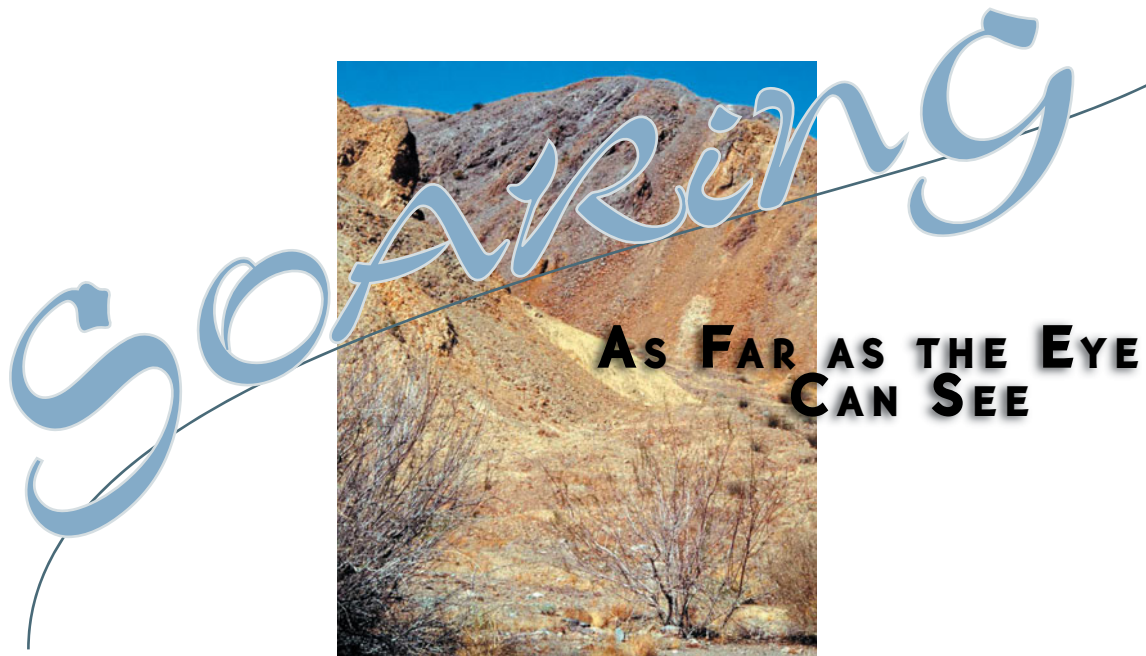


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*The bird at last
frees itself from the possessing
muck, flaps its wings to lift up and above the
muddy field. Once returned to her best environment, she
inhales the breath of joyous freedom, gliding easily over the land
that just moments before had held her tight in its embrace.
Trapped on the ground, her world had consisted of the immediate
predicament, but now free, her world reaches toward the far distant horizon. Now
her sharp eyes gaze beyond the trees, over the rolling hills, across the valleys. Now she sees
the lay of the land, the perils—once hidden from her sight—that lie just beyond. Now she spies the
scampering prey that will become her meal, and she swoops down, silent, and with accurate aim.*



There are many mountains and tall hills in the deserts of the Southwest, and I've climbed a few. On solitary treks I've clambered up the sides of many a rough and tumbled slope, grasping for purchase upon sun-baked stone or sliding sand. Whatever the locale or terrain, every slope always came with a standard set of decisions to be made—and the one most pressing would always be: *How high should I go?*

Because I am something less than a superior example of the male physical potential, this decision would present itself with alarming regularity. Every fifty feet or so would come the need to sit awhile and reconsider my options.

Resting atop a convenient rock after shucking my load of gear, sipping something wet and cool, I would contemplate

the remarkable beauty of the panoramic view that lay before me. A wide 180 degree view would spread out before me, far more than I had seen from the ground—or even from my previous resting stop. And I would always consider the option to stop where I was and enjoy the wide view, saving myself from the effort needed to climb higher.

But usually I would press on toward the higher reward. For you see, on the side of the mountain the view is 180 degrees, but from the top, just a little higher, the view is twice as wide. From the comfortable side of the mountain one can see far into the distance, and scan wide left to right. But on the mountain top one can pivot in any direction, in a 360-degree circle, taking in the complete view, all around and as far as the eye can see.

An Historic Perspective

The closer we are to God, the more we share His vision. There is no one higher than the Lord, and from His vantage point the view is limitless.

A Prayer of Moses, the man of God.
Lord, You have been our dwelling place
in all generations.
Before the mountains were born
Or You gave birth to the earth and the
world,
Even from everlasting to everlasting,
You are God.
You turn man back into dust
And say, "Return, O children of men."
For a thousand years in Your sight
Are like yesterday when it passes by,
Or as a watch in the night.
(Psalm 90:1-4)

Man's perspective is limited, his frame of reference brief. But God sees around the bends in life, and while it is true that we will never know precisely what lies around the corner, the closer we soar to God the less we will concern ourselves with what is there.

God's perspective is at once historic, contemporary, and prescient. He sees yesterday as well as today, and tomorrow as clearly as the day before.

**"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."
(Revelation 1:8)**

The historian's perspective on current events is superior to that of the person who lives only in today. This perspective certainly does not guarantee comfort, but it does guarantee *context*, and a superior foresight regarding the consequences of actions.

- The one who lives only in today may have considered it expedient to appease such contemporary rulers as Saddam Hussein, but the historian knows what resulted when Great Britain's Neville Chamberlain—along with most of the rest of the world—appeased Adolf Hitler in 1938: the Second World War.
- The one who lives only in today may see no harm in electing corrupt and amoral leaders—men or women without moral sense or principles, incapable of distinguishing between right and wrong. So long they do their civic job, where's the harm? The historian knows, however, the ignominious end such societies quickly reach that follow that path of ill-formed logic.
- The one who lives only in today may be troubled over both natural and contrived tragedies that cost many lives, sensing trends that will continue unabated. But the historian, while experiencing just as much sorrow over the loss, knows that such tragedies have occurred throughout time; they are the natural ebb and flow of this earth and its people.

The more we keep God at arm's length, the smaller we feel in comparison to Him.

Distant from Him, we feel inferior, manipulated, helpless; it becomes easier to think of Him in mechanical terms, like some great and mysterious mechanized beast—uncaring and unknowable. Though supposedly aligned with Him, when our spirits remain detached it becomes easier to think of Him in almost hostile terms.

When my dad died I was angry at God, and as much as cursed Him for being so stupid and unfeeling as to take the wrong man. How dare He be so unfair! How dare He be so wrong! But that was a time when I had set myself far distant from God; that was a time when I was up to my neck in the muck of this earth and its ways. In my condition—in my distance from God—it would have been impossible for me to share His perspective. Had I been closer—had my spirit been in closer communion with His—I would have felt just as much the pain and loss of my dad, but I would have been comforted in the moment by the clarity and scope of God's perspective.

Standing at the bottom of God's mountain we can feel only small and insignificant. Gazing upward from our earthbound perspective, His lofty heights appear to lie beyond our grasp. They seem unattainable. If we but begin climbing, however, one stone at a time, we immediately leave the clutching grip of the soil. Though still far away from the peak, we immediately begin to see it draw nearer—and the earth become smaller.

The higher we climb, the more accurate our view, for we are then able to take in a broader sweep. From our higher vantage point, we can see the sturdy rock within reach of the quicksand; we can see the water hole that lies just a few feet beyond the dry desert; and we can see the cool oasis that lies just beyond the next sun-parched dune.

Soaring Higher

Because he was unwilling to soar into the heights, my friend who was so critical of our exuberant worship—who was so adamantly against drawing closer to God—had a very small view of God's Kingdom here on earth. Because for him "worship" consisted of chatting over punch and sheet cake, he also

had a very small view of his God.

The higher we soar toward God, the more we will have His context and perspective.

- When trials come, we will be willing to accept them as simply part of His plan for our life—something for our good.

Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

(James 1:2-4)

- When we are confused and persecuted, we will understand that such painful times occur for His glory.

...we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.

(2 Corinthians 4:8-10)

- When we are feeling insecure, we will place even greater trust in the Lord who cares about our lives.

Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you," so that we confidently say, "The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What will man do to me?"

(Hebrews 13:5-6)

By soaring closer to God's higher plane, we have nothing to lose, but oh, so much more to gain.

