

blind spots

What you
don't see can
hurt you.

TIM RIDDLE & FIL ANDERSON

“One of the greatest gifts God has given to humans is the capacity for self-knowledge. We can navel-gaze into our own being like no animal ever dreamed. The capacity for self-awareness is both a blessing and a curse. If we are open to our blind spots, it is a blessing. If we deceive ourselves regarding who we are, it is a curse. Tim and Fil are working from the blessing side. Go with them.”

Dan Boone, President, Trevecca Nazarene University

“It will take courage to read this book. It’s uncomfortable to consider weakness. I’d much rather live in denial. In *Blind Spots*, Tim and Fil offer groundbreaking insights and help in not only identifying what you cannot see—but also finding freedom to move toward the person you want to be.”

Tim Stevens, Vice President of Consulting, Vanderbloemen;
author of *Marked by Love: A Dare to Walk Away from Judgment and Hypocrisy*

“Reading Tim and Fil’s book feels like a conversation with a trusted friend. You can hear the tones of their caring voices in the stories they tell because they’re stories they’ve lived. You can sense their profound wisdom as they bring Scripture to life because they have been transformed by God’s Word. And somehow, while revealing the ugly realities of our blind spots, and telling us the truth that is hard to hear, their words make their readers feel known and loved. Read it and be changed.”

Drew Hill, Pastor; author of *Alongside: Loving Teenagers with the Gospel*

“Jesus says that when we can see things clearly, our whole life will be full of light. That’s precisely where Fil Anderson and Tim Riddle plunge into our smudged existence to help. With hard-won insight, they bring focus and clarity to critical matters that our hurry, self-deception, and pure thoughtlessness often turn to a muddled blur. In helping us attend to what we often miss, *Blind Spots* offers a gift as precious as sight.”

Jedd Medefind, President, Christian Alliance for Orphans

“Only the most brazen and foolish presume they are fully self-aware. Most mere mortals know there are countless ways we fail to see what we need to know about ourselves. But how do you know what you can’t see? Blind spots are a problem that leave us knowing we are significantly near or farsighted without the glasses to correct our vision. Tim Riddle and Fil Anderson have written a compelling and honest book that offers light to fill the spaces we can’t see. What we can’t see can kill us or our jobs, marriages, and friendships, but when we learn to see, it opens our eyes to wonder about how Jesus pursues us even in the midst of our refusal to see. *Blind Spots* is a brilliant gift to anyone who longs to let the truth set them free.”

Dan B. Allender, Christian therapist; author; speaker focusing on sexual abuse and trauma recovery; professor of counseling psychology; founding president of The Seattle School of Theology and Psychology

“*Blind Spots* is a short and wonderfully narrative take on our pervasive lack of self-clarity. Practical and personal stories provide a lens to open our eyes to things others see about us that we miss. I think of how Jesus told his disciples at the Last Supper, ‘I have many things to say to you that you cannot yet bear. But when the Spirit of Truth comes, he will lead you into all truth.’ I am so grateful that this book gives the opportunity to bear more truth and see ourselves anew. Reading *Blind Spots* was Jesus’s invitation to address blind spots that sabotage my relationships. It gave efficient ways to participate with God’s Spirit in responding to truth about myself.”

Adele Calhoun, Pastor of Spiritual Formation, Highrock Covenant Church; author; spiritual director; retreat leader; pilgrimage leader; certified Enneagram instructor

“The very thought that there is something unseen in me that hinders my intimacy with Jesus, or deters my true self from emerging, is what compels me to read *Blind Spots*. The insight, challenge, and practical help offered, combined with the Holy Spirit’s work within, revealed several of my personal ‘blind spots’ to keep exploring. Thank you, Fil and Tim.”

Ty Saltzgeber, Author of *My First 30 Quiet Times* and numerous other titles; husband; father; speaker; mentor

“Did you know there is a difference between looking and seeing? So many of us spend lots of time looking without ever really seeing. In *Blind Spots*, Tim and Fil take an honest and profoundly authentic look at some of the places that keep us blind, groping in the dark. Bringing light to dark places, Tim and Fil not only expose our blind spots but help us move toward truth, freedom, boldness, and strength. A must-read!”

John Wagner, Young Life SVP Global Cities; author of *Perfect: Sacred Stories from the Heart of a Dad*

“It’s often said that ‘seeing is believing.’ However, in *Blind Spots*, I learned just the opposite—that believing is seeing. That regarding the things we can’t see about ourselves, we only develop twenty-twenty vision when we’ve been lovingly seen by a chosen few and by the One whose gaze of affection and acceptance sets us free. After reading this treasure of a book written by Tim Riddle and Fil Anderson, I finally understand why St. Paul asked God to ‘open the eyes of our hearts.’”

Michael John Cusick, Author of *Surfing for God*; CEO at Restoring the Soul

“In these pages, you’ll find the authors diligently and honestly trying to uncover and address a crucial topic. In so doing, they successfully offer a helpful start to the lifelong and freeing practice of journeying with God to discover, reveal, and attend to reality. Many will find this book to be a great help. Your loved ones will be glad you read it.”

Nathan Foster, Director of Community Life, Renovaré; author of *The Making of an Ordinary Saint*

“*Blind Spots* is so much more than just a book. It is a mirror through which we can see our souls. With truth and grace, the authors hold up this mirror for us to take a deep look at what needs to be addressed in our own lives. I wish I had read this book decades ago. I’d be a better man, and now I have that invitation to become a better version of myself and you do too! Sometimes the truth can be too hard to accept. But in this book, we find that the truth sets us free. By first knowing our blind spots, then having them brought to the light, we can see our way more clearly to walk with confidence into the future to experience all God has for us.”

Stephen W. Smith, President and Spiritual Director of Potter’s Inn; author of *The Lazarus Life* and *Soul Custody*

“In my forty years of being a pastor, it would have been so instructive and helpful to have this book. As it has been said, ‘Sin blinds, it binds, and it grinds.’ We all need a different set of eyes to see what we are missing. This book helps leaders to pay attention to the necessary internal work leaders need to do to serve and love their communities faithfully. Tim and Fil illustrate a critical topic for healthy, wholehearted leadership and share their stories with insight and wisdom.”

Clyde L. Godwin, Director for The Barnabas Center Triad

BLIND SPOTS

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Tim Riddle & Fil Anderson



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Dedication

(Tim)

To my wife, Stacy.

You've been my rock for thirty-three years.

You have loved me well and been incredibly supportive throughout our journey together. Thanks for being my first eyes and proofreader with every chapter I completed. Your encouragement always motivated me to keep writing.

I love you dearly!

To my children; Ragan, Carly, Fletcher, and Ellie.

What a blessing! Thanks for being excited for me when I first shared the idea and thanks for your encouragement and confidence that I could do this, with God's help of course!

I love you more than you know!

To Harold and Ella Riddle, my mom and dad.

You left this earth way too soon but oh how you influenced me well for thirty-one years. You provided the foundation for who I am today, and you instilled the confidence in me never to stop pursuing my dreams as long as God was leading the way!

(Fil)

To Lucie, my soul mate and best friend,
who knows me intimately, loves me regardless,
and is willing to be completely honest with me
about my blind spots.

Foreword

My father sold used cars. Consequently, we rode in all kinds of automotive makes and models during my childhood. I vividly recall my father's emphasis upon checking his blind spot. Since the cars were always shifting, so were the blind spots. A sporty fastback might obscure his vision much more than a big, wide station wagon. Sometimes a few adjustments in a rear-view mirror were sufficient. At other times, he needed our assistance, another set of eyes in the backseat to know it was safe to proceed.

Tim Riddle and Fil Anderson offer both the mirrors and the eyes we need to identify our blind spots. What we don't see can definitely hurt us—professionally, interpersonally, and in our spirit. The prophet Jeremiah admonished those “who have eyes and see not, and who have ears and hear not” (Jeremiah 5:21 NKJV). Ezekiel described a rebellious house “which has eyes to see but does not see” (Ezekiel 12:2 NKJV). Jesus hearkened back to the words of Isaiah, decrying a people who have grown dull; “their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed” (Matthew 13:15 NKJV). This book considers the cost of such blind spots.

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Clarity of vision is a prerequisite for long-term discipleship. How do we become those who Jesus describes as “blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear” (Matthew 13:16 NKJV)? I am grateful to Tim and Fil for leaning into biblical stories of healing, where scales fall from a blind man’s eyes. Fil and Tim communicate how much we need each other to root out our blind spots, to provide a corrective mirror. They also confess their own shortcomings, acknowledging their blind spots, calling us all to self-examination.

This book snapped me back to painful moments of revelation over thirty years ago. I was among a small group of students at Davidson College who volunteered to be part of an exercise during Reverend Charles King’s seminar on racial reconciliation. I had plenty of African-American friends, so I felt confident I could display my understanding on racial justice issues. During the exercise, I found my hackles rising. He seemed to be treating some people in the circle differently than others, listening thoughtfully to some group members and brusquely cutting others short. My frustration rose. I pointed out the inequity in how he was treating some of us. He appeared indifferent, even blaming me for raising objections and causing problems. I completely lost whatever cool I’d brought into the circle.

Only then did Dr. King reveal his ruse. He’d set up social rules that worked against Caucasians. In his circle, the social construct favored black people over white people. And in just fifteen minutes, I was ready to rebel, primed for a battle, raging against injustice. How might a lifetime of inequality feel? How much rage would boil within students who had been judged, demeaned, shut down because of the color of the skin rather than the content of their character? Never before had I really stepped

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into African-American shoes. Suddenly, I understood a little better. My blind spot had been revealed, in public. I was far weaker than I imagined. More prone to anger than I'd guessed. And blind to the cost of racism, how it robs people of dignity and self-worth. Some blind spots are personal. Others are cultural. All include hidden costs. What else lurks beneath the surface, smoothed over when things go well but poised towards self-destruction or pointing fingers when circumstances change?

Tim and Fil invite us into a long-term project, discipleship rooted in deep heart work. Given how enmity trumps empathy in our public discourse, now is the time to examine our blind spots. Can we pause to identify the log in our own eye before pointing out the speck in our brothers and sisters? How great that Tim and Fil provide such honest correction for each other. They invite us into their wise and trustworthy process. How grateful I am for their encouragement to consider our own blindness. How else will we mature in faith and character? It is far too easy to sleep walk through life, seeing but not recognizing, listening but not truly hearing. A revelatory wake-up can arrive via Scripture, a sermon, a look, a hug, a movie, a song, or a book like this. *Blind Spots* is an opportunity for God to love us boldly, for Jesus to confront us gently, for the Spirit to sharpen our sight.

Enjoy the refining journey!

Craig Detweiler
President, The Seattle School
of Theology and Psychology
November 2018

Acknowledgments

(Tim)

Thanks to my team at SMC; Suzanne, Connie, Tyler, Jessica, Karen, and Rena (TT). I still remember the day I shared with all of you that Fil and I were writing a book together. The smiles on your faces and your excitement meant more to me than you know.

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Thanks to my writing partner Fil Anderson. You have been my spiritual mentor for many years now. I still remember the day I walked into your office and said: “Tell me about writing.” Then you prayed that prayer and the rest is history! You have encouraged me more than you know. I could not have done it without you. Thanks for mentoring me throughout this process. Also, thanks for being my blind spot accountability partner and for showing me what it truly looks like to love Jesus!

(Fil)

I don’t know who said it first, but I’m sure it’s true: *If you ever see a turtle on a fence post, you can know it had some help getting there.* In other words, we don’t accomplish anything in life alone. That’s certainly been my experience co-authoring this book.

This book *Blind Spots* was Tim Riddle’s original idea and an excellent one, at that. Thank you, Tim, for inviting me to join you in this rigorous, life-giving endeavor. I cherish your friendship and trust.

Thank you, New Growth Press, for believing in our message enough to invest your valuable resources into the publication of this book. Thank you especially for providing us with the outstanding assistance provided by Barbara Juliani, Ruth Castle, and Sue Lutz.

Thank you to Craig Detweiler for his eloquent foreword and other people, for whom my admiration is immense, who were willing to read our manuscript and offer their generous words of endorsement.

Whatever else remains a blind spot, one thing I see clearly: my contributions to this book were not mine alone. The insights and inspiration of many writers, teachers, and friends are so integral that, except for a few personal experiences I’ve cited, countless people have

Acknowledgments

contributed to its writing. That notwithstanding, I'd like to thank the following people especially.

I am profoundly grateful for the Board of Directors of my ministry platform, Journey Resources, for their relentless devotion and confidence in me. Also, the many individuals who have faithfully and generously partnered with me as I do everything I can to offer the message of God's unconditional and limitless love for all people everywhere.

Thank you to the extraordinary pastoral team (Bob, Ben, Angela, Jeromy, Nick, and Jarm), staff, leadership, and members of St. Mark's Church, Burlington, NC, for encouraging me by your example, strengthening me by your prayers, and granting me the privilege of serving as your spiritual formation pastor.

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Thank you, Notorious Sinners (you know who you are), for rivaling all others in the ways you have exposed your blind spots and helped me to see more of my own. The same goes to you, Mike Fowler and Rod Mortenson.

Thank you, Reality Ministries, North Street Community, and Corner House family for the ways you reflect God's compassionate heart for humanity by creating spaces with no margins where everyone is accepted, valued, and celebrated. You've uniquely assisted me in seeing priceless things that I've been blind to for most of my life.

Thank you, Mom, Linda, Steve, and Susan, for loving me unconditionally, through every stage of my life, despite my many blind spots.

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God said, “A man’s greatest treasure is his wife, she is a gift from the LORD” (Proverbs 18:22 CEV). Thank you, Lucie, for being my greatest treasure. Thank you, Lord, for the gift.

The three greatest treasures my life with Lucie has produced are our children. They are my greatest heroes. Our daughter has one of the most courageous yet most tender hearts I’ve ever known. I admire her compassion. I love you, Meredith, and I love Gabe, who wisely sees you as his greatest treasure. Corinne, you are precious, and I love you too. Our son Will is bright and devoted to living his life fully with integrity. I admire his determination. I love you, Will, and I love Katie, who is your greatest treasure. Collins, you are precious, and I love you too. Our son Lee relentlessly desires to generously and selflessly give his life away. I admire his sense of justice and compassionate love for others, especially those on the fringes. I love you, Lee.

INTRODUCTION

A few thoughts before you begin reading

Recently I posted a question on one of my social media accounts:

“Are blind spots always blind . . . or do we try to hide them for our convenience at times?”

Little did I know it would spark a debate about the actual definition of blind spots. One friend posted in response:

“Blind spots by definition are blind. If you can see them, you can call them ‘denial’ spots but not blind spots.”

Later he acknowledged he was merely busting my chops a little and he understood my point.

Shortly after our first edits of this book, our publisher suggested that we clearly explain our definition of blind spots because, as you will see as you read, our understanding is more broad than narrow.

Some wanted us to classify all blind spots as sins, and many are. But I (Tim) can provide examples of blind spots in my life that weren’t the result of a sinful character flaw (although many others were). For that reason, to

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be honest, we didn't want this book to focus only on how sinful we all are.

Here's an example. I love to speak and teach, but that gift was not revealed until about fifteen years ago. I had no idea it was something God wanted me to pursue. But through my spiritual journey and the encouragement of others, I realized it was something he was calling me to do. I don't think that blind spot was the result of sin! I think it was something that God was waiting to reveal at the right time in my life. However, if you had told me twenty years ago that I would be giving hundreds of talks to multiple audiences, I would have denied the possibility. At the time it was simply a blind spot.

So, let's get back to the idea of sin. I agree that a lot of our blind spots are rooted in our depravity and sinfulness. But are they really blind, or have we pushed them to the corners of our soul as an attempt to hide them? And who are we hiding them from: ourselves or others?

This leads me back to my friend's response to my social media post. Should we call them "denial" spots instead of blind spots? My friend suggested that most blind spots hang out in our shadows. They aren't completely invisible, but are still hard to see at times.

By now, you are probably thinking, "Is he going to define it or not?"

Fil and I had a long conversation about the definition one afternoon after a meeting with our editor. It has caused both of us to dig a little to affirm and defend the definition of "blind spots" in our book.

We finally decided that a blind spot (to us) is anything that stands in the way of being all that God has intended for our lives. Yes, many of those blind spots are sins, but others are rooted in ignorance, immaturity, circumstances, and sometimes the sins of others against us.

A few thoughts before you begin reading

Sometimes, as with my speaking gifts, they are things we don't see because God has not yet revealed them to us. But blind spots of many kinds may fuel our fears of stepping out in faith to use the talents and gifts God has given us.

I found this definition of sin in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*: “Actions by which humans rebel against God and miss His purpose for their life.”

In the end, you will have to come to your own conclusion. Here's one thing Fil and I are confident about: Blind spots are real and can cause a lifetime of pain, anguish, and second guesses. Blind spots can keep you from being all that God has wired you up to be. What you don't see can genuinely hurt you, but thankfully we have a Savior who can help us identify our blind spots, forgive our sins, and give us the power and desire to see our blind spots removed. We hope that reading this book will reveal that truth more than anything else!

CHAPTER 1

How the Journey Began

Most Christians, I am afraid, are self-conscious but not self-aware. — Peter Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Church*

(Tim)

As I sat there, I was stunned. I couldn't believe what I was hearing. How could something manifest itself so deep inside of me that it came out in words that still, to this day, I can't remember saying? Could I actually have a blind spot? Certainly not me, the most self-aware person I know—or so at least I thought! I had spent most of my adult life identifying blind spots in others and was completely blind to my own.

Entrepreneurial Blind Spots

I was thirty-one years old when I decided to start my own business. I was young, energetic, and hard-working. I also loved people. The prospect of assembling a team to accomplish a meaningful goal was exciting to consider.

The new adventure began with just one employee: me. I was the CEO and CFO, while also managing sales, the

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warehouse, customer service, and shipping. In my spare time, I was the custodian and deliveryman. I quickly learned that wearing multiple hats was required in a start-up company. I also learned that long hours were a “hidden benefit” of ownership. But I loved every minute!

Soon I was dreaming about hiring additional team members. The company was rapidly growing, and financially we were ahead of schedule. After five years, we had placed ninety highly skilled individuals onto multiple teams. My dream had finally come true. Or had it?

We began with a great idea, at an ideal time, with sufficient startup capital. We also were determined that our company would be an exceptional place to work. To keep our employees happy and productive, we offered frequent and open communication, regular recognition of achievements, and constructive feedback. Having these bases covered, I naively assumed that management would be easy.

Then along came John. He was a true professional who had gained excellent experience working with a larger company. Nonetheless, I quickly learned that John was disorganized, and his mess led to stress that spread to his team. I initially thought, “No problem! Simply provide John with constructive feedback and change will follow.” After all, John was a great guy. I liked him. However, no matter how hard I tried to help him see his deficiencies and make constructive adjustments, John never changed. He remained oblivious to the obvious.

Next there was Sally. She was undoubtedly the sweetest, hardest working, most dedicated person I had ever encountered. When we hired Sally, I thought she might be the best employee yet. But soon I discovered that Sally was a pathological liar. While she consistently presented her brightest and best side to me, her team often experienced

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the darkest and worst side of her personality. The “sweet little Sally” that I encountered could chew you up and spit you out for no apparent reason. Whenever I gave Sally feedback, she looked at me as if I was speaking a different language. Despite my most determined efforts, I could not help Sally see the deficiencies that were apparent to me and everyone else. Once again, I failed.

Next came Michael, a great guy that everyone loved. His decision to leave an already successful career to join our company surprised me. Michael’s work was always precise. His teammates loved him, but there was one issue. Michael was a perfectionist and struggled with deadlines. Thus, while Michael was striving for excellence, our company’s momentum was slowing and the market was passing us by. No matter what I did to assist him in seeing the problem, it remained hidden to him.

After fourteen years as the leader of the company, I felt like a failure. My dream had become a nightmare. Why couldn’t I help the people I loved? Why couldn’t they see what I saw? It all seemed so obvious and easy to fix. Why did they have to become casualties on my watch?

The Journey to Self-Aware

Then my life changed. At the age of forty-four, following a season of “holy discontent,” I began feeling tugged and nudged in the direction of vocational ministry. After a year of prayer for clarity, I left the marketplace and became the executive pastor of a church I had attended for several years.

Managing our staff was one of the primary responsibilities of my new role. Starting out, I remember thinking, “Now I will get a chance to implement all of the great employee growth strategies I developed in the marketplace. Surely if you work in a church, you will be able to

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recognize your flaws and want to experience transformational change.” But I soon realized that marketplace and ministry challenges were very similar when people are involved.

Soon after my new career began, I read Daniel Goleman’s international bestseller, *Emotional Intelligence*. Since I was passionate about helping people grow, I was fascinated to learn how a lack of self-awareness prevents growth. Because of my previous failures in assisting employees to recognize their shortcomings and make necessary changes, I was determined to find answers. Goleman’s strong emphasis on the necessity of individuals to understand their flaws first, before they can experience change, provided me with a sense of relief and vindication. I even remember thinking, “Perhaps I’m not such a failure after all!”

Thus, I began to focus on my journey into self-awareness. I took all the personality tests I could find. I wanted to know my strengths and weaknesses. I became more willing to uncover the hidden parts of my personality and more open to ways that I could change. Eventually, I began living with the illusion that all my blind spots had been discovered. Sure, I had my flaws, but I was acutely aware of them and certainly open to change. At least, that’s what I believed was true.

The Meeting

Then it happened. I was meeting with one of my teams. I had served with this team for several years. I genuinely trusted and loved each member of the group. While sharing with them some strongly held convictions, I began to sense that the meeting wasn’t going well. I was confused by the tension in the room. My ideas were well-conceived and my communication was clear, but

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I detected an air of resistance and dis-ease among the group. “What’s their problem?” I wondered. My judgment was confirmed when the meeting ended and everyone hastily departed. “How could they not see and agree with my ideas?”

Over the years, I had diligently worked to earn their trust and respect. There had been conflicts and disagreements, but we always confronted them head-on. I went home feeling confused, discouraged, and angry.

Over the next week, I had very little engagement with the group. I began to feel shunned and, as each day passed, I became more frustrated. I had given so much to this team!

Finally, one team member informed me that the group wanted to meet regarding their concerns about our interactions in the previous meeting. I began replaying the events in my head. “How could they be concerned? If anyone is concerned, it should be me!”

A few days before the meeting, the Spirit of God began unsettling me. I started fasting the day before the meeting, wanting to make sure my heart was beating in sync with God’s.

Once we gathered, our first order of business was to establish our intentions and how to pursue them. Each person would state their concerns, with a shared hope for reconciliation and restoration. The first person said that I had not been myself during the past six months and that several of my remarks and reactions during our last meeting validated his uneasiness. I thanked him for voicing his concerns and apologized for any actions of mine that disturbed or offended him.

The second person recalled a brash and insensitive comment I made at the end of our previous meeting. Instantly, I remember thinking, “She has that wrong.

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There is no way I spoke those words! I would never say such a thing!” Wanting to avoid appearing defensive, I remained quiet until she concluded her remarks. I thanked her for sharing her observations, then added, “I believe you misunderstood. I never said what you think you heard.” Instantaneously, the entire group responded in unison, “YES YOU DID!”

I was stunned, utterly astonished! How could I possibly not remember speaking words that, clearly, they had heard me say? These beloved and trusted friends offered ample proof that I had a blind spot of epic proportions.

To this day, I can’t recall saying the words they heard. Had the Evil One hidden this toxic poison so effectively that I truly could not see it? Had it taken root and grown in some dark, hidden corner of my being in such a way that it was manifested in my words and actions without me knowing? Certainly not me—the most self-aware and open person I knew!

We ended our meeting in a far different place than where it began. No one was in a hurry to leave. Instead, we remained together, laughing, praying, and loving each other. I am incredibly grateful to have been surrounded by people who loved me enough to expose a dangerous blind spot in my life. St. Augustine said, “A friend is someone who knows everything about you and still accepts you.” Isn’t this the dream we all share? Don’t we long to have people we trust, who will call attention to our blind spots, while continuing to accept and love us?

Freedom

I woke up the following morning raring to go. I felt more energized and restored than I’d been in a long time. The change was so noticeable that I wondered about the cause. I sat on the edge of the bed and began to replay

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the events of the previous day. Then I realized that I was experiencing the effects of freedom. For the first time in months, a huge burden had been lifted, like a cancerous tumor successfully removed from my body. So many times, we don't recognize the impact of our blind spots until they are exposed.

I quickly sent a note to the group expressing my gratitude. A newfound longing for others to see their blind spots and experience the same freedom began to stir in me. I wanted others to feel the same release. After all, blind spots are hard to see so they require certain mirrors to look deep inside our soul. God's Word, the work of the Holy Spirit, and doing life in community are three great places to start. God's heart breaks when we choose to allow our blind spots to separate us from him.

A few months later, I walked into my friend Fil Anderson's office to share my experience and seek his counsel. Fil is one of the best teachers of spiritual growth I know. For several years he has been my spiritual mentor, challenging me to come closer and to look deeper. A few years ago, I was able to convince Fil to join our staff. He helped us learn to "be" with Jesus while "doing" for Jesus, especially since our "doing" can hide our blind spots if we aren't careful.

Soon after, our conversations turned to a desire to capture our thoughts and experiences in this book. In fact, one reason we chose to write it was to hold each other accountable for our blind spots!

(Fil)

Living (and Nearly Dying) in a World of Blind Spots

As far back as I can remember, I was hooked on approval. I was driven by the desire to establish my worth

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and make my mark as a spiritual leader. So, when I was offered an opportunity to become a part-time youth pastor while still in college, I took the plunge. I craved the recognition it provided and yet found myself utterly unprepared for the weight of expectations that came with the title. Immediately, my life became a whirlwind of activity that garnered praise and admiration—and eventually resulted in unintended but horrific consequences.

After a few years of huffing and puffing to gain the favor of God and others, what I feared most finally occurred. The threat of being exposed as an impostor—combined with the fatigue I'd been hiding—ushered me into a state of utter exhaustion and depression. No longer able to hold up the mask, I experienced a physical and emotional breakdown and admitted myself into the psychiatric unit of a local hospital.

For two weeks, I lived behind locked doors with other distraught individuals. My experience might sound like a nightmare to you, but to me, it was the safest, most loving place I'd ever been. There, I was free from the need to care for or impress anyone. Instead, I was surrounded by people who wanted to care for *me*, urging me to rest and assuring me that feeling broken was neither wrong nor a sign of weakness. They affirmed my value at a point when I was incapable of doing anything to prove my worth.

When I left the hospital, I stepped right back into the illusion that the approval my heart desperately yearned for would be discovered in the midst of busyness. How others appraised my work again became the most significant indicator of my worth. My life became a bizarre bundle of paradoxes and blind spots. Despite my contempt for it, I craved the constant activity. Busyness had a narcotic effect, soothing the unbearable pain of alienation, loneliness, anxiety, and fear that plagued me.

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When I was busy, I could avoid feeling. While I carefully hid them from view (my own and others'), my repressed feelings were nonetheless releasing a deadly toxin that was attacking the core of my being without my knowing.

A Life-Altering Encounter

Many years later, in the chill of winter, a fifteen-minute conversation changed the trajectory of my life. I was attending a conference and had signed up to meet with the main speaker for something announced as “spiritual direction.” Having no concept of what that was, I didn’t expect anything significant to happen. Besides, all I wanted was a superficial conversation and a personally signed copy of his new book so that I could brag that he and I were friends.

He began our brief visit by asking about a part of me that I had not considered for quite some time. “Tell me about the condition of your soul,” he asked. There was silence.

I was clueless. How could I tell this stranger about a part of me with which I was so unfamiliar? But rather than be found without an answer, I babbled about the most disturbing and familiar aspect of my life: the frenzied, out-of-control pace I couldn’t seem to escape. After listening for a while, he made the statement that was the beginning of a change in my life: “Fil, you seem dreadfully close to losing touch with the Jesus you so desperately want others to know.”

Never had words pierced my heart as these did. Later, when I was alone, I wondered, “Was this Jesus speaking into my life?” For quite some time I’d had a haunting sensation that certain things in my life were out of control. But there had been no time to analyze the problem, its cause, or what might happen if I didn’t rein in the chaos.

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As I sped down life's highway going in four directions at once, always striving and always busy, I was unaware of some dangerous and potentially deadly blind spots. But after speaking with this holy man and sensing Jesus's nearness, I set out on a spiritual journey toward the recognition of some of the dangerous blind spots and a more authentic life.

Spiritual Blind Spots

I gradually began to recognize the most dangerous blind spot of all: a flawed, destructive concept of God. With unrivaled grace and finesse, Jesus started to lavish on me an ever-increasing awareness of the boundlessness of his love, and my heart was taken captive. He refused to allow me to destroy my life, which I had known was happening.

As far back as I could remember, the primary focus of my attention had been on the needs of others. I had a reputation for acting unselfishly and being helpful, kind, compassionate, supportive, and affirming. These characteristics of my personality came quite naturally. I seemed to have a sixth sense for what others needed and found deep satisfaction in meeting those needs.

For instance, when I was growing up, a family rule was that everyone took their plate to the kitchen sink after a meal. Because I enjoyed such tasks, I often gathered all the dishes and washed them without being asked. I also enjoyed the recognition it garnered from my parents and siblings.

Thinking that my selfless service was what made me lovable and valued to others and to God, I gave without boundaries and dismissed my own needs as irrelevant. I took Jesus's words that "it is better to give than to receive" to a new level. This way of expressing my

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God-given gift of love and nurture became for me a blind spot. Deep down, I experienced sadness because I came to believe that I was unlovable as I was. I believed I would be rejected or disliked by God and others if I failed to meet their needs.

So I sought validation by being indispensable. I wanted to be known as the ultimate selfless giver, even to the point of being a rescuer and a martyr. I foolishly imagined that even God must be impressed with how I served sacrificially, without limits. Though service was meaningful and a source of joy, I was prone to over-give. Worse still, if my help was not acknowledged, I felt hurt and slighted. Since I relied on recognition and approval for my unselfish giving, my primary fear was being useless and unable to help.

My besetting sin was pride, but I could not see it. This blind spot manifested itself in two ways. First, I believed that I knew how best to meet another's needs, even better than the one who seemed to need my help. I was proud of my insightfulness, and I wore it as a badge of honor that I awarded myself.

My sinful pride also manifested itself in my denial of my own needs and desires. It felt selfish and wrong to care for myself since this went against my preferred identity as the one who helps God and others. I had a difficult time asking for help and I chronically diverted attention away from my neediness. When people did help, I felt guilty and obligated to repay them rather than merely receiving their help and expressing gratitude.

We Don't See What We Can't See

We are, by definition, unaware of our blind spots. What a revelation it was to realize that I don't always know what I'm doing when I'm doing it! I can't see

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the damaging effect of my obsessions and compulsions on others or on myself. But I'm not alone. We all have moments when we don't know why we're choosing to live as we do, or we just don't see what we're doing. This is what Jesus was getting at when he asked, "... why worry about a speck in your friend's eye when you have a log in your own?" (Matthew 7:3). Our blind spots are the logs in our eyes that we never see. God graciously uses his Word, his people, and his Spirit to show us things about ourselves that we can't or don't want to see.

Our blind spots are like rocks on a dark path. We stumble over them because we can't see them. I, for instance, stumble over my arrogant invasiveness and presumptuous desire to control as I compulsively try to help people.

The problem with our blind spots is not just that they lead us into a life of frustration, disappointment, and feeling overwhelmed with life, others, and ourselves. They are also potent hindrances to our spiritual growth. To the extent that we are blind to what is motivating us, we aren't free to grow. Discovering our blind spots helps us embrace the truth that God has a plan for our lives that's better than ours.

The Puzzle of Ourselves

Discovering our blind spots helps us to find the answer to the question we all must answer: *Who in the world am I?* This is not a narcissistic question (although it can be). It's an essential question.

John Calvin wrote, "Nearly all wisdom we possess . . . consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves. . . . The knowledge of ourselves not only arouses us to seek God, but also, as it were, leads us by the hand to find him."¹

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Centuries later, David Benner wrote: “Lack of awareness is the ground of our dis-ease and brokenness. . . . Choosing awareness opens us up to finding God in the midst of our present realities. . . . Awareness is the key to so much. This is why it is, in my opinion, the single most important spiritual practice.”²

These are powerful words from a respected teacher of Christian theology from the sixteenth century and a modern-day teacher of psychology and spirituality. Their wisdom exposes the impact that blind spots can have on our souls and our walk with God.

Our blind spots prevent us from experiencing the unrivaled love of God. If I am hiding behind a blind spot, I am unconsciously keeping God, others, and myself from the unparalleled love God offers. But discovering my blind spots has led me to a level of self-awareness that has drawn me into a richer and fuller awareness of God’s unconditional love.

The Truest Truth

Years ago, I had a month-long speaking assignment at a Christian camp in New York. My wife and children were coming with me, but we knew my days would be demanding once we arrived. So we took an entire week to make the trip, allowing for quality time together as a family. I’m glad we did because, upon our arrival, I hit the ground running. Days later, I was sitting in a meeting when, out of the corner of my eye, I saw someone pacing back and forth at the end of a long hallway. At first, I gave it no thought. But as the pacing continued, I turned and discovered that it was our three-year-old son, Will. When he passed me, he slowed down and looked in my direction. Wondering what he might be thinking, I waited for the next time he passed and motioned for

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him to come to me. I pray I never forget the look of sheer joy, relief, and delight on his face. First walking and then running to where I sat waiting, he shouted, “Him wants me! Yes! My daddy wants me!”

What about you? Are your days spent frantically pacing back and forth—wondering, fearing, and dreading how God feels about you? Is God’s love for you something you can’t see? If so, I have some excellent news. Jesus wants to lead you to the real you, the person you truly are, the person he made you to be. Your view of God, others, and yourself can change, if you’ll see yourself as Jesus does—as one who is deeply loved, completely forgiven, and forever free.

Be Encouraged

This is a fantastic fact: People can change. It will not happen if we ignore or deny the dangerous presence of the blind spots in our lives. But with enough raw honesty, willingness to change, and openness to seeing what God and others see in us, change can happen.

Get Engaged

Before moving on, make a list of people you know who have made significant, positive changes in the way they live, looking more like Jesus now than they used to.