

Devotion for NBC, February 17, 2021

Believing is Seeing, Seeing is Believing

I am a biologist and an educator, not formally trained in biblical theology. I must confess to some measure of intimidation of bringing biblical comments to biblical scholars such as the NBC faculty.

First, a story, a letter from a young soldier struggling in his walk with Christ, to a godly pastor, Ray Stedman:

“I think I have lost my faith in the power of prayer. It seems like I have asked so many things in Christ’s name that weren’t answered. I get the skeptical feeling that it would have happened one way or the other whether I asked or not. If it comes out the way you ask, then you say, ‘My prayer was answered’. If it doesn’t you say ‘God chose not to answer it this way’ or ‘He’ll answer it later if I keep praying, etc.’ I haven’t by any means rejected Christianity, but I can’t, no matter how much I want to, give myself wholeheartedly to a way of life I am so uncertain about. But it’s really rough riding on the fence.”

There’s an honest letter. I remember as a young pastor’s wife being there myself on occasion. Bottom line, **“I’ve tried prayer and it doesn’t seem to work”**. This really is repeating an often-heard comment, “Seeing is believing.”

This, as Ray Stedman suggests, is a great lie foisted on us by our evidence-based culture, our science, my science and the skeptical world. For us as Christians, **believing first is seeing**. And yet, sometimes, I think it’s true...

If I were teaching my Sunday School class, I would stop and ask them, “How should this young soldier answer?” and then proceed to develop a discussion among mature Christians who have probably not been at the place spiritually where he is in some time.

Let me illustrate what I think is missing here.

I paused over a book in our local bookstore (Books-a-million) one warm, fall, Florida afternoon entitled, *Lifespan: Why We Age – And Why We Don’t Have To*. The gist and purpose of the book is to convince you that you do not need to age. With that information, and if I were in my class, I would ask you, “What do you think of this book?” “Do you have any confidence in the premise of this author?” “Why or why not?” Responses usually include, skepticism, interest, but not belief.

Now let me tell you about why I noticed this book and purchased it and who wrote it.

(TESTIMONIAL) I listen faithfully to a radio broadcast on Saturday morning at 7 am entitled “The People’s Pharmacy.” The couple that host the program include a man and wife, a

pharmacologist, and a medical anthropologist who also write a weekly column in the several national newspapers. I heard the author of this book on their program and was impressed with his credentials and his research, so after checking the book out of the library and reading it, I went into Books-a-million not with the intent of perusing books but buying this book. That's why I bought it and have read it through once and reread portions of it several times. I am even now working to implement some of its proposals. Question: What do you think of the book now?

(CREDENTIALS/CREDIBILITY OF THE AUTHOR) Here's who wrote it. David Sinclair is a professor of genetics at Harvard Medical School. *Time* magazine named him "One of the 100 most influential people in the world" in 2014 and "Top 50 people in health care" in 2018. He has received more than 35 awards for his research and major scientific breakthroughs including the NIH Director's Pioneer Award. He has been featured on *Today*, *60 Minutes*, *in Wall Street Journal*, *New York Times*, *Fortune*, *Newsweek*. He has published several articles in the top three science journals of our time. Question: What do you think of the book now?

Here's what the book is saying **(READING THE BOOK)**. Each of us begins as a single cell with instructions for all our body parts written inside. As the cells progress, the information that is necessary to make a liver cell, for example, is shut off in cells that make skin, but the full instructions are still within each cell, just not all expressed. A Japanese researcher has determined that he can take the cells of a mouse fibroblast and reprogram them back to their original undifferentiated, all-instructions-available state, capable of recreating a whole new organism. He has discovered the reset switches and has returned these cells back to their embryonic state. They are now called induced pluripotent stem cells, iPS. He does so using 3 protein products made by three genes called **YAMANAKA GENES**. Sinclair believes that cellular reprogramming in humans is coming and will first be used to treat age related diseases such as glaucoma and macular degeneration. His research indicates our future may include at age 30 you will get a course of three injections of viruses carrying some combination of Yamanaka genes that can be convinced to lay quietly until signs of aging appear, then are reactivated externally, and your body will rejuvenate itself. This is the Reader's Digest version of chapter 6.

NOW TELL ME WHAT YOU THINK OF THIS BOOK. I suspect your opinion of this book has risen. Here's why. You now have heard a testimonial and understood more of the credibility of the author and listened to parts of the book itself. You have had a recommendation from someone you know and may have confidence in. You are developing an opinion of the character of the book, the credentials of the author, and the character of the research. You may be curious enough to want to read the book or accept its premises **BECAUSE YOU HAVE JUST GOTTEN ACQUAINTED WITH THE CREDIBILITY OF THE AUTHOR, THE CHARACTER OF THE AUTHOR, AND HIS BOOK.**

Back to the young soldier. I think his most pressing need is to delve deeply into an understanding of the character of God. He has heard **TESTIMONIALS OF** how God works; he has seen **EXAMPLES IN** others who are confident in God's character, has **READ ABOUT** this in God's

word but has begun to doubt the character of a faithful, loving God enough to trust His providence wherever it leads.

I am teaching the book of Hebrews in my Sunday School class, and we are on chapter 9. All of the preceding chapters are intent on developing the superiority of Christ, promoting the character of God. The author is addressing a harassed, persecuted group of converted Jews who are looking back with longing at returning to the Old Covenant, because they do not understand the Character of this Great High Priest, Jesus. Rather like the young soldier who is tempted to return to unbelief in prayer, because HE DOES NOT UNDERSTAND THE LOVING, FAITHFUL CHARACTER OF GOD. This is the Christ who in the words of Hebrews:

- A. Is greater than: the prophets, the angels, Melchizedek, Aaron, Abraham, the Levitical priests
- B. Is: the pioneer of our salvation, He who sanctifies, our permanent Great High Priest, holy, undefiled, appointed with an oath by God, ministering at the right hand of God, perfectly mirroring God, is ever interceding for us, expressing grace and forgiveness.

You and I have developed an understanding of God's character over a lifetime using many references, we have seen **examples of God in others**, we have **poured over promises** when life is unpredictable, have **taken courses in Theology** and **spent time in the presence of God**, enough to sense His heart. Whether God answers prayers the way we want Him to or not, we trust His character and great overwhelming love for us.

That's where you come in. You have become, in some measure, an example of the character of God to your students, your acquaintances, your colleagues, your family. They are expecting you to live in the character of God, not perfectly, but to the extent that they can say, "I can see that there is a loving God because of the way you live." "I can believe He is faithful because you are faithful. I can believe in prayer because you pray." Ultimately, they must choose faith on their own, but seeing is ever so helpful.

In many ways, **BELIEVING IS SEEING**, because belief and faith must come first. Hebrews 11 is full of "by faith our biblical heroes stepped out in obedience before seeing results." Without faith it is impossible to please God. He who comes to God must believe that He is and that He rewards those who seek Him. But in some ways, **SEEING IS BELIEVING**, because when we see Christ in you, we can believe more in the character of God. May these things be said of me and of each of you, as our students, our colleagues, and the questioning world is developing the believing part of this equation.

Mrs. Donna B. Alder, Vice Chair of the Executive Committee of the NBC Board of Trustees, Retired professor of Biology at Roberts Wesleyan College for 30 years, Retired Nazarene pastor's wife.