

4 Ways You Can Be Spiritually Blind

Every new season from God seems to have a theme, catch phrase or byword that characterizes it. In a recent season, one catch phrase expressed a particular hunger in our hearts that became the theme of many of our prayer lives: “Increase our territory.”

The widespread appeal of that phrase and its message—that God wants to increase the territory of those who call out to Him—was apparent in the almost frenzied popularity of a slim, simple little book by Bruce Wilkinson called *The Prayer of Jabez*. The book expounds on Jabez’s prayer, recorded in 1 Chronicles 4:10, which included a cry for an increase in territory. The Bible says that God granted his request.

Lift Up Your Eyes

God wants to grant our requests, too. But before He can increase our territory, He wants us to have a clear vision of what that territory is.

We can learn a great deal from the story of Lot and Abram in Genesis 12 and 13. When God called Abram to leave his homeland and begin a faith-journey to “a land that I will show you” (Gen. 12:1), Abram obeyed, taking his family—including his nephew, Lot—with him.

But at some point, God made it obvious that the two men needed to go their own ways. “Please separate from me,” Abram said to Lot in Genesis 13:9. “If you take the left, then I will go to the right; or, if you go to the right, then I will go to the left.”

The Bible says that Lot looked out over the land and “chose for himself” what appeared to be the best part: the fertile, well-watered plain of Jordan to the east (vv. 10-11). He left

Abram and headed for the plain, taking his family, flocks and herds with him.

Lot probably thought he'd gotten the better end of the deal. After all, he'd had first choice. But he was mistaken.

His land, it turned out, contained the hedonistic city of Sodom. And ultimately his decision cost him his family and all the blessings God wanted to pour out on him.

Lot made his choice based on what he could see in the natural. His sight was limited by what he could see with his eyes. He had a vision problem!

In contrast, when Abram staked out his territory, he did not survey the land, check the demographics or conduct a poll. He allowed God to show him the land that was right for him.

"Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are—northward, southward, eastward, and westward," God told him, "for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever" (vv. 14-15).

Abram's only requirement was to look. God had already given him everything he could see!

How do you find your territory? The real question is: How far can you see?

Abram's territory was determined by what he saw. He looked where God told him to look, and he saw what God wanted him to possess. Of course, he could not physically see all the land or all the descendants still to come; but through faith he knew the extent of his territory.

Like Abram, your territory is limited only by your eyesight—your spiritual vision. When God tells you to look, you must do so with eyes of faith.

The nature of faith is to believe the impossible and see the

invisible. That's why visionaries are often misunderstood: They see what isn't there—yet!

Your territory may not look like much in the natural—perhaps nothing more than a steamy valley full of sand and old bones. But appearances can be deceiving. Just as God blew into Elijah's valley of dry bones and brought a resurrection of life, so God can move through the barren areas of your territory and bring life and increase.

In Abram's (Abraham's) case, his territory was an actual, physical location. Even today, the city of Jerusalem is in conflict because it is part of the land that God promised to Abraham. His descendants must continue to fight to possess the territory that he saw with spiritual eyes so long ago.

For most of us, however, our territory is not land as much as it is our sphere of influence—the place and ministry God has chosen for each of us. Perhaps your territory is your home, your family, your church. Perhaps it's the homeless shelter where you volunteer or the country God has prompted you to pray for.

Essentially, your territory is the call of God on your life. But your territory is not limited to your lifetime. Just as Abraham did, you must look beyond “right now” into the land of your descendants. You must occupy your land for the sake of your children and your children's children. You cannot see the full extent of your inheritance unless you develop your spiritual sense of sight.

How's Your Vision?

Recently, after a lifetime of perfect vision, I began wearing reading glasses. I have no problem seeing distances; it's the little details that are hazy for me.

Our spiritual eyes are like our natural eyes in many ways. They both can suffer from a number of vision problems.

1. Spiritual farsightedness. According to my optometrist, I am farsighted. On a spiritual level, people can be farsighted too.

Those with this vision problem can see the big picture—the ministry, the calling, the sphere of influence God wants to give them—but they struggle with little details such as truthfulness, integrity, patience and so on. They see the landscape of future fulfillments and promises, but they stumble on the simple, close-up, day-to-day things that are necessary for success.

I know a number of wonderful, anointed ministers who will never see their visions come to pass because they suffer from spiritual farsightedness. I call these men and women empty dreamers.

Such people are always dreaming of the great possibilities ahead. But they fail to practice the unexciting, daily disciplines that bring about the fulfillment of those possibilities.

When we get a word of promise from the Lord, we are right to receive it with joy! But then we must begin to fine-tune that vision and walk out the process that is required to fulfill it.

2. Spiritual nearsightedness. The opposite of farsightedness is nearsightedness—the ability to see only the objects closest to you. The big, beautiful, panoramic views are lost on those who can't see more than 10 feet in front of their noses!

People who are spiritually nearsighted focus on every tiny detail of life and ministry. Unable to look upward and outward, they miss the grand scope of all that God is doing and all that He wants to do in their lives.

When we allow the temporal details of daily living to dominate our attention, we fail to see the wonderful future God has

planned for us. The result is that we become discouraged and lose hope. Yes, we must attend to the little things—but we must never lose sight of the big picture.

3. Spiritual astigmatism. For some time my husband was almost legally blind due to a condition known as astigmatism. Light did not refract properly through his eyes, making it difficult for him to see even with glasses. He was miserable.

But last year he underwent laser surgery. A very precise laser was used to surgically correct the structure and alignment of his eyes.

Now his eyes work the way they were meant to work. He has never seen better!

Astigmatism can be a problem on a spiritual level, too. When God reveals something to a person with spiritual astigmatism, they may not “get it” right away. They may need someone from outside their set of circumstances to bring alignment and clarity.

Sometimes spiritual astigmatism is caused by old hurts or wounds that act as filters through which every new vision passes. Because the spiritual light is refracted improperly, sight and understanding are hindered.

I know a woman who was raised in an abusive home. She often saw her father physically hurt her mother. Then she’d see him sober up, bring flowers to her mother and beg for forgiveness.

This woman survived her difficult childhood and grew up to marry a wonderful, godly man. Her husband would often bring her a bouquet to show his love. But every time she saw the flowers, she could see only a manipulating man trying to appease her.

She was suffering with a vision problem! Thankfully, with God’s help, she received healing, and she and her husband are

happily married today.

4. Spiritually weak or lazy eyes. As a young child, my oldest daughter, Stephanie, loved to read. She was actually reading by kindergarten!

But a problem surfaced when she was in first grade. Her teacher called us one day and said that Stephanie had failed a sight test that had been given to all the students that afternoon.

Stephanie had a lazy eye, we were told. Unless something drastic was done to correct it, she would grow up to be blind in one eye. So for some time she had to wear a patch, like a pirate, to force the lazy eye to work.

You see, Stephanie could read, play, learn and do everything the other children were doing. But when she was faced with a test, she failed.

Isn't that the way life often is—everything is fine until we are faced with a test? The question then becomes, is our spiritual eyesight strong enough to see beyond the test to the promise God made to us?

People get around every day with impaired spiritual sight, thinking that if they can see enough to avoid getting hurt, they have successfully navigated life. But with only one good eye, they have no depth perception.

They can only guess at distance. They are never able to know with confidence how far they have come and how far they must go in their walk with God.

Overcoming Spiritual Blindness

Most of us have learned how to operate at some level of spiritual blindness. We hear the voice of God, but we cannot see His promises clearly. We feel our way along because we fail to see the plan and purpose He has set before us.

Unfortunately, we will never see the full extent of the territory God wants to give us—we will never experience increase—until our spiritual vision is corrected and our eyes of faith are opened.

Caleb was one man who saw with spiritual eyes. He and Joshua, along with 10 other Israelites, were sent to spy out the land of Canaan. (You can read the story in Numbers 13 and 14.)

Upon their return, Caleb and Joshua gave an optimistic report based on what they saw through the eyes of faith. They looked past the giants and other significant obstacles to the generations to come that would one day possess a promised land of milk and honey.

The 10 other spies, however, reported what they saw with their physical eyes through the filter of fear. Even though they carried in their hands evidence of the bounty of the territory God had placed before them, their report described only the physical limitations that the land presented.

Unfortunately, the Israelites chose to accept the report of the 10 fearful men over the report of Caleb and Joshua. As a result, an entire generation ended up wandering blindly through the wilderness, never setting eyes on the territory God had promised to give them.

But Caleb never forgot what he saw. Forty years later, when he finally re-entered the promised land with a new generation of Israelites, he claimed his territory. The rest of the Israelites received their parcels through the drawing of lots.

Caleb had already seen the land. He already knew where he wanted to stake his claim and raise his descendants. He didn't care that the biggest giants lived smack in the middle of his territory; he knew that with God's help, he would drive them out.

He saw!

Caleb's land became known as Hebron once he finally took possession of it. God will change the name of your territory, too, once you set your borders and drive out whatever giants are there.

Maybe you've nicknamed your land "Hatred" or "Depression." Maybe you've known your territory simply as "the kids" or "the job." That's because your spiritual vision has been impaired, and you have yet to see the wonderful plan God has for you.

God wants to heal your spiritual vision and show you the full extent of the territory He has marked out for you. He wants to open your eyes of faith to see the increase He desires to bring into every area of your life.

Your territory is limited only by your eyesight. How far can you see?

Read a companion devotional.

Shirley Arnold is pastor, along with her husband, Steve, of TLC Family Church in Lakeland, Fla. They have also established the Spirit Life School of Theology, the Secret Place Associated Network of Ministries and the Secret Place Training Facility. She is the author of several books and ministers in churches and conferences around the world.