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Don't Crop Out the MEANING

This is the season for Vacation Bible School. My wife, Wendy, recently remembered a story from a VBS about 15 years ago when we lived in Georgia. Our daughter, Raechel, had saved her money for the mission offering that week. On the day she brought it, she sat in one of the main sessions beside her friend. That friend asked Raechel if she could hold the coins. Just then, the offering bag came around, and the friend put in the coins... herself. Raechel couldn't believe what she was seeing!

At that exact moment, a photographer from the local paper snapped a picture. Not knowing the back story, the paper described the picture as the other girl's offering. And it truly looks like Raechel is amazed at her "friend's offering." It is understandable when you look at the picture why that is the first impression. But when you zoom out and know the backstory—the truth is much different, isn't it?



In trying to track down that newspaper photo, I talked with Jim, one of their photojournalists who has worked at the paper for a long time. When I shared with him the backstory of the picture, he said it reminded him of what he learned in college years ago. His professor taught the class to make sure to "never crop out the meaning of the picture," look at the big picture, and find the true meaning behind what you think you see.

So many times, when God is working in our lives, our families, or even in our ministries, we only catch a glimpse of what He is doing.

We are either too zoomed in while trying so hard to interpret what's going on, or trying to

think ahead and plan for what may happen. Or, we aren't aware enough and even totally oblivious to major things God is doing around us—and in us.

My dad recently said something that stuck with me. He said he was praying for spiritual hearing aids and glasses—so he wouldn't miss something God was saying to him or doing around him.

I love the verses from Isaiah 55:8-9, which read, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways."

It says in Romans 11:32-33, "Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! Oh, how great are God's riches and wisdom and knowledge! How impossible it is for us to understand his decisions and his ways!"

No one knew that truth more than Job. In Job 11:7, his friend, Zophar, says something Job probably already knew, "Can you fathom the mysteries of God? Can you probe the limits of the Almighty?" Job sure learned that lesson, didn't he?

It's good to remind ourselves that when God works, we may not understand or even see what He is doing. Rather than getting so hyper-focused on ourselves and only on what we can see and feel, we may need to zoom out and realize that while we may not understand it all right now, God not only has a plan, but He is working out that plan right now for our good.

Things aren't always as they appear with our limited vision and perspective. We need to be careful not to jump to conclusions or zoom in too close and "crop out the meaning."

And then, remember the words of the wisest man who ever lived when he wrote in Proverbs 3:5-6,

"Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths." ■