleys; I can simply sit in this place as I type this sentence and appreciate my surroundings—the furniture in my home, my books, my laptop, my cellphone, etc. For 1 Corinthians 10:26 (GNT) states, “...The earth and everything in it belong to the Lord.”

God calls Jeremiah to be His messenger in Jeremiah 1:4 (GNT), saying, “I chose you before I gave you life, and before you were born, I selected you...”

Every one of us has been personally selected and chosen by God to carry out His works (what we are meant to do). From the aforementioned verse, we learn that each of us has a unique purpose, and we should not spend our brief time on this planet trying to be like or better than someone else.

The Bible also states in Genesis 1:27-28 (GNT) that, “God created human beings to be like Himself...and put them in charge over everything.”

Therefore, we must cease conforming to the world's tendency to impose limits through comparison and instead strive to be like God, utilising the great potential and gifts bestowed upon us. As stated in Ephesians 2:10 (GNT), “God made us what we are...for a life of good deeds, which He has already prepared for us to do.”

Whenever we observe others seemingly surpassing us in life—such as securing impressive jobs, marrying, or starting families—we must remain steadfast and trust in God’s timing. While we exercise patience and await His promises with hope, we should live for Him wholeheartedly, fulfilling our purpose by utilising the gifts that have been given to us. This aligns with the message in Romans 12:6 (GNT): “...use our different gifts in accordance with the grace that God has given us.”

Furthermore, Colossians 3:23 advises, “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as though you were working for the Lord and not for human beings.”

When we approach our tasks as outlined in the above verse, it becomes nearly impossible to be distracted by the accomplishments of others.

Additionally, we must cultivate an attitude of gratitude towards God for what He has provided us. We should take the time to count our blessings.

Gratitude fosters growth by helping us become content with what we possess. It aids in maintaining a healthy and mature relationship with God by shifting our perspective. Therefore, we should never cease to thank God for what He has accomplished in our lives.

We become weary, depressed, and dissatisfied with our lives when comparison overwhelms us. This provides an opportunity for the devil to suggest that God has forgotten us or that there may be a delay in the reception of our blessings. I urge you, never fall for that trap!

The writer of Hebrews in 13:5 (GNT) states, “...be satisfied with what you have, for God has said, ‘I will never leave you; I will never abandon you.’” Paul in 1 Timothy 6:6 (GNT) states, “Religion does make a person rich, if he is satisfied with what he has.”

Thirdly and finally, we need to learn to respect everyone around us.

We were not created to have selfish motives; such motives are evil. God judges our intentions and provides for us accordingly. Romans 12:10 (GNT) says, “.... be eager to show respect for one another.”

We must display God's presence in our lives through our good deeds. Hebrews 12:14 (GNT) states, "Try to be at peace with everyone, and try to live a holy life, because no one will see the Lord without it."

We all possess different talents and each of us excels in some area. Use your gifts to glorify God in every way possible. Learn to encourage one another and celebrate each person's success around you, for we are God's children, and we are also meant to be the salt and light of this world.

**Reflection Questions:**

- Where has a "what's that to you?" nudge from Jesus quieted your glance lately?
- Name one gift in your corner today—what thanks could you express to root it deeper?
- Amid a neighbour's bloom, what small honour might you extend this week?
- In your unique way, what prepared deed from Ephesians 2:10 calls you next?

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