

October



Fun House Mirrors
BY Emily Vickery

My mother-in-law has the best mirror.

As I write this, I'm enjoying some time in Alabama with my in-laws after Christmas. While trying on Christmas gift additions to my wardrobe, I noticed something interesting about my mother-in-law's mirror. It is a narrow, floor-length mirror propped up against her bedroom wall, and due to its angle or perhaps a warp in the glass, reflected objects look narrow, too. This slimming effect is flattering and ideal for ignoring the results of too many Christmas goodies, but unfortunately, when I return home to my own mirrors, I will be disappointed.

Have you ever stood in front of a fun house mirror? Your image appears distorted, and not at all normal. Instead, you look short and round or long and tall or maybe twisted and squiggly. The fun house mirror will never give you a true reflection of yourself.

See, that's the problem with warped mirrors—they never show you the whole truth.

Our world contains quite a few faulty "mirrors." Some offer rosy pictures of ourselves and the world in which we live. Their warped projections seem innocent enough at first glance: "You do you!" "Live your truth!" Other reflections are slightly more negative: "You're on your own, kid." Or perhaps, "Is this all you have to offer?" Still, others aren't even pointed at us but reflect faulty images of God Himself, showing Him as all-loving but omitting His commitment to holiness. Some echo that crafty Serpent's age-old question from Genesis 3, "Did God really say...?"

This fun house of mirrors can seem overwhelming. How can we be sure that the view we have of ourselves, the world around us, and the Lord above is the correct one? How do we discern what is true in a world that gives such credence to falsehood? The psalmist in Psalm 119:9-16 (ESV) asks similar questions and provides biblical wisdom on where to turn when looking for truth.

"How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word. With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your

commandments! I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you. Blessed are you, O Lord; teach me your statutes! With my lips I declare all the rules of your mouth. In the way of your testimonies I delight as much as in all riches. I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways. I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word."

Psalm 119 is, in many ways, an ode to the beautiful gift we have in God's revealed Word to us. These verses showcase this theme well, reminding us that when we delight in God's Word, we find the paths of life. It does not lead us astray with half-truths or distorted pictures of reality. And as new covenant believers, we also have the gift of God's Spirit in us, helping us to "not wander from [His] commandments" (verse 10). This doesn't mean we can coast from here, though. No, if we are to walk daily in the truth, it will take an intentional effort. Note how many active verbs there are in this series of verses. The psalmist speaks of guarding his ways, seeking the Lord wholeheartedly, declaring truth with his lips, delighting in God's ways, meditating on His precepts, and fixing his eyes on God. The way of truth is not a path we walk down by mistake. Rather, it takes a devoted heart (and mind) to continue in the ways of God.

Is the Warp So Bad?

What happens when we exchange the mirror of God's Word with one showing a warped but perhaps more aesthetically pleasing version of ourselves? Is it truly so terrible to accept some of the more affirming messages of society? After all, doesn't God want us to love ourselves, too?

When we are tempted to allow messages that go against God's Word to sway us, however 'positive' they may sound, we will eventually realize the detrimental effect these messages have on our lives. Rather than leaving us feeling affirmed and fulfilled, we find ourselves exhausted, burnt out, and overwhelmed. No matter how many times we tell ourselves we are capable enough to do it all, we just

weren't created that way. If we consistently surrender to our world's answer to treat ourselves like the queens we are, we'll discover that no number of pedicures or iced lattes will ever fully satisfy us. Scripture puts it even more bluntly: "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death" (Proverbs 14:12 ESV).

Ironically, when we yield to the positively warped mirrors of our current culture and its dictation of how we view the world, we may find our self-image negatively skewed. Social media hosts endless influencers who laud the 'girl power' of women everywhere. However, a bad day at work, at school, or with family can leave us feeling miles away from the 'girl bosses' we see on Instagram. Even if social media isn't a temptation, it is challenging to avoid the world's message: we should be able to do it all, see it all, and have it all. When we inevitably fall short of these lofty (read: 'unattainable') goals, we may develop thought patterns warped in more negative ways, mirrors that magnify our faults and failings and hide our more positive angles altogether.

If we rely on our own ideas or the ideas of a secular society to influence our hearts more than the truth of God's Word, the result will not be aesthetically pleasing. In fact, Scripture reminds us consistently that our hearts are wicked and deceitful (Jeremiah 17:9), and we are, indeed, prone to wander from the truth (Isaiah 53:6). So, we cannot rely on the warped mirrors of the world or our own warped perceptions of truth if we hope to walk the paths of life.

Keeping Our Mirrors in Good Shape

Now that we know which mirrors not to trust, let's ensure the mirrors we use are providing us with a picture that accurately represents ourselves, our world, and our God. Looking back at Psalm 119:9-16, we are reminded that when we fix our eyes on the Word of God, we will find His truth. This focus on Scripture requires us to read it consistently, memorize it (verse 11), and meditate on its truths daily (verse 15). Maybe from a young age, we were raised

in church, attended services and Sunday School, possibly even "hid God's Word in our hearts" (Psalm 119:11), and yet we still struggle to apply biblical precepts to the various choices, situations, thoughts, and beliefs we encounter daily.

Perhaps a simple biblical framework will help as we place our "mirrors" under the lordship of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5). I credit the work of Emily Jensen and Laura Wifler, in their podcast and book, *Risen Motherhood*, for popularizing this framework in day-to-day situations faced by wives, mothers, and women in our modern world. * These ladies use a bare-bones version of the Gospel story as a starting point: creation, fall, redemption, consummation. We can also use these biblical themes as touchpoints in discerning what is true. In the remainder of this study, we will work through these themes and consider what they reveal about the familiar and alluring messages in our world today.

Creation

God created this world as a perfectly functioning ecosystem full of worshippers who interacted with their Creator in ways we can only imagine. He made man and woman in His image to display His likeness and serve as priests and garden keepers. The first humans experienced perfect communion with God and with the world around them. The world had no concept of shame, pain, or failure. In Genesis 1 God called His creation "very good," and indeed it was, at least for the first two chapters of Genesis.

Fall

Enter Serpent, stage left. The crafty deceiver appears in Genesis 3 and utters the first question recorded in Scripture: "Yea, hath God said, 'Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?'" And he sowed seeds of doubt and discontentment where, to this point, humanity had only felt certainty and peace. When Adam and Eve sinned, the perfect world of the Garden (and perfect communion with the God of the Garden) was tarnished and broken. Now, all created order feels the effects of sin in all aspects of our lives, including our

ability to discern what is right and true.

Redemption

Praise be to God; He was not content to leave us in our fallen state. Through Christ, His perfect life, sacrificial death, and triumphant resurrection, we can now be reconciled with God and pardoned from the effects of our sin. Accepting Christ's redeeming work establishes us as co-heirs with Him to the eternal hope of Heaven and a final resurrection. As we await His second coming, we allow the Spirit to do His sanctifying work in us, conforming us to the image of Christ.

Consummation

We who are now in Christ enjoy an in-dwelling of God's Spirit and a promise that Christ will return one day to make all things new. We await with anticipation this final glorification, echoing the words of Paul: "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known" (1 Corinthians 13:12 ESV).

Putting It into Practice

Knowing the gospel story (and thus, the story of the whole of Scripture) is a wonderful thing. But how can it practically help us discern thoughts based on distorted thinking? These four biblical concepts provide the lenses to view our thoughts, emotions, and life circumstances. They can serve as guideposts in thinking biblically (and thus truthfully) about the perspectives we receive from the mirrors of the world, other believers, and even our own hearts.

Let's practice this with two of the more prevalent messages or thought patterns we often encounter.

The "Treat Yourself" Mentality: "I deserve every good thing coming to me."

Creation – Scripture tells us we were all created in God's image. Because of this, every woman possesses innate dignity and worth. God gave us dominion over the earth to enjoy and subdue His creation. This role involves rewards and responsibilities.

Fall – Every person born after the Fall in Genesis 3 has inherited Adam and Eve's sin nature. All of us are sinful and depraved, and the Bible tells us we all deserve death (Romans 6:23).

Redemption – The work of Christ at Calvary rescued those who have accepted Him as Lord and Savior from this death sentence. While in our sin, we deserved death, but now, God has given us the promise of eternal life and an inheritance in Heaven, not of our own merit but entirely by God's grace (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Consummation – While things in this life may not always be pleasant or easy, we are blessed with a hope of eternal rest and perfect happiness with the Lord. On that resurrection day, we will be transformed fully into a glorified, perfect Bride of Christ, free to enjoy His presence and goodness forevermore as He always intended. Only the righteousness of Christ on our account could bring us to this place.

Conclusion – While rewarding ourselves for achievements or celebrating milestones is not problematic in itself; believing our own merits somehow earn us good things is problematic. We can't ignore the ugliness of sin if we want to appreciate the beauty of Christ's grace fully. All of humanity deserves nothing but God's wrath; mercifully He offered us His grace instead.

The "Girl Boss" Mentality: "I should have it all together all the time."

Creation – The first humans were tasked with filling and subduing the earth (Genesis 1:28). God never ex-



pected them to attempt these tasks without His help. He met with them daily and offered wisdom and guidance. He made humanity communal beings, and thus we need community. God also modeled the importance of rest and recovery in the very schedule of Creation, resting from His work on the seventh day.

Fall – Sin made our God-given roles more difficult. We now work by the sweat of our brow and may not see the results we want.

Redemption – Although Christ was able to say, “It is finished,” (John 19:30), referring to His own salvific work on the cross, those He redeemed are still unfinished works in progress. When we walk in the Spirit’s power, He molds us more and more into the likeness of Christ, but we will never see perfection on this side of Heaven.

Consummation – God promises to one day make all things new and set all wrongs right. We will finally be in constant

peace and unity with Him and one another; sin and death will be no more.

Conclusion – Striving for excellence may be biblical, but perfectionism is not. Attempting to keep all things going smoothly all the time on our own power ignores the sovereignty and omniscience of God alone and leads to burnout and disappointment.

Facing the Truth

It is easy to get frustrated when we don’t always act in accordance with God’s truth. It’s embarrassing at times to look back on things we accepted as right, true, and real, when they were false. This unfortu-

nate reality is a result of being on this side of the Fall. While through God’s grace and by His Spirit, we continue to grow in discernment and awareness of our own blind spots; this process takes time. Even this week my husband gently reminded me that my description of a particularly difficult day’s events led me to believe things were worse than they really were. While he was only trying to point out I was painting a more negative picture of myself and my abilities than was warranted, I found myself affronted at the idea I could possibly be acting dramatically about the situation!

Too often, we feel the same way about the pricking of the Holy Spirit. Let us not give in to this temptation. Instead, let us accept with gladness the Lord’s correction, knowing that only the truth sets us free (John 8:32). God has given us such a gift in clearly communicating His truth to us. Accept this gift and feast on it as daily bread. Let us preach the Gospel to ourselves often, so we will not be led astray by the warped mirrors of our present age. Fun house mirrors may be enticing, but they always show a false image. When we look to the Word of God and the revealed Word in Jesus Christ, we will never see anything other than the Truth.

THINK ABOUT IT:

What mirrors are you using most often in your life? Take a moment to identify some of the underlying thoughts and beliefs that shape most of your emotions, actions, and habits.

What habits and practices can you implement to better prioritize meditating and memorizing the Word of God?

Christian community is a needed resource in recognizing and combatting falsehood in our lives. Is there someone (or a group of people) in your church family with whom you could seek discernment and accountability?*W*

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Clinical Mental Health Counseling. She works part-time in Institutional Research at Welch College and spends the rest of her time trying to keep her house in a decent state and her two children, Jack and Daisy, alive and well.

**Emily Jenkins and Laura Wifler, *Risen Motherhood: Gospel Hope for Everyday Moments* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 2019).*

