

Looking for God Goggles

Faith is permitting ourselves to be seized by the things we do not see. Martin Luther*

When I take my godchildren swimming, there is one item that is absolutely essential: goggles. The kind that covers your eyes AND nose is preferred. They need these goggles for the 658 times they go underwater, you see. They think these protect their eyes from chlorine and if adjusted right — not too tight, but tight enough — help them see underwater. Since these are dollar goggles, I am not sure they do that, but I humor them.

Today, what I seek from the Lord is more serious than a pair of swimming goggles. I desire that the goggles of faith I received at my Baptism would allow me to see everything clearly, according to God’s perfect will.

I am grateful for the prescription-strength sliver of glass that gives me clear vision to see God's beautiful world: the bright red cardinal in the pine tree; the beautiful smiles of children in their green and gold uniforms at Trinity Lutheran School, Mobile; the dazzling rays of sunlight dancing on the Alabama River. In these sights, I see God's hand clearly visible.

But I struggle, at times, to see God at work through Christ when I look at other sights: a child who is hungry, a dying friend, a job layoff. When worry, fear, and sorrow cloud my eyes, I pray that the Lord would strengthen my eyes of faith — to remind me of my Baptism.

Opening Prayer: Dear Lord, open my eyes of faith to the wonder of a world You loved so much that You gave your only Son, Jesus Christ, to save us. Help me see past obstacles to opportunities. Help me see Your guiding light when I'm blinded by fear and sorrow. Bring to my mind the heroes of faith: generations who have lived faithfully by the Spirit and demonstrated Christ's love. Gently nudge my feet as you enable me to walk by faith. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Name something beautiful you saw today. _____
Was there something lovely that you might have missed or walked past in a hurry? _____ Or something you took for granted? _____
Are you going through some challenges that a pair of God goggles could help you see with faith eyes right now? _____ (Answers will vary.)

What would seeing with God goggles be like? We probably all know someone who has a great spirit of faith despite many difficulties, heartaches, and challenges. One of God's most faithful evangelists suffered early in his life from spiritual blindness. Zealous for the God of Israel, he breathed “threats and murder” against followers of Christ. Then, on the road to Damascus, he got his own pair of God goggles.

Acts 9:1–3; 13–14 What was Saul's reputation among Christians? _____

(Answers will vary, but may include: bad, evil, frightening.)

9 ¹But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest ²and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. ³Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. ¹³But Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many about this

man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. ¹⁴ And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name.”

In Acts 9:4–9 what happened after he saw the bright light? _____

(He heard and then ... went blind.)

⁴ And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” ⁵ And he said, “Who are you, Lord?” And he said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. ⁶ But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.” ⁷ The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. ⁸ Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. ⁹ And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

Read Acts 9:10–18. When Ananias blessed him, scales fell off his eyes. What did he do then?

_____ (Baptism; filled with the Holy Spirit)

¹⁰ Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, “Ananias.” And he said, “Here I am, Lord.” ¹¹ And the Lord said to him, “Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, ¹² and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.” ¹³ But Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. ¹⁴ And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name.” ¹⁵ But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. ¹⁶ For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.” ¹⁷ So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” ¹⁸ And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized;

Our Baptism also restores us to life in Christ and gives us eyes of faith. In Baptism, we get our God goggles put on by the Holy Spirit. But they need lots of adjusting.

Saul — now Paul — became one of the most dynamic missionaries of the New Testament and helped bring the Gospel to Gentiles. His life was a testimony to the power of God to change our vision and guide our feet even when the path is dangerous and frightening.

Eyes of Faith

Let me share an example from my life. Driving through the Trinity Gardens community with Leevones Fisher (*Lutheran Woman's Quarterly*, Fall 2016, Pages 8–9 and 21), I see rundown homes, vacant overgrown lots, trash-filled ditches, and streets littered with broken glass and empty beer cans. My eyes tell me this community is broken, troubled and full of misery.

Mrs. Fisher, however, sees this community through eyes of faith. Her heart of Christ's love sees opportunities, not obstacles. When a young mother lost her children because of her drug addiction, Mrs. Fisher took her to recovery classes every day for 30 days. The mother fulfilled her promise to keep going and now is sober and raising her children. And her mother and sister also became sober.

The youth who are over in that lot participated in a summer program Mrs. Fisher set up to mow lawns and clean up streets. Today they help with some of the community gardens that provide food all year long.

That home, owned by an 80-year-old who has lived in the neighborhood for over 50 years, was

damaged in one of the hurricanes. Mrs. Fisher had it fixed. Another home on the next block was dilapidated and dangerous. Mrs. Fisher had it renovated and, along with a house that was built on a vacant lot, is providing housing for families moving back into the community.

Martin Luther reminds us that faith in God is bigger than what we see with our eyes and what we feel with our emotions — both of which are very unreliable. "Faith is of the nature that it does not judge nor reason by what it sees or feels but by what it hears. It depends upon the Word alone and not on vision or sight." [*The Complete Sermons of Martin Luther: Volume 1*]

Paul also tells us not to look at today's problems and pains but to look past our very visible problems to the invisible future. Read **2 Corinthians 4:17–18** and restate his advice in your own words. _____

(Answers will vary. Sample: While the problems of this life come and go, we see them as preparation and continue to look forward to the promise of yet unseen and unmatched glory that is eternal.)

2 Corinthians 4: ¹⁷For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, ¹⁸as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

Paul knows about afflictions, although I doubt I would call them "momentary" or "light." Look them up in **2 Corinthians 11:23–28**, and list several. _____

(Answers will vary, but may include: imprisonments; countless beatings; often near death; five times received, at the hands of the Jews, the forty lashes less one; three times beaten with rods; once stoned; shipwrecked; adrift at sea; frequent journeys; in danger from rivers, robbers, my own people, Gentiles, false brothers; danger in the city, in the wilderness, at sea; sleepless nights; in hunger and thirst; in cold and exposure; daily anxiety for all of churches.)

2 Corinthians 11: ²³Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. ²⁴Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. ²⁵Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; ²⁶on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; ²⁷in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. ²⁸And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.

Yet, with his God goggles, how does Paul see all of this? See **Philippians 3:8**. _____

(As loss, rubbish; as really nothing compared to knowing Christ)

Philippians 3: ⁸Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ

In **2 Corinthians 5:7**, Paul tells us how we are to live for Christ.

2 Corinthians 5: ⁷for we walk by faith, not by sight.

Can you give an example of how you might walk by faith, not sight, with something that is difficult for you today? _____ May we pray over that right now?

Note to Leader: It is important to be sensitive to the willingness to answer these questions, as well as to be prayed for, aloud.

Our faith is not meant to be some weak and untried muscle, but a strong and vigorous, active confidence in the One who is our Savior and King. How does Paul describe faith in **Hebrews 11:1**? _____

(The assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.)

Hebrews 11: ¹Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

This verse gives us a two-part definition of faith: first, "being sure of what we hope for." The word for sure in Greek, *hypostasis*, communicates substance, firmness, confidence, a guarantee. This is echoed in the second half of the verse: "and certain of what we do not see." The Greek word *elenchos*, used here, means a conviction and a certainty that inspires the believer to lay hold of the realities on which his hope is fixed and which, though unseen, are already his in Christ.

The writer continues in Hebrews 11:39 that our forefathers' faith remained strong even though they *did not receive what was promised*. We have not seen Jesus in the flesh. No one has for over 2,000 years. Yet we believe. How? Read **1 Peter 1:3–9**. _____

Hebrews 11: ³⁹And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised,

(God's mercy; a living hope that allows us to trust through trials; faith in the Word of God)

1 Peter 1: ³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. ⁸Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, ⁹obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

We believe because our Baptism empowers us through the Spirit to accept by faith the Word of God and the eyewitnesses to His birth, life, and resurrection.

The goggles I give my godchildren often get foggy as they use them, and we have to keep cleaning and clearing them out. In the same way, without faith my spiritual sight is often weak and foggy. Too often I fail to see how God has worked out a problem into a better or stronger solution. I often fail to see God's hand in taking my brokenness and using it to bring love and compassion to someone going through similar trials.

Note to Leader: The sight we have by faith is not weak or foggy. Actually, our sinful flesh causes us not to see clearly what eyes of faith capture. Like reliance on glasses, which help physical sight, we must trust what faith allows us to know and see about life in Christ.

Every day, I am challenged to close my physical eyes to difficulties and to see and believe, to trust and depend on, God's greater work through Christ in lavishing love, mercy, and grace upon me so that I can share it with others. Just as I need that thin sliver of glass to give me physical vision, by faith I need to wear God's goggles — sharpened through his Word and Sacraments.

But my eyes are toward you, O GOD, my Lord; in you I seek refuge; leave me not defenseless
(Psalm 141:8)!

Closing Prayer (based on *Ephesians 1:17–19*): We pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give us the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him, having the eyes of our hearts enlightened, that we may know what is the hope to which

He has called us, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His great might.

Closing Hymn: Sing or say together “We Walk By Faith” (*LSB* #720) or “Who Trusts in God a Strong Abode” (*LSB* #714; *LW* #414; *TLH* #437).

**Short Quotes by Martin Luther|Praying the Gospels
[All references ESV]*

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