

LIVING WITH AN ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE

Purpose: The purpose of this session is to communicate the importance of living from God's eternal perspective rather than from a temporal one.

Objectives: This session will help you to

1. Understand what an eternal perspective is.
2. Understand why we need to live with an eternal perspective.
3. Understand some benefits of living with an eternal perspective.
4. Understand principles of how to develop an eternal perspective.

Key Verses: 2 Corinthians 4:18; Colossians 3:1-4.

I. Introduction:

We have looked at many ministry skills during our training time and the importance of evangelism, discipleship, and being involved in a spiritual movement to help fulfill the Great Commission. We want to look at another important thing that will help keep us in the process of fulfilling the Great Commission over the long haul. This will be especially valuable when adversity will tempt you to quit.

II. Eternal Perspective Defined

A "perspective" is a point of view, a way of thinking about a matter. Having an eternal perspective means evaluating the beliefs, events and decisions of life from God's point of view. It is using God's values as the measuring stick with which to evaluate life. It is recognizing that everything done in the present has an eternal consequence, and should be evaluated in that light.

Because you are going through this training, you already have a good measure of an eternal perspective. Yet, at times we let the temporal creep in.

III. An Eternal vs. a Temporal Perspective

Jesus taught that our perspective in life, the way we view the world, affects every detail of our lives. Therefore it is of utmost importance.

Our perspective in life will have either a strong positive impact on the way we live or a negative one. To show how important this concept is and our great need to live with an eternal perspective, let us contrast how these two views affect our thinking and actions in three areas.

A. Important in our view of **TRUTH** (I Corinthians 1:20-25; 2:6-9; Colossians 2:8).

We live our lives on the basis of our belief system. But, where do we get our beliefs from? We get them from books, professors, polls, parents, friends, or from many other sources. People act on what they **believe** to be true even if their beliefs are not true. Obviously, being sincere about one's beliefs does not make them true.

Society today believes sincerity is all that matters. But as the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel found out in their challenge against Elijah, sincerity is not enough (1 Kings 18).

1. Temporal view: (1 Corinthians 1:20-25)

Everything is relative. There are no absolutes. Because our human perspective is based on knowledge and experience, it is limited and incomplete. Our perspective is also influenced by the negative values of this world. The wisdom of the world is foolishness. If we live with this perspective then our measurement of what is true will be based on the world's values rather than God's.

2. Eternal view: (1 Corinthians 2:6-9)

An eternal perspective, however, enables us to live in light of God's truth rather than what we perceive to be true through our limited knowledge. Living according to God's wisdom will appear to be foolishness to the world but is based on the true measure of reality: God's eternal truth. In John 14:6, Jesus said that He is The Truth - not just another truth. Psalm 119:160 says that the sum of God's Word is truth.

It is easy to believe the wisdom of men and thus pursue values with our own interests and comfort as the goal. However, what satisfies and gratifies us now is not necessarily in our best interest in light of eternity. Having an eternal perspective will enable us to discern and apply God's truth in life.

B. Important in our view of this world.

1. Temporal view (1 John 2:15-17).

If we value the things of the world, then we do not have the love of the Father in us. Instead of wanting the things of God, we want what the world has to offer. We will then feel a part of this world.

2. Eternal view (Philippians 3:20; Hebrews 11:10, 13-16).

The true perspective is that, if we are Christians, we do not belong to this world. The Bible calls us aliens (Hebrews 11:13-16; 1 Peter 2:11). Our true home is in heaven. If that is our view, then we will not want to have anything to do with the world's values. The soldier in a foreign land does not buy a home and try to establish a life there. He is there only to do a job and looks forward to returning home. He sends his salary to his family and keeps in constant communication because his heart is back home. We're just passing through in this life. Someday, it'll burn. When severe storms or earthquakes totally destroy many homes and kill a number of people, we're reminded to hold things loosely, and hold people tightly.

C. Important in our view of **significance** (Matthew 6:19-21). What's really important in life.

1. Temporal view:

People who have the world's values pursue all that the world offers. They will try to find significance in accomplishments of worldly value such as acquiring wealth, having possessions, being influential, making important career accomplishments, having social status, etc. While there is nothing wrong with these things in themselves, they will never give true significance or be of eternal value (v.19).

2. Eternal view:

People who see the world from God's viewpoint realize that significance comes through being rightly related to God and knowing who we are in Christ. The only accomplishments of true, eternal significance are those which serve to advance God's kingdom and not worldly interests (vv.20,21).

For example, two men may both have influential positions and receive high salaries. One man sees his position as his reason for significance and his money as a means of gratifying his sense of importance. But the second man has an eternal perspective and sees his position as a way to influence many for Christ and sees his money as a means to support God's work.

IV. **Benefits** of Living With an Eternal Perspective. (Matthew 6:19, 20; 25-34; 2 Corinthians 4:16-18)

A. Our treasure (the true significance of life) cannot be stolen or destroyed (Matthew 6:19,20). All of the worldly accomplishments of a lifetime have no lasting significance in eternity. Great wealth, influence and friends can be acquired, but it will all disappear. But as we invest our lives in the things of God, we "lay up treasure" for eternity. This includes both the deeds we do in the power of the Spirit and the people we have influenced for Christ. Both are of lasting value and significance. A chicken restaurant had on their buckets, "One life will soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last." Martyred missionary, Jim Elliot said, "He is no fool to give up what he can not keep in order to gain what he cannot lose."

B. We can live without anxiety (Matthew 6:25-34).

Much time is spent worrying about or being pressured by people, circumstances and possessions. When we have an eternal perspective we live free from worry for several reasons.

Verse 26 tells us how much God values us. We do not have to worry about the future or try to find our sense of importance from a false value system. God has declared us to be of great value - so much so that He sent His Son to make us complete.

Verses 27-30 show us that God will take care of us. God asks us to think logically. If He values us so highly, He will care for us according to His plan. Give an example of His care for your family or something related.

Verses 31-34 show we are free from the pressures of the world. Believers with an eternal perspective are set free from those pressures and are free to pursue things of eternal significance.

- C. We are able to endure trials and difficulties joyfully (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

We cannot escape experiencing heartbreak and difficulties. But living with an eternal perspective can give us an attitude of expectancy even in difficult times:

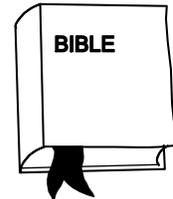
1. Because God is renewing our inner, eternal nature day by day, though our temporal bodies experience weakness and finally death (v.16).
2. Because we recognize that enduring earthly afflictions produce an eternal value that far outweighs the present discomfort (v.17).
3. Because we have learned to "see" and live for the true reality of the unseen eternal kingdom (v.18).

V. How to Develop an Eternal Perspective. James 1:22

No one is born with an eternal perspective. On the contrary, we are all born with a temporal one. We need to change our way of thinking about things from the world's perspective to God's perspective. This involves both taking in the truth and acting on it (James 1:22).

- A. **Choose** to study and meditate on God's values. (Romans 12:2; Ephesians 5:18 cf. Colossians 3:16)

You cannot know God's values or perspective apart from the Word of God. The Bible gives an understanding of who God is, what God is like and what His perspective of life is. Further, we must "hide God's Word in our hearts" for our minds to be transformed (Romans 12:2). Slip away from God's Word and you'll slip away from an eternal perspective.



- B. **Choose** daily to measure values and decisions against the truth of God's Word (2 Corinthians 10:3-6).

Notice Paul's desire to "bring every thought captive". The spiritual battle takes place in our minds and it is a battleground of ideas. We must develop the habit of continually evaluating these ideas which bombard us and determine whether they are our own thoughts or are from other people, against the truth of God's Word. Don't evaluate God's Word by your experiences; evaluate your experiences by God's Word.

- C. **Choose** to seek God's kingdom first and lay up eternal treasures (Matthew 6:20,21,33; Colossians 3:1-3).

What are you living for today? How will you decide to use your time? Will it be based on "the things above" or on "the things on the earth?"

You've got to watch your focus (Hebrews 12:1,2). Remember Peter walking on the water to Jesus. He did well as long as he focused on Christ, but when he took his focus off Christ, he sank (Matthew 14:29,30). We need to walk in the Spirit and continually be filled with the Spirit.

- D. **Choose** to walk by faith, not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7).

It is easy to "trust the Lord" when our circumstances are comfortable or when we can see what God is doing in our lives. But we need to walk by faith not sight, trusting God even when we cannot see or understand what He is doing. Remember the train diagram (Fact/Faith/Feeling)?

- E. **Choose** to follow the example of mature believers (Hebrews 3:12-13; Philippians 3:17).

Sin is deceitful. It will even taint our view of Scripture and how we hear God. Fellowship with godly people protects us from sins of deceitfulness.

VI. Summary and Application.

- A. Summary. Build your value system based on God's Word.

Because our thoughts, words and actions are based on our value system, it is very important that our value system be based on God's Word. To the degree that they are based on a worldly value system, our lives will be of only temporal significance and we miss the joy and privilege of having our lives count for eternity. When we build our value system on God's Word by hiding it in our heart, then we evaluate everything in light of God's truth and act in obedience to it.

- B. Application.

1. Do you have an eternal perspective? When faced with a decision, ask yourself, "Will this amount to anything in light of eternity?"
2. This week while discussing with people, ask, "Why do you believe that?" See how many attitudes and ideas are really based on God's Word and on an eternal perspective.
3. What is your perspective on finances, material possessions, relationships, a mate, time? In which areas do you need to trust God to develop an eternal perspective?
4. Evaluate your Eternal Perspective. Colossians 3:1-4 exhorts us to pursue the things above, not the things that are on this earth. Paul wrote this passage to confront the temporal perspective of the Colossians which is revealed on both sides of this passage 2:16-22 and 3:5-11. This provides us with an easy checklist to uncover some areas in which we are living according to a temporal perspective.

Colossians	Temporal Perspective	Self-Assessment 0 = never, 3 = sometimes, 5 = often
2:16-17	Do you allow others to judge you in respect to do's and don'ts of what's right for Christians that is not necessarily found in the Bible, the grey areas?	0 1 2 3 4 5
2:18-19	Do you allow others to rob you of your joy in Christ by submitting to their views of how one grows in Christ: through asceticism, study, worship, personal persuasions.	0 1 2 3 4 5
2:20-22	Do you follow the belief that we attain godliness through self-denial? That the flesh can be defeated by punishing it?	0 1 2 3 4 5
3:5	Do you allow immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire or greed to control your actions?	0 1 2 3 4 5
3:8	Do you allow your emotions to control your actions resulting in anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech	0 1 2 3 4 5
3:9	Lying	0 1 2 3 4 5
3:10-11	Looking down on others because they are of a different background	0 1 2 3 4 5

Discussion Questions:

1. Describe ways you've seen temporal or eternal perspectives in your Target Area or in your world.
2. Describe ways you've seen temporal or eternal perspectives in your own life.
3. Now what? Applying an eternal perspective, what do you believe God would have you do?

Appendix A

What an Eternal Perspective May Look Like

- *It's focusing on what you can't see, but it's not focusing on what you can see (Colossians 3:2; 2 Corinthians 4:18).*
- *It is taking the time to read a story to your child - which he/she may forever remember you for, but it is not demanding that you watch a sporting event on TV - the results of which may be forgotten in a couple of years.*
- *It is continuing to do outreach even when seeing little results (1 Corinthians 15:58), but it is not giving up and seeking re-assignment where there must be more action.*
- *It is taking the time to listen to a disciple share his/her struggles, but it is not being so busy in your own agenda that nothing else can really fit in.*
- *It is investing a little bit more money in your church or missionary, but it is not purchasing the latest popular music CD.*
- *It is taking more time to pray and get into God's Word - which deals with the real world, but it is not staying up a little later at night to watch a very entertaining show on TV - which is often just fantasy anyway.*
- *It is choosing to believe what God's Word says in a situation, but it is not relying on your feelings in a situation - as strong and convincing as they may be.*
- *It is being content just in who I am in Christ, but it is not trying to perform for approval from others.*

- *It is being content with the abundance that God has given me (Philippians 4:11), but it is not anxious for what He has not yet given me.*
- *It is praying about everything with thanksgiving knowing that God is in control (Philippians 4:6, 7), but it is not worrying about how things are not going as I planned.*
- *It is trusting that the trials we go through will eventually pass (2 Corinthians 4:17; 1 Peter 1:6,7), but it is not pitying self and giving up that we will just have to suffer with something the rest of our lives.*
- *It is trusting that God has a good plan for me in my trials – maturing me – even though I may have no idea how He is doing it (Philippians 1:6; 2:13; James 1:2-4), but it is not concluding that God must somehow be against me.*
- *It is evaluating circumstances in light of God’s Word, but it is not evaluating God’s Word in light of our circumstances.*
- *It is knowing that God’s will and plan will be accomplished in the world, as fallen apart as it may seem, but it is not being anxious about present unpleasant political and world events that seem beyond our control.*
- *It is sharing the gospel with someone, even though you’ve had a tough day already, but it is not looking for excuses to not share the gospel.*