

PLAIN TRUTH[®]

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Looking at Life from the Outside In

By Ed Dunn

Thirty-six years ago, I began to lose the ability to see whatever it was I was looking at directly. I began to lose my central vision. As a college freshman at the time, new to the Los Angeles, California area from the hills and hollows of rural Western Pennsylvania, I was already somewhat overwhelmed by my “big-city” environment. To suddenly and most unexpectedly face the deterioration of my eyesight, after a life of perfect, 20/20 vision to that point, I must admit, I was completely terrified. How would I go on? How would I find my way with so much of life yet ahead of me?

Following a long journey of eye doctor visits and the related rigorous testing, the eye specialist who ultimately diagnosed my condition gave it to me straight; he

informed me that I had a rare retinal disorder known as Stargardt’s Disease. He told me that Stargardt’s was a disease that attacks the central vision, and is found in only one-in-fifteen-thousand people in the world.

The eye specialist continued by sharing that it was a rare event to see this vision condition in someone so young, and that, unfortunately, there was no cure nor course of treatment. Eventually, over a period of ten years or so, I would lose my central vision completely.

At first, I didn’t care much for the direct manner in which the eye specialist was delivering my news. I had a hard time accepting what he was saying. At my age, what I was hearing sounded ridiculous to me. But the good doctor had a method to his madness. He wanted to make

sure that I knew clearly and without a doubt what I would be facing from the age of eighteen-years on. He wanted me to be quite serious about the changes I would need to make in order to function in life.

I learned that Stargardt’s Disease is one form of macular degeneration. Most commonly, this affects the eyesight of much older individuals, people who most teenagers would think of as senior citizens. As the eye specialist shared with me, the disease attacks the photo-receptors in the portion of the eye known as the

macula. The macula resides in the center of the retina and is critically important for the function of central vision.


Almost overnight, I was forced to see the world around me in an entirely new way. I had to give up my driving privileges shortly after diagnosis. I had to begin to learn how to do everything in life—reading, writing, sports and interacting with others socially—using less-and-less of my central vision (my “inside” vision) and depending more on my *peripheral vision* (my “outside” vision). The change from looking directly at something or someone in order to see, to scanning—looking around, above and just slightly off to the right to see—took some getting used to, to be sure.

I was forced to use a hand-held magnifier in order to read my college textbooks and write

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GOT A LIGHT?

Navigating through life is tough without one.



Our lives often seem to go around in circles. We get lost. We all need some help in maintaining a sense of direction. We're Plain Truth Ministries, and we take that name seriously. We don't have all the answers, but we know the direction, and we'll share it with you—in a clear, plain manner—in everyday language.

TRUTH
—in an—
Uncertain World

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research papers. Reading, done at a cozy distance of a mere few inches from the surface of the page, came more slowly as the disease progressed.

Writing and typing research papers became more tedious as my sight deteriorated. I found I needed twice as much time to complete these types of academic tasks as I did previously in high school. Given the demands and pace of a new student life, time became one of the most precious resources I had.

Looking at life from the outside in, as I like to refer to my use of *peripheral vision* to see everything around me, did come at a cost. Living with a rare eye disease at such a young age led me to feel like something of an outsider, like someone who was “different,” “other” or even “odd” compared to the college students around me. I often felt *peripheral* to what was happening around me, as if I was on the outside looking in. As the eye disease progressed and its effects became harder to explain, I didn’t like to talk about it.

My Favorite Sight Story

I love the story of the man who was born blind, found in John 9:1-34 (NIV). John tells us that he was born blind so that the works of God might be displayed in him. Jesus healed the man by spitting on the ground, making a mud paste and then putting the mud paste on the man’s eyes.

“Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” was Jesus’ simple instruction. The man did as Jesus instructed and came back seeing. He then proceeded to get himself into a boatload of trouble with the religious authorities of the day (verses 13-34). I love this story for its utter simplicity and humanity. I love it for the elements used within. And, of course, I love it for the miracle at the end.

But this story is not my story. As much as I find deep inspiration

and more than a little humor within these verses, in my own story, I have not been healed. I’ve prayed for healing from the day of my diagnosis. I’ve asked many others to pray for and with me, as well.

I’ve tried special diets, handfuls of lutein and beta-carotene supplement regimens and homeopathic remedies of every shape and size. Nothing has worked to change my physical sight. To put it simply, it is what it is.

Spiritual Sight

Blindness is an unfortunate handicap but true vision does not require the eyes.

—Helen Keller

Everything that is made beautiful and fair and lovely is made for the eye of one who sees.

—Rumi

As a college freshman, I came across a thinker who inspired me deeply. The second-century Roman emperor, poet and warrior-king, Marcus Aurelius, is famous for saying: “What stands in the path becomes your path.” He is also credited with writing, “Accept whatever comes to you, woven in the pattern of your destiny; for what could more aptly fit your needs.”

Although I’ve never identified as a Stoic, these writings became a pair of lenses through which I could look at my life. These writings became a purpose statement of sorts, not only to accept my vision condition as it is, and the limitations I must deal with, but also to begin to use the condition for good. Perhaps my sight story and what has stood in my path may be an encouragement to others.

As Christ-followers we know that we live by faith and not by sight. We also know that, if we live long enough, we can’t escape this physical life without our share of hardship and heartache. It’s just life. It’s just the way it is. I’d like to believe the poet in Marcus Aurelius was right and what we face in our lives is all part of a plan that best serves us.

However, if I’m honest, much of the time I’m left not understanding the *how* or the *why* of what happens in life. As it pertains to physical sight, only hindsight seems to be 20/20.

What I do believe is that in Christ, we are never **looking at life from the outside in**. We are never *peripheral* to what is truly important—our relationship with Christ and in Christ. We are not outside of him—we are inside with him. We are included. We are central to him and he is central to us. When we believe that Christ lives his life in us and we then live from him, our lives are transformed.

We live in the reality of our own humanity and weaknesses yet in the richness of Christ’s indwelling divinity. The two realities work together to help us face our physical limitations. Christ living in us and we living in him is **never looking at life from the outside in**. □

Ed Dunn is the author of Peripheral: The Journey from Partial to Perfect Sight, currently in the process of publication.



*Information
Is Not
Knowledge...*



*...And
Knowledge Is
Not Wisdom*

Greg Albrecht

The German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (1788 to 1860) said “every generation, no matter how paltry its character, thinks itself much wiser than the one immediately preceding it, let alone those that are more remote.”

In these early years of the 21st century it seems that many are obsessed with dismissing those who have gone before and wiping away their legacy. It seems we are quick to judge others, and slow to realize we will ourselves be judged by the standards we use to repudiate and condemn.

In this century the prevailing notion is that wisdom is derived from access to information and the subsequent knowledge that applies that information. But just as **information is not knowledge, knowledge is not wisdom.**

One must wonder whether our current infatuation with information is helping make us and our world a better place. Is this passionate addiction to

information retrieval systems and our desire for electronic connection endangering wisdom?

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.—Proverbs 3:5-6

In an article titled “Wisdom in the Age of Information,” Maria Popova, a Bulgarian-born writer and blogger who lives in Brooklyn, New York writes, “We live in a world awash with information, but we seem to face a growing scarcity of wisdom. And what’s worse, we confuse the two. We believe that having access to more information produces more knowledge, which results in more wisdom. But if anything, the opposite is true—more and more information without the proper context and interpretation only muddles our understanding of the world rather than enriching it.”

She says, “Information is having a library of books on shipbuilding.

Knowledge applies that to building a ship. Access to the information—to the books—is a prerequisite for the knowledge, but not a guarantee of it. Once you’ve built your ship, wisdom is what allows you to sail it without sinking, to protect it from the storm that creeps up from the horizon in the dead of the night, to point it just so that the wind breathes life into its sails. Moral wisdom helps you to tell the difference between the right direction and the wrong direction in steering the ship.”

The Information Age is not our savior. In fact, it may have taken us captive. It’s a familiar sight, isn’t it? Hundreds of millions are dragging an electronic ball and chain around with them—they are hunched over their devices, playing games, seeking information and even intimacy, searching for meaning on social media.

Fake News

This tsunami of information forcefully reminds us that data and information are no substitute for

wisdom. Wisdom seems buried in a swamp of “alternative” facts, false equivalences, political partisanship and conspiracy theories.

The Internet provides data and hosts websites and dispenses information indiscriminately, so that the user must exercise discretion and discernment about information to be believed and data to be discarded...but many lack any training or guidance in carefully discerning fact from fable.

The information society is now mired in what we know as “fake news.” Of course the primary use of the term “fake news” is by people who propose that news media is trying to twist and pervert and corrupt reality by presenting a false reality and a biased perspective.

But in its wider usage “fake news” seems to be information that contradicts and collides with the already established truth of the person who encounters it. **Fake news, in some ways, seems to be whatever one does not wish to believe.** It is foolish, the very antithesis of wisdom, to ignore clear

evidence, but as humans we are more comfortable with those “facts” that agree with our decisions and our behavior.

One of my favorite stories in this regard comes from the life of a man named Hack Wilson. In the early decades of the 20th century, Hack Wilson was a feared slugger for the Chicago Cubs while struggling with alcoholism—he eventually died of alcoholism at the age of 48.

One day the manager of the Chicago Cubs decided to illustrate how destructive alcohol was, and thus, hopefully, convert Hack Wilson from his alcoholic addiction. The manager set two glasses in front of Wilson. He filled one with water and the other with vodka. Then he took a worm and put it in the glass of water—the worm wiggled around and if you can say that worms swim, then it was swimming.

Then the manager took the worm out of the glass filled with water and placed it in the glass filled with vodka—the worm immediately started to disintegrate before their eyes. The manager looked at Hack Wilson and said, “Now, what did you learn from that, Hack?”

Hack Wilson looked at his manager and said, “Well...I see that if you drink vodka

you’ll never have worms.”

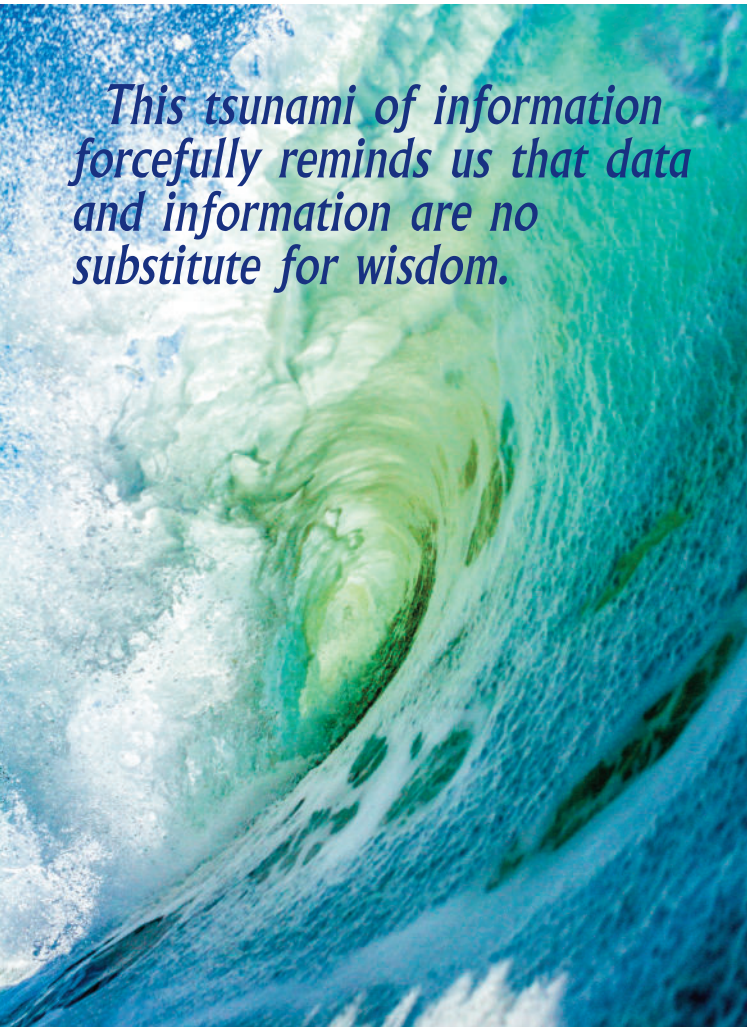
We can and we do make information mean what we want it to mean—thus the popularity of the term “fake news.” Information does not save us. **Information is not knowledge, and knowledge is not wisdom.**

Each generation battles with its own self-centered and self-serving desire to do what it believes to be right and appropriate, while failing, at some level, to respect the wisdom that can be gleaned from the past. Each generation thinks itself smarter and more clever than the ones before it, but being clever or smart is not at all the same as being wise. Let’s pause and reflect on the phrase “moral wisdom.”

Moral Wisdom

Wisdom is closely related to **humility** and **compassion**—one might say that **humility** and **compassion** are siblings of wisdom. Moral wisdom is accompanied by humility and compassion. On the other hand, pride and arrogance are the mortal enemies of moral wisdom—pride and arrogance are self-serving and self-absorbed.

Proud and arrogant people are not, by and large, wise. A person who cannot listen to others has



This tsunami of information forcefully reminds us that data and information are no substitute for wisdom.

difficultly learning and is prevented, in many ways, from serving and helping them. One who does not learn does not grow, change and adapt.

Proverbs 16:18 tells us, “*Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.*” James 4:6 teaches, “*God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.*”

Virtue and **goodness** are also close relatives of wisdom—of course the great lesson of the gospel of Jesus Christ is that no human is capable of perfect righteousness and goodness. **Virtue** and **goodness** are gifts of God, by his grace.

Thus, when one combines **humility** and **compassion** with **virtue** and **goodness**, one can see that moral wisdom is a gift of God. With humility, compassion, virtue and goodness in mind, as siblings and cousins of wisdom, we reflect on service and self-sacrifice, a part of loving our neighbor, so that one source of wisdom is the divine love that is the love of one’s neighbors.

The wisdom that is a gift of God, the highest form of moral wisdom, is based on love, mercy and grace. Such wisdom relies upon a higher morality and a more just and more loving source than humans are capable of innately generating.

Thus we read in Psalms 14:1 that a fool, who surely is the opposite of wise, says that there is no God.

No matter how much information is gathered and remembered, and no matter how much knowledge is accrued, without God all such attempts will end in foolishness. This is what Proverbs 3:5 has in mind when it speaks of leaning completely on our own understanding—the futile attempt to achieve wisdom by means of the human rational process.

It is in our humility before God, our submission to him and our trusting in him with all our heart, in our grateful yielding to him, that we receive moral wisdom from him. □

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What's My Motivation?

I keep in touch with several friends from my distant past (which is becoming more distant all the time). One of these friends always seems positive, cheerful and enthusiastic. At his chronological age, most people have long since retired, but he continues to work and take on huge projects. Where does he get all his energy? I'm not sure, but I do know that he follows motivational gurus. He wanted to know what I thought of one of his favorites.

I told him I believe some motivational teachers can help us to develop purpose, goals and vision. My friend's favorite teacher emphasizes that we become what we think, and that positive or negative thoughts can bring positive or negative experiences and opportunities. So far so good. As the Apostle Paul advises, "...whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things" (Philippians 4:8).

But wait. There's unfortunately more. My friend's teacher, like many of his ilk, touts what is called the Law of Attraction. In other words, if you think on something long or hard enough—wealth, health, success, power—it will happen! By the power of your own mind, you can bend reality to your will! Early 20th century success huckster Napoleon Hill described it this way "...you can never have riches in great quantities unless you work yourself into a white heat of desire for money, and actually believe you will possess it" (*Think and Grow Rich*, 1937).

My friend's guru goes on to explain the "science" behind all this. The way he tells it, the universe consists of "vibrations." From the comfort of our own living room, we can attune the vibrations of our desires to those of the universe, and the universe will deliver our desires to us. Really? As I told my friend, this is not science. It's magical thinking.

It also sounds like the Word of Faith and

Prosperity Gospel movements, aberrations within Christianity which teach that you can harness the power of faith merely by speaking your desire (name it and claim it) and God will hand you health and prosperity on a platter.

Not surprisingly, such movements are a mishmash of religion, New Thought and upward mobility, spiked with commercialism. Each teacher offers to reveal their particular secret of success, health and prosperity in exchange for donations and purchases of their products, books and seminars—making *them* far more wealthy than their hapless followers will ever be.

Further, if you *don't* prosper or enjoy good health, it's your own fault. You haven't been diligent—you haven't aligned the vibrations correctly, you lack faith, or you are harboring some secret sin that keeps God or the universe from bombarding you with limitless health and wealth.

Frankly, this treadmill doesn't sound very motivating or inspiring to me. I don't need it and I don't think my friend does either.

But instead, what about this? "*For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together*" (Colossians 1:16-17).

This passage speaks of someone who is the supreme Power behind the entire universe. Beyond that, he's our best Friend. All we have to do is ask, and we will receive exactly what we need (of course as we journey with our Friend, we may discover that what we ask and what we need are two different things—but that's part of the process).

Why, then, would we need some arcane secret to manipulating the universe when we already share friendship with the Creator himself—Jesus? What could be more positive and motivating? □

—Monte Wolverton



Quotes & Connections



"It is the calling of great men, not so much to preach new truths, as to rescue from oblivion those old truths which it is our wisdom to remember and our weakness to forget."—Sidney Smith (1771-1845)

"The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes."
—Marcel Proust

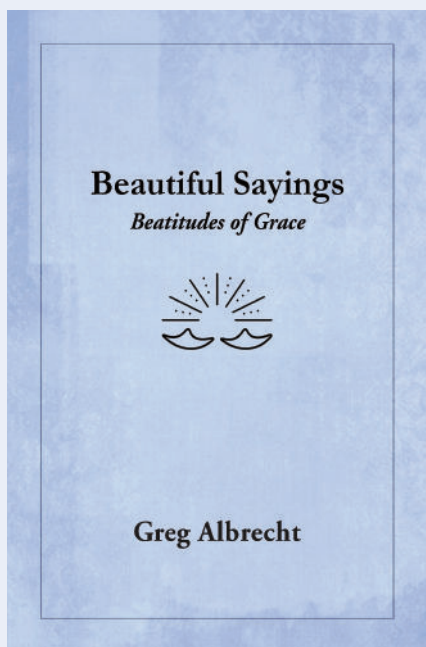
The question is not what you look at but what you see."
—Henry David Thoreau

"If I had the opportunity to say a final word to all the young people of America, it would be this: Don't think too much about yourself. Try to cultivate the habit of thinking of others; this will reward you. Selfishness always brings its own revenge. It cannot be escaped. Be unselfish."—Charles Eliot, 19th century president of Harvard

"He who can no longer pause to wonder and stand rapt in awe is as good as dead; his eyes are closed."—Albert Einstein

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