

Introduction

Why *Eyes to See?* And Who Am I, Anyway?

The Uffizi Gallery in Florence, Italy is home to a space called The Tribune. Built to house the personal artwork collection of the Grand Duke at the time, the 16th-century octagonal domed room is an impressive exhibit, both the grandeur of the room itself, as well as the paintings, sculptures, and other objects found inside.

To preserve the integrity of the mosaic marble floors, visitors aren't allowed to actually enter The Tribune. Instead, they must see the exhibit from one of the few roped-off doorways, which introduces the notion of how someone's vantage point can inform their experience.

During my visit to the gallery, if I'd only gazed through one of the doorways, my experience of the exhibit and what it contained would've been somewhat limited. I would've seen certain things clearly, but others would've been obscured, obstructed, or maybe not in my line of sight at all.

I share this because, for many of us, Christianity has been experienced – metaphorically speaking, of course – as somewhat of a grand art exhibit, a dramatic and multi-faceted painting of sorts. It's accompanied by a placard that contains both a brief narrative, which explains the elements depicted on the canvas, and a list of bullet points to ensure that we understand the artist's intentions behind the piece and interpret it accordingly.

Something about this exhibit draws us in and causes us to respond. And as life goes on and we develop and live out our faith, the painting and the placard remain inextricably intertwined.

Eyes to See: An Afternoon Primer for Reclaiming the Good News of the Gospel

For many people, this arrangement works fine no matter how much time passes by. Their faith continues to breathe life into them and provides a sense of liberation, hope, peace, grounding, and maybe even purpose. Others, however, can start to feel confined or conflicted, perhaps even stunted. And while some are completely content and don't see any reason to question any elements of the narrative or the bullet points on the placard, for others, there comes a time when things don't quite sit right anymore.

This book is primarily for The Others. It's for those who are still drawn to the painting itself, but have begun to feel as though its beauty is somehow in conflict with the narrative; the vastness of its essence confined by the bullet points.

Leading up to and since leaving the Christian denomination where I'd spent the previous 20 years, I started coming across countless "Others" – people who were either seriously questioning certain aspects of their Christian faith, or who had one foot out the door. We're talking about all kinds of people, from the average church member to people leading worship teams to pastors who just couldn't do it anymore because they were expected to preach a message that simply no longer made sense to them.

These were good-hearted people who loved elements of their faith, but who were desperately ready for something different. They were ready to be done with things like guilt, shame, judgment, sin management, and claims of exclusivity in terms of who's in versus who's out (and therefore who's destined for hell). They were ready to be done feeling like they always had to discard worldviews or experiences that didn't seem to fit their understanding of Christianity. They were ready to be done hearing – and singing – about wrath and wretches. And, perhaps most resoundingly, they were ready to be done with fear.

Deep down, they all knew that something wasn't adding up with this story that's called The Good News.

But even though people want to somehow evolve or responsibly rethink things that no longer sit well with them, often they can't because they've internalized many aspects of Christianity as Truth with a capital T. This can cause a sort of paralysis, often with fear as the underlying stronghold. Not only that, things are so tightly interwoven in the Christian faith that it can seem impossible to re-think one thing because of its interconnectedness to everything else.

Consider this. Imagine the aforementioned artwork and placard as a large exhibit in a gallery. And, similar to The Tribune, imagine that you can walk from one vantage point to another, where there's a different placard with a slightly different narrative and different bullet points for interpreting the painting. And from this view, the lighting causes various elements on the canvas to look different, some standing out with more vibrancy and others fading into near obscurity.

And what if the experience from this new vantage point resonated more deeply and assuaged the elements from the original that were starting to cause unrest?

If you're skeptical and think this sounds implausible, it may help to familiarize or reacquaint yourself with the notorious young woman/old woman drawing that people get into heated arguments over. "She's a beautiful young woman!" he insists, only to have her retort with "Have you lost your mind? She's an ugly old hag!" (If you're not familiar with it, just Google "young woman old woman perception" and check out the images.)

This drawing shows us in a simple but powerful way that there's often another valid perspective to what we deem to be "true." But, in order to see it, we need to let our guard down

and have an open mind. For our purposes, this relates to the overarching portrait of Christianity, as well as the various individual elements that we'll be discussing.

To be clear, I don't want to push against anyone's view of the old woman or somehow insist they're wrong for seeing her. People who are seeing an old hag are seeing an old hag. It is what it is, and pushing against something only creates more resistance, which often isn't beneficial to anyone. Instead, consider this an invitation to be shown how to shift some perspectives that can transform what you're already looking at from the old hag into the beautiful young woman.

When it comes to Christianity, there are copious resources to help with this kind of transition, but most people would never know it. And, unfortunately, you're not going to hear about them in most churches where Vantage Point A is so deeply ingrained that anything else is often seen as a threat and quickly snuffed out. Never mind that it can take a lot of time and effort because, in reality, we're not talking about simply stepping from one end of an art exhibit to another. And we all have other things we'd rather do with our time than study theology, church history, the origins of Christianity, and the like.

Let's face it, we live in a short-attention-span era where we want relevant information distilled and delivered as succinctly as possible.

Enter: *Eyes to See*.

This book won't require a huge time investment. You can finish it in an afternoon if you're so inclined. And because that was my goal, the pages ahead are packed with a lot of information and purposely absent of extraneous efforts to solidify various views, including attempts to validate them with strings of academic references. If the content piques your interest

and you want to learn more, there are countless resources available.

You might be wondering who I am and what authority I have to pen a book like this. I'm Dave. I've never gone to seminary. I don't have a degree in theology. And I don't read Greek or Hebrew.

I'm just an average guy who spent 20 years of my adult Christian life certain that the things I'd been taught about God and the Bible and Christianity were the ultimate truth. Then things began to shift, thanks to a subtle but persistent sense deep inside that something just wasn't right. Queue: Unexpected faith crisis.

Okay, so it wasn't actually a crisis – transformation is probably a better word – but it felt like one, thanks to how excruciating and all-consuming it was. A large part of it was academic, lasting for what felt like forever as I trudged through countless books, college texts, papers, lectures, and debates, all in a somewhat desperate attempt to find some security in something that was growing increasingly unstable. I certainly wouldn't want to repeat it, but I wouldn't trade it for anything.

My first book came out of that whole experience, which was completely unexpected, but also pretty great. That book was sort of a memoir-esque CliffsNotes version of everything that allowed my faith to undergo such a transformation. We can call this book the CliffsNotes of the CliffsNotes, along with being stripped of any memoir elements.

So, just to be clear, I don't wish to imply that I have any authority. With *Eyes to See*, I'm merely offering a rapid-fire delivery of information that remains largely unknown by the greater Christian community, even though much of it has been widely discussed and accepted in more academic spaces – including seminaries – for many decades, if not centuries. Each chapter

is intended to offer a different vantage point from which to view one of the main aspects of the Christian faith.

If you're anything like I was before my "dark night of the soul," you may feel defensive or fearful about some of the things you're about to read. To that, about all I can say is "I understand." Trust me, I really do.

This book won't answer all the questions it will raise, but that's not the goal. The goal is to give you a glimpse at perhaps a much better version of your faith and a much more vibrant understanding of the story we call The Good News, one that may breathe life into you in a way you haven't experienced in a long time.

So grab your favorite beverage, find your comfy spot, and let's begin.