



SEE THE GOOD



FINDING GRACE, GRATITUDE, AND OPTIMISM IN EVERY DAY

ZACH WINDAHL

FOREWORD BY BOB GOFF



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TO GISELA.

Thank you for making every moment
worth remembering.

I will never stop saying “I love you.”

Contents

Foreword by Bob Goff 9

PART ONE: Changing the Way We See

1. Shifting Our Perspective 13
2. You Decide the Story 27
3. New Creation 47
4. Shabbat 67
5. It's a Celebration 77
6. He's Way Funnier in Real Life 97

PART TWO: How to Live It Out

7. Feel All the Feels 113
8. See the Good 133
9. How to Be a Blessing 153
10. Speaking Life 177
11. Ripple 197
12. And Then You Breathe 209

Appendix: 52 Gratitude Journal Prompts 223

A Special Thanks 227

Notes 229

Foreword

IF YOU'RE ANYTHING LIKE ME, it doesn't take much these days to hear about how badly things are going. Turn on the TV, open your phone, or strike up a conversation with the person in line next to you at the grocery store, and chances are you will hear about the poor state of the world. In fact, it seems to me, most people are more acutely aware of the world's worsening state than ever before. From pandemics to politics, there is a feeling that things are going from bad to worse. And for so many reasons, things are pretty tough for a lot of people right now. Divisions socially and politically are causing major stress and problems; people have lost loved ones and suffered in so many ways over the past few years . . . It would be very reasonable to understand why people feel the way they do.

I have been close to and witnessed some of the most terrible experiences in recent history. I have seen natural disasters, wars, famine, and other horrific events firsthand that make our reality seem extremely pessimistic. Yet I am consistently surprised to see people in the darkest of situations rise up to bring light to those around them. I have seen it time and again all around the world. When I assume things should only be heavy and hard, there are

people who are able to see things from a different perspective and, in the face of overwhelming adversity, focus on the good to be found in life. Have you met any of these people? The ones who seem to always have a glint of joy in their eyes, with laughter never too far away? These are the people others look to in the hardest of times, and the resilience that hallmarks their lives seems to come from somewhere other than their circumstances.

My experience and friendship with Zach Windahl has shown me that he is one of those people. The kind of person who doesn't gloss over or avoid difficult situations, but who embraces the difficult, knowing full well the hope found in those valley moments of our lives. In the following pages, Zach helps us understand how and why we should acknowledge the hard parts of life but choose to also see the good, and live a positive life in response. The longer I live, and the more people I meet, I am learning what it means to see life as a gift to be grateful for. Zach and those like him who have discovered the reasons for focusing on the good are willing to also respond to the good in life with gratitude, and step forward with grit and determination to make our world a better place. For when you are able to see the good and find life as a gift, it truly makes you want to give something back in return.

As you read this book, be inspired and encouraged to see your life and the lives of others around you from a new perspective. In doing so, I hope you will learn to give back to life as you find ways to receive what it is already trying to give you.

—Bob Goff
New York Times bestselling author



PART ONE

CHANGING THE WAY WE SEE



CHAPTER 1

Shifting Our Perspective

“MOM IS SICK.”

At four years old, I didn't grasp the depth those three words held.

She probably has a stomachache, I thought. If she drinks some ginger ale, she'll be better soon.

Little did I know that my mother had been diagnosed with stage 4 ovarian cancer. The doctor sent her home with a 5 percent chance to live.

The thing about such a fresh diagnosis is that you would never have known what was going on internally, because on the outside she looked fine. At least for a while. But after a few months, the weight began to slide off and she became skin and bones.

I couldn't recognize my own mother anymore.

One evening as she was in her room at the hospital, she was visited by our family friend, Papa Don, who came equipped with a Bible and a word to share. Even though

my mom had grown up in the church, she was taught from tradition instead of being invited into a relationship with Jesus. Relationship with Christ is essential. And so that night, on her hospital bed, everything changed.

My mom was healed spiritually and was filled with a hope that couldn't be shaken. She knew where she was headed, no matter the outcome of the cancer. And as her treatment progressed, so did her physical healing. A few months later she was cancer-free.

But her war with cancer didn't stop there. And neither did healing and hope.

Over the next ten years she battled on—through a tumor around her sciatic nerve, colon cancer that required three-quarters of her colon to be removed, and to top it off, breast cancer with a double mastectomy and reconstructive surgery. From the ages of four to fifteen, I saw my mom cycle in and out of the hospital, never knowing if she was going to make it.

I guess you could say my childhood was unique. Different.

The best thing that could have happened to us, actually.

Because do you want to know what really shaped me down to my bones? The fact that I never saw my mom upset with God or depressed or adopting a “poor me” mentality. No, the entire time, she found a way to see the good and reminded me how much worse life could be. I mean, she could have been dead. But she wasn't.

She was alive.

I was alive.

You, reading this, are alive.

Some people weren't blessed with that opportunity.

But maybe an optimistic outlook on life isn't natural for you, like it was for my mom. Maybe you're angry with God. Or maybe you feel like you just can't catch a break. I know how that goes. I also know there are mindset shifts and habits we can incorporate to help each of us lead a more grace-filled, hope-filled life; I believe this book will help point you in the right direction.

Just think what would happen if we opened our eyes to all that God is doing in our midst—the good in our personal lives and in the greater world.

What if we started sharing those stories with others?

What if we began to help people see God in ways they never knew of before?

It's going to change your life and the lives of others. I promise.

Better or Worse?

Since the age of four, I have been given a forced education in how joy works and was introduced to the importance of gratitude toward life because it was almost taken away before my eyes.

I am a routine guy. Super type-A, and a 3 wing 2 on the Enneagram. Yeah, you know the type. Everything planned out. Every morning is the same:

I wake up to my alarm at 7 a.m.

Shower.

Clean my glasses and grab my Bible.

Take my dog, Nyla, outside to do her business.

We eat breakfast together, which is really just me chugging a protein shake because it takes her seventeen seconds to devour her food.

And then I sit on our couch to read my Bible and share a thought or two on social media.

Same thing. Every day.

One day, I decided to post two polls on my Instagram Story. I was a little curious that day after seeing so many anxiety-driven posts online.

Poll one:

Do you think the state of the world is getting better or worse?

Poll two:

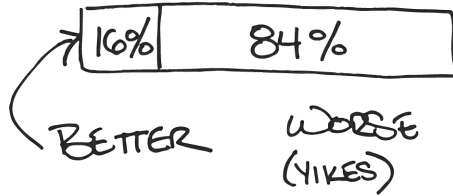
As Christians, do you think it's getting easier or harder to be a Christian?

Honestly, I don't really know what I was expecting the answers to be. But after twenty-four hours, I was shocked by the responses.

84 percent of people said the world was getting worse.

81 percent said it was getting harder to be a Christian.

DO YOU THINK THE
STATE OF THE WORLD
IS GETTING BETTER
OR WORSE?



I was astonished at people's perspectives.

I sat there and just didn't understand. I wondered how so many Christians could have such a negative outlook on the future. Do I not have the same outlook on life that most people do? I thought about this for a while and was flooded with emotions.

I was so confused, a bit sad and curious—and pretty angry. Angry because I couldn't understand the surprisingly negative results of the polls and because I had so many follow-up questions that wouldn't fit in the character limit of the Questions box on Instagram.

I couldn't just sit there and wonder, though. I needed to know how this happened. I needed to do something about it. *We* need to do something about this.

So I began my discovery process as normal, with a simple question: *Why?*

Here are some of the reasons people voted the way they did:

“We are in the last days!”

“We are experiencing censorship and pastors being arrested.”

“Christians are being hated and everyone hates God.”

“Churches could lose tax exemption status in the next two years.”

“Pop culture makes the world more accepting of sin.”

“Christians are getting all the wrong labels, and lies are being told.”

“World views are moving more away from the Bible.”

“Because nobody loves anymore, it’s all about judgment and hate.”

“The gospel isn’t being preached.”

“Society is full of lawlessness and temptation.”

“Christian ethics are more hated than ever.”

“I don’t think it’s getting better or worse. It’s just different.”

Those responses are all real concerns and problems people all over are dealing with. I’m happy everyone shared their thoughts with me; they allowed me a glimpse of why people answered the poll the way they did. And I am in no way trying to downplay the bad circumstances people are seeing and experiencing everywhere.

But I still didn’t really get it. How did we get here?

We Are So Bored

If you want a great burger in Minneapolis, go to a spot called Nolo's. They have this duck burger that will knock your socks off.

The other day when I was there, my friend Ethan ordered a plate of sauteed shishito peppers for my friends Tiago, Luke, and me. He said that one in twenty peppers will be so hot you lose your breath.

Don't threaten me with a good time.

As we worked our way through the tray of peppers, flinching with every bite, I brought up the results of my Instagram poll and how it was messing with my head. How I couldn't comprehend why so many people thought the world was getting worse.

I shared stats such as how, in the last twenty-five years alone,

- world hunger has declined 40 percent;
- the child mortality rate has been cut in half;
- extreme poverty has fallen by three-quarters; and
- 88 percent of children have been vaccinated against at least one disease.¹

Looking at this from a macro perspective, the world is trending positively. Wouldn't you agree?

So I asked the guys what they thought. Luke said, "I think it's because we are so bored and we need things to complain about." I thought about his response for a second and, well, I completely agree.

We are just so bored.

And we lack perspective.

Dentistry and a Printing Press

I was selling shirts at a Christian music festival the day after I got my wisdom teeth removed. It was hot, hot, and I was hungry, hungry, but the only thing I could consume while my mouth was healing were meal-replacement shakes. And considering that I was at a Christian music festival on a hot summer day, instead of at my home with a refrigerator, my shakes were warm. And strawberry flavored. I'm not sure if the strawberry made it worse or not, but those things were definitely curdled by the end of the day, and I had to choke them down.

As nasty as that may have been though, how nice is it that when you need to have your wisdom teeth removed, you can drive down the street to the dentist, get drugged up, have the dentist take them out, and a few days later the swelling is down and you're all healed. Praise God for that!

What do you think happened two hundred years ago if you had wisdom teeth issues? Like, you need to realize that Novocaine was invented in 1905. What do you think they did to numb the pain before local anesthetics were developed? Anything? Rub a random leaf that they foraged on it?

To take it a step further, how do you think dental surgeries took place during Old Testament times? Yikes.

Think of it: It's the middle of summer in 2500 BC. The world powers at the time are Egypt and Babylon in Mesopotamia, controlling what is known as the Fertile Crescent.

To understand the region a little better, make a peace sign with your left hand.

Your forearm is the Red Sea.

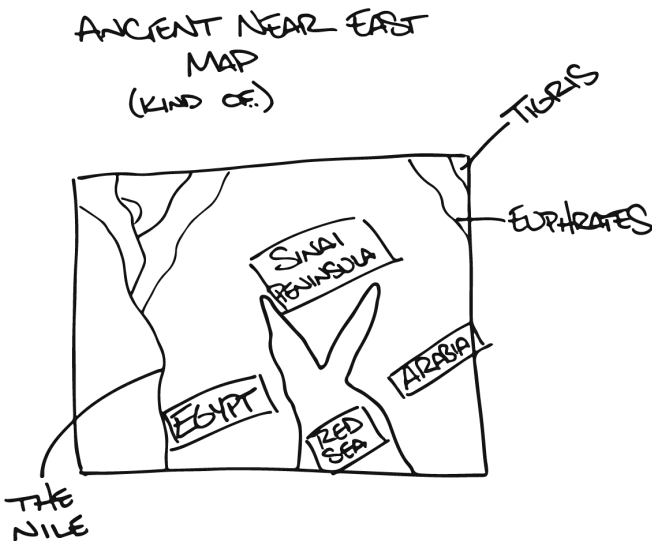
Your middle finger is the Gulf of Suez.

Your pointer finger is the Gulf of Aqaba. To the left of your hand is Egypt.

Between your fingers is the Sinai Peninsula.

And to the right of your hand is Saudi Arabia.

Above that is Mesopotamia and where the Promised Land would end up being—modern-day Jordan, Israel, etc.



Three massive rivers ran through the land: the Nile through Egypt, and the Tigris and Euphrates through Mesopotamia.

This land was special. And the rivers are what made it extravagant.

Nearly every spring, all three rivers would overflow and flood the land, resulting in a plentiful harvest for all of the people groups. They believed that the more they sacrificed to their gods, the greater the flood and the more abundant the harvest would be. We'll talk more about this later, but I wanted you to have a brief understanding for now.

So, back to the vision.

It's the summer of 2500 BC. You are preparing a meal for your family by grinding wheat with a mortar and pestle that were passed down by your parents and are looking a little rough around the edges. What you don't realize as you're grinding is that a small chunk of rock broke off the pestle into the dough mixture. Blind to the tragedy that is about to ensue, you knead the dough into cakes for dinner and begin cooking them over the fire. The smell of goodness flows through the air, calling your family to gather for a bite of what you've been slaving away at. But moments like these with the entire family together make all of the work completely worth it.

You sit back.

Your spouse smiles. Your daughter laughs as your son cracks another joke.

This is peace. This is harmony.

You grab your plate, take a bite, and immediately regret using that old pestle and mortar, as the small chip of rock just broke your lower molar.

OUCH.

Now what?

The good news is that archaeologists have uncovered mummies from the same time period that have holes in their teeth and jaws from dental surgeries.

The bad news is that there was no anesthetic or laughing gas.

Dental surgery wasn't preventative for them as it is for us today. They only brought out the drills when there was a real problem. Think of how excruciating the pain and discomfort would have been with no numbing cream. At the same time, think of how terrible the pain would be if you broke a tooth and didn't do anything about it. It was a lose-lose situation.

When it comes to dentistry, things are definitely better now. I don't do well with blood, and shivers just crawled up my spine as I typed this, thinking about getting my wisdom teeth ripped out.

I know they're called wisdom teeth, but that doesn't sound very wise to me.

And don't even get me started with circumcision.

There's a type of literature in the Bible called Wisdom literature. It's all about helping you live life. Not necessarily rules, but tips on how to live well.

Like, “For lack of guidance a nation falls, but victory is won through many advisers,”² and “Commit your actions to the LORD, and your plans will succeed.”³ Stuff like that.

I’m a big fan.

I’m so grateful that we have this ancient wisdom available at our fingertips, whether in a printed Bible or on your phone. (You’re definitely holier if you have the real thing, but that’s neither here nor there.)

Did you know that it was only five hundred years ago that the first Bible was printed in English? You couldn’t just go and buy a Bible at a store. In the past, you would have had to write it out. My hand cramps just thinking about it.

Not only that, but back in the day, you definitely couldn’t live out your faith in public as we are able to do in many parts of the world today. It wasn’t because a few people didn’t like Christians so they were being persecuted. No, *Rome* hated Christians. Like, the *entire world power* Rome. From what a lot of early church scholars believe, the Romans didn’t really understand Christianity, especially as it moved away from Judaism and became more Hellenized. Christians were a threat. They were saying that a new kingdom had arrived and was taking over.

Other mystery cults were spreading at the time as well, such as the cult of Bacchus and the cult of Mithras. These cult followers would worship in secret and have meals together, encouraging one another in their faith, just as the Christians did. Not only that, but they would eat the flesh of their god in the form of bread and drink the blood in the form of wine, as we do in our Eucharist. So when the

Roman government was looking at these various groups of people, they couldn't tell the difference, and Christians were persecuted the same as the rest.

Rome had an emperor for a few years named Nero, who was the worst. He would feed Christians to lions for entertainment. He would also dip them in oil, impale them, and light them on fire to be used as lanterns at his dinner parties.

And we're complaining about our churches losing their tax-exempt status. Come on. That's a slap in the face to our Christian lineage.

We have it so good.

There are so many things to be grateful for.

I love how, when I asked the question "Why?" about the poll results, one person responded, "I don't think it's getting better or worse. It's just different."

I agree with that.

Maybe I needed to adjust my question, because the answer isn't binary. It's complex. We need to muddy the waters a little bit.

Is it getting better? Yes, it is trending positive.

Is it getting worse? Also, yes. Many things are terrible right now.

So I guess it's kind of like asking, "How was 2020?" or "How was your childhood?"

There were a lot of things that were good and bad, depending on how you look at it.

It's true that many bad things are going on, like racial injustice, the threat of nuclear weapons, our mental health crisis, our earth crisis, and division in the church. But there are also countless things to be grateful for, such as modern dentistry and the availability of Bibles, for starters.

We get to decide what story we're telling. God is literally allowing us to participate in the ongoing creation of the world.

These are the days the church was created for. What an extraordinary thing to be alive and have this experience. What else could we want?

Almost losing my mom during my most developmental years taught me a lot of life lessons, but they can be summed up into two main things:

God is good.

And all of life is a gift.