

Concrete Vision: People Enhance Vision

Day One

Difficulty

Our difficulty in loving others is, of course, because others are difficult to love. That is what we tell ourselves, and we find our hearts in agreement. The problem is that our hearts are deceptive, and our minds are in need of renewing. Many times, the difficulty in loving others is within us, not outside of us. We love for earthly reward, not heavenly reward. We love just as long as we get more out of loving than we give. We love as long as we feel inspired. We love as long as we feel like the other is worthy of it. Jesus loved us while we were his enemies. Jesus asked that those crucifying him would be forgiven. Jesus loved others for something other than earthly reward. Jesus loved because of his relationship to the father, not his relationship with the world. If we want to have an abundant life, we must learn to live in abundant love. Our love for others must not spring out of our need to be loved by others, because it will often be disappointed. Our love for others must overflow from the abundance of God's love for us. Spend time in his love, and live the abundant life he wants for you.

Verses: John 13:34, 1 John 4:20, 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, Matthew 5:43-48

Prayer Topics: Mercy, Forgiveness, Patience, Peace

Day Two

Mirrors

I once saw a Shark Tank episode where a person tried to get funding in order to bring a new mirror to market. The mirror would make you look skinnier in a subtle way, so you would see a distorted but plausible view of yourself. The members of the shark tank wondered who would want to buy

a mirror that lied? The inventor stated that they would sell the mirrors to clothing stores who would benefit from the customers trying on clothes and thinking it made them look thinner. Would you buy a mirror that deceived you? When we lie to ourselves, we are doing something that only benefits Satan, just like the deceptive mirror only benefits the store owner. Even though we know this, we continue to lie to ourselves. When we look at other people and we see how sin looks, rather than thinking how bad the sin looks on them, we should see how bad it looks on us. Others are a mirror God gives us to see ourselves, yet because of our hearts we think the mirror makes us look good and the other person look bad. It is as if you looked in the mirror and were glad you didn't look as bad as that poor guy in the mirror, and went away happy about how good you looked. Next time you see someone engaged in behavior that makes them look bad, rather than feeling smug, get humble. Think to yourself that this is how you look, and endeavor to never look that way again. Then you can use the mirror for your own benefit.

Verses: James 1:22-25, 1 Corinthians 13:12, Proverbs 27:19

Prayer Topics: Clarity, Humility, Perspective, Truth

Day Three

Godly Counsel

Scripture tells us that the one who walks with the wise grows wise, and advocates for wise counsel and advice. The question is always whether we listen. Do you seek out advice? When you enter into unfamiliar territory, do you speak to people who have experience? Looking back on my life, I can recall a number of times when I took on something unfamiliar and had a poor outcome due to a lack of seeking advice. Perhaps you can too? When you seek advice do you listen? Do you take the advice seriously and let it influence your decisions? Do you watch and emulate people who are successful in the areas you want to be successful? Are you open to unsolicited advice or even criticism? It is very difficult to tolerate, much less accept, criticism that comes without an invitation. What do all of these things have in common? They require humility, or at least a greater desire

to be successful than to be right. It amazes me just how strong our desire to be right is, and how much we will give up to indulge it. God desires our blessing, but in order to achieve it we must be willing to follow his ways. Others can help us see those ways more clearly if we are willing to give up our pride. How can you implement Godly counsel in your life today? Spend some time pondering it, and find your reward.

Verses: Proverbs 11:14, Proverbs 12:15, Proverbs 16:1-4

Prayer Topics: Wisdom, Meekness, Collaboration, Guidance

Day Four

Look Closely

If we have decided to walk with the wise, we can look closely at them to become wise. By looking closely I do not just mean to mimic them, although that can be a good idea. Paul told us to follow him as he followed Christ, so doing what a wise disciple does can be very helpful to us in living the abundant life. What I primarily mean in looking closely is to watch for subtle reflections of our behavior in the responses of those around us. Other people are always holding a mirror in front of us. They do this in a subtle way, usually, but we can see it if we really look. Are people enjoying their interactions with you? Are they getting benefit from the exchanges they are making with you? People are like our glory cloud, in a similar but more powerful way than our physical surroundings. That is why Shadrach, Meshach, and Adednego were counseled against eating only vegetables, because the King wanted his glory cloud to be glorious. Are the people in your life profiting from your presence? Are they growing in competency? Are they becoming more joyful? More loving? Look closely at the mirror by looking closely at those around you, and if it reveals that adjustments need to be made, then lose no time in making them.

Verses: Daniel 1:5-7, Ephesians 4:11-16, 1 Corinthians 11:1

Prayer Topics: Mentor, Discipleship, Imitation, Resemblance

Day Five

People Centered

I recently watched a video in which a former opera singer talked about her love for music that inspired her early career. Because of her talent she was availed numerous opportunities, including spending a year in Berlin where she performed in a prestigious venue. After a number of years of travel and performance, she realized that although she loved music, she loved it because of the human element it contained and illuminated. In short, she loved music because it contained and expressed human truth and emotions, and communicated them from one human to another. Ironically, her love of music and her career in music was separating her from the human side of music by disrupting all her relationships. In hearing this, it struck me that most of our loves, at the center, contain this human element. Whether we love movies or motorcycles, the human element is an inextricable part of any of those loves, and if we love the thing to the exclusion of the human element, we diminish our life and the lives of those connected to us. It tells us something deeply important about who we are and how God made us that this is so, and examining our loves and amplifying the human element in them can do nothing but help us in pursuing the abundant life.

Verses: 1 Corinthians 13:1-13, 1 Peter 2:9, Hebrews 10:24-25

Prayer Topics: Gifts, Community, Priorities, Love