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Seeing Clearly

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Seeing Clearly

IN ALL THINGS EXPLORES THE CONCRETE IMPLICATIONS OF CHRIST'S PRESENCE IN ALL FACETS OF LIFE

"First take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye." (Matthew 7:5)

What we fail to reconcile in our own hearts will inevitably be projected on others. It's an inviolable principle of Scripture and psychology summarized in Augustine's words: *Noverim me*—Let me know myself. Our inner work makes honest engagement with another's sin not only possible, but possibly transformational. It also frees us to know and be known by God.



This transformation is so important in a day when reactive social media engagement has replaced reflective, patient, interpersonal dialogue. As an early adopter of Twitter and Facebook, I've participated in toxic, quick-fire back-and-forth's that went nowhere, convinced no one, and served only to magnify the log in my own eye. This modern-day, call-and-response liturgy mirrors our culture's addiction to rushed, anxious communication. It fosters disconnection rather than connection, which further exhausts our anxious limbic systems, fuels shame, and erodes trust. We risk undermining the change we seek in others and in our world.

It would be easy to blame social media platforms or seemingly omnipresent Christian social media personalities who might be easy targets. And let's not in any way minimize how we're all caught up in systems of power and privilege which breed suspicion, injustice, and a righteous desire to express concern. In many respects, social media has given

the voiceless a platform to speak.

So, I start with me, because if I don't do my work and examine my heart, then I'll be firing arrows into the air haphazardly, unaware of whom I hurt.

Disciplines of daily silence and self-examination allow me space for meaningful reflection and centering. In these times, I am most in touch with the shame underlying my anxious lifestyle and the grief I keep at a distance through addictive habits. True repentance is borne out of moments of silence and solitude, when what lurks in the shadows can be revealed.

How do you experience silence? A while ago, I was talking to a CEO who said, "I'd never want to do that; I'd have to be with myself." He laughed, but the shame and self-contempt was palpable. He is unaware of how his avoidance nullifies any prospect of inner transformation. He cannot see the anxious system he leads. He wonders why retention is so low and why production stagnates. Those who work with this man experience his abusive tactics every day, as he blames everyone but himself. And yet, in that one moment, I caught a glimpse of the terror that the prospect of silence stirred in him.

Shame may be the most powerful emotion in the universe. It whispers within, "You're not enough." It whispers to the CEO and the star athlete, the stay-at-home parent and the young pastor. It floods the body, fueling self-contempt and a crying out for relief. Our strategies for relief are endless: busyness, achievement, ingratiation, pleasure, addictions, even spiritual activities. Instead of turning our attention within to experience God's love and kindness

amidst our shame, we look outside, often turning our shame into contempt for others, exercising control of our lives, and correcting everyone but ourselves.

Too often, rather than facing our own shame, we place it elsewhere. Rather than naming our own powerlessness, we power up. When faced with the chaos of the world and our own lives, we grasp at control. In doing so, we become complicit with the very "powers and principalities" that are fueled by contempt and control. The work of exploring our own "logs" is work done not just for ourselves, but for the sake of the world. We uproot our sin so that we can do good. We become recipients of grace so that we can extend grace.

When we recognize that we are the "poor in spirit," those powerless to change the world, Jesus comes. God dwells within. The source of power is redemptive. Even challenging another is borne out of love. St. John of the Cross once said that the Gospel mission is to put love where love is not. Rooting out the log in our own eye is the first act of love, as we remove every obstacle to union with God within in order to experience the depth and breadth of divine love.

In a time when it's easier than ever to call others out, the invitation is to return to the wisdom of Jesus. He doesn't tell us to ignore the speck in the other's eye or turn a blind eye to the world's injustices. He simply wants us to do the work so that we can see clearly.

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