

Seeing God's Potential in Your Life

By Dave Batty

“By the time I was 20, I was convinced I would only live two more years at most. I had been a drug addict since I was 16. Now my life was in such despair, I wanted to just end the madness.

“I decided to call my mom and tell her to buy a casket, put me in it, and bury me alive. Then I would die and finally have peace.”

What causes people to have such despair? Why are they not able to see the potential God sees in their lives?

I met Marina two years after she was at that point of despair. About the time she was contacting her mother to arrange for her death, a friend told her mom about Teen Challenge. Marina came to Teen Challenge and within days experienced God's healing touch in her life.

Before she graduated from the program, Marina discovered a whole new way of living, and she made a decision to devote her life to helping others find new life in Jesus.

You may be familiar with the story of Nicky Cruz, a gang leader who came to know Christ personally through the ministry of Dave Wilkerson here in New York City in 1958. His life was radically changed through the power of love.

When he first met Dave Wilkerson, he was filled with anger. When Dave said, “I love you, Nicky,” his response was to say, “You come near me, Preacher, I'll kill you.”

Dave responded, “You could cut me into a thousand pieces, and lay them out in the street, and every piece would love you.” Nicky knew how to handle hatred and violence, but love—that was different. He couldn't shake that expression of love, and within a few weeks gave his heart to Jesus.

Nicky went to Bible school, graduated, and came back to New York City to minister with Teen Challenge. Several years later he left and started his own ministry. Now almost 50 years later, he has preached to over 34 million people, and seen thousands come to know Jesus personally.

It's easy to look at the past 49 years and become excited at the

wonderful way God has used Nicky's life to help so many.

But if you had been walking down a street in Brooklyn and met Nicky Cruz 50 years ago, when he was still a gang leader, filled with anger—what would you have seen?

How hard is it for you to see God's potential in your life and the lives of others?

Would you have said, “I see in Nicky great potential to be a powerful man of God, an evangelist who will preach to millions”?

Or would you have said, “Here comes trouble! Let me get out of the way.” Is the only potential you would have seen the potential for trouble?

When you look at yourself in the mirror, what do you see?

What is the key to seeing God's potential in your life? And what will you do with the potential God has placed in your life?

How to squander your potential

In the Old Testament, God put His finger on a young man named Saul and said, “I choose you to be

- ❖ **What is the potential God sees in your life?**
- ❖ **What can rob you of God's potential for your life?**
- ❖ **What guarantee do you have that God's potential can be realized in your life?**

king of the nation of Israel.” Saul wasn't seeking power or fame, but God said, “You can do it.” God anointed King Saul, and surrounded him with godly men. All the keys were there for Saul to be successful in living out the potential God had for him.

But King Saul allowed his early success to deceive him. He soon began to pick and choose when he would obey God and when he would ignore God's commands. Finally God said, “I have rejected you as king.”

Saul squandered God's potential in his life, and his later years were filled with violence, confusion, fear, and finally death by suicide.

When only God sees potential

Then God spoke to Samuel the prophet and told him to go and anoint one of Jesse's sons to be the next king. Samuel went to Bethlehem and invited Jesse and his sons to come to the special sacrifice he would offer.

When Samuel meets Jesse's oldest son, Eliab, he thought, “Surely this is the one God has chosen to be the next king.”

But God immediately said to Samuel, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him.” (1 Samuel 16:7 NIV)

Here was the prophet Samuel, the spiritual leader of the whole country, who looks at Eliab and completely misses what God sees. God goes on to say, “Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.” (1 Samuel 16:7 NIV)

Samuel has all 7 sons of Jesse pass in front of him, and each time

God said, “No.” Then Samuel asks, “Are these all the sons you have?”

Jesse tells him the youngest son is out tending sheep.

So put yourself in David's position. Samuel, the Billy Graham of their day, came and specifically invited Jesse and his sons to a feast and a sacrifice, and Dad doesn't even invite David to come! This shows how little Jesse thinks of David.

You know the story, David comes, and is anointed as king, and though he didn't immediately become king, he eventually served in that leadership capacity for many years. David lived out the full potential God had for his life.

No, David was not perfect. But here's what God said about him: “I have found David son of Jesse a man

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after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.” (Acts 13:22 NIV)

You may have a family much like David's. Others see no potential for greatness—no potential for anything in your life. I spoke to one man who at 67 years of age said, “I still hear the words of my father saying to me, ‘You will never amount to anything!’”

So how do we rise above the negative impressions others have? Or maybe you don't see any potential in your own life. How do we begin to see what God sees?

How can we begin to see the potential God sees in our lives?

1. Stop comparing yourself with others

It's easy to look at others like Bill Gates or Tiger Woods and say, “I can never be like them.” God makes it clear that He has made each one of us special. And even before you were born, God had a plan for your life—His plan—one filled with hope, one filled with potential.

In Ephesians 2:10, we have the promise, “For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.” (New Living Translation) (See also Jeremiah 29:11) God has a special plan just for you so your life can be filled with meaning and purpose.

2. God alone decides what special gifts, talents and abilities He will give you

In 1 Corinthians 12, we have a description of many of the gifts the Holy Spirit gives us. At the end of this list of gifts, we have a very clear statement about how we get these gifts. “It is the one and only Spirit who distributes all these gifts. He alone decides which gift each person should have.” (1 Corinthians 12:11 New Living Translation) God alone decides this. We need to focus on discovering what gifts He has given us, and look for ways to use these gifts to do the work He wants us to do.

Not everyone is called by God to be Billy Graham—only one—Billy himself. We can each celebrate in the realization that each one of us is a

“masterpiece” in God’s eyes.

3. Don't let the standards of our culture determine your potential

It is so easy to believe all the hype portrayed on TV and by Hollywood. Many compare their looks to the stars of Hollywood, and feel so inadequate. But God has a simple and specific answer to

God's potential for you has nothing to do with what the culture says is good for you.

Hollywood—“Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.” (Romans 12:2 New Living Translation)

Another translation puts it this way—“Don’t let the world squeeze you into its mold.” God’s potential for you has nothing to do with what the culture says is good for you.

God loves to take the worst cases of failure and turn them into miracles of success. The history of Teen Challenge is filled with broken, hopeless drug addicts who have experienced God’s touch and become men and women with great potential. But more than potential—they have lived out that potential and seen God use them to be a blessing to thousands all over the world.

Jesus gives us a powerful picture of seeing potential in unlikely people in Luke 8:28-39. Jesus and his

disciples have just crossed the Sea of Galilee, landed on the shore of Gerasenes, ready to begin a preaching and ministry tour in that area. Who meets Jesus? A demon-possessed mad man. He was naked, homeless, screaming at Jesus, “Don’t torture me!”

If you had been one of the 12 disciples, what would you have been thinking? “Who’s in charge of security? Get this mad man out of here. Jesus has important ministry to do!”

What would you have seen? Would you have simply seen the outward appearance of a very troubled man who was disrupting the ministry of Jesus? Would you have seen him as nothing more than a menace?

But what did Jesus see? Jesus saw potential! Jesus healed this man—of course a few pigs died in the process. Sometimes there is a cost to healing!

When the townspeople come to see what happened they found the madman sitting at the feet of Jesus, now wearing clothes, and “in his right mind.” (Luke 8:35 NIV)

Fear—the thief of potential

And what was the response of the people? Were they delighted that Jesus had solved the biggest problem in their town—the reign of terror was over! Did they fall at the feet of Jesus and shower Him with praise?

No—their response to seeing the healed man was—“they were afraid.” (Luke 8:35 NIV) Even when the people who had seen the miracle explained it in detail, the people of the town still reacted with

fear. “Then all the people of the region of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them.” (Luke 8:37 NIV)

They squandered a great opportunity for Jesus to do more miracles in their town. Surely this was not the only man who had a problem! They allowed their fear to rob them of the potential God had for them.

Does fear cause you to squander God's potential for your life?

How easy is it for you to do the same? Do you fear what God might ask you to do if you said, “God, I will do anything you want me to do, go anywhere you want me to go”? Does fear cause you to squander God’s potential for your life?

Living out your potential

But there is more to this story in Luke. Jesus willingly complies with the request of the townspeople. He gets in the boat and prepares to leave. But the man who has been healed begs Jesus to let him come along.

Now wouldn’t that have been a great testimony to have for future services—“Come see a man who had thousands of demons in him, but Jesus healed him!” That should increase the attendance at the meetings!

Pretend for a minute that you are that demon possessed man who has just been healed. Would you want to stay in that town? After all, these people are still afraid of you. And you have destroyed your reputation and relationships with people. I think I

would be begging Jesus to let me come with Him.

But Jesus says no, and instead tells him, "Return home and tell how much God has done for you." (Luke 8:39 NIV) Jesus saw potential, not just to be rid of his problems, but Jesus saw a potential evangelist!

The man obeyed Jesus and immediately began to tell people what had happened in his life. He fulfilled the potential Jesus saw in his life.

This man was on the fast track to ministry. He woke up that morning as he had for many years a demon possessed maniac. Before the day was over he was healed, and called to be an evangelist. Not only was he called, but he began doing the ministry that very day.

Not every person will have this dramatic of a miracle. Not everyone will be called to a ministry and begin that ministry the same day they are saved and healed. David was anointed king, but it was years before he ascended to the throne—years filled with all kinds of problems. But God used those problems to develop the character God wanted in his life.

Bill Gaither wrote a song which says, "I am a promise, a possibility. I am a great big bundle of potentiality!"

And for you—what is the potential God sees in your life? You can be sure it is great!

How will you respond to the potential God has placed within you? Will you allow fear to rob you of this potential? Or will you trust God to know what is best for you and embrace all that He has for you? The choice is all up to you.

Seeing God's potential in your life Discussion Guide

The following questions can be used for your personal reflection on this topic, or it can be used as a guide for a group discussion. If this is used in a group setting, please understand that you are not required to disclose the specific details of past sins, failures, or personal experiences.

1. Read 1 Samuel 16:1-7, especially verse 7. How much does a person's physical appearance affect your impression of their potential?
 - A. How hard is it for you to be pleased with the way God has made you?
 - B. How hard is it for you to see God's potential for your life?
2. Read Ephesians 2:10. This verse in the New Living Translation says we are God's masterpieces.
 - A. How hard is it for you to be pleased with the way God has made you?
 - B. How hard is it for you to see God's potential for your life?
3. Read 1 Corinthians 12:4-11, especially verse 11.
 - A. What gifts do you believe God has given you?
 - B. How are you using these gifts in your life?
4. Read Luke 8:26-39. Note the reference to fear in verses 35-37. Does fear keep you from responding to God's potential for your life? Are you afraid of what God might want you to do?
5. Read Mark 4:1-20. In verses 13-20 Jesus explains the meaning behind this story. How does this story relate to how you are living out God's potential in your life?



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