



# The Tri-Cities Edifier

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## Past, Present, and Future

Josh McCord

We all share something in common: each one of us has a past, a present, and a future. The Bible helps us deal with all three.

### The Past

Some look at the past and see only failures and regrets. While we remember the past, living in yesterday's mistakes or success isn't the best approach to life. Paul provides needed guidance: "...one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 3:13-14). When the past presses upon you, remember this: God's forgiveness is real. Let the mistakes go. Past success is good, but we can't rest on the laurels of the past either.

### The Future

Many people make the mistake of assuming they know what lies ahead, or that they control what tomorrow will bring. Scripture tells us plainly, "whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow..." (James 4:14). God has revealed some details about eternity, but He has not revealed the details of tomorrow. How do we deal with the unknown future? While we do not know what the future holds, we know the One who holds the future. Trust Him!

### The Present

Because we cannot change yesterday and cannot control tomorrow, we can't afford to waste today. Hebrews 3 uses the word "today" repeatedly to remind us of the urgency of listening and obeying God now (Hebrews 3:7, 15). One verse especially stands out: "Exhort one another daily, while it is called 'Today,' any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." (Hebrews 3:13). This day is a gift. It is our opportunity to do what needs to be done: so, whether that means to serve, repent, encourage, worship, or grow, do it!

Don't live chained to the past. Don't be paralyzed by the future. Make the most of today and walk with God in every step.

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## I Perceive

Keith Hamilton

"Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, 'Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.'" (Acts 10:34-35)

Perception is a funny thing. In the workplace, I had arguments with other people in the field of Human Resources and Human Resources Development regarding the subject of perception. For a while, the common thing floating around the corporate HR community was the statement, "One's perception is their reality." That statement irritated me to no end. The reason for such was the conclusions drawn by others namely in the areas of harassment or discrimination. The argument would go something like this, "If a person perceives they were harassed or discriminated against, then that is their reality." That "philosophy" led to all kinds of problems in the workplace. It bolstered some into making false charges against others that time and resources had to then be spent investigating the allegations of supposed misconduct. My counter argument was that perception did not always equate to reality. One can have a false perception for many reasons.

Even the Bible describes how one can believe a lie and be condemned (2 Thessalonians 2:10-12). One's perception may also be skewed because of mental issues. I will never forget visiting a place in the Memphis area as a teenager that treated people with mental problems. One of the patients walked around acting like, talking like, and telling people he was Elvis Presley. If perception is reality, well then, I shook Elvis Presley's hand one time. Not!

Perception is how we understand things to be. Yet, what is that perception (understanding – other translations use the word “understand” in Acts 10:34), based on? That is the key. Notice Peter's words, “... of a truth ...” Ah, that's it. Is our perception or understanding based on the truth (facts, evidence, reality, etc.)? Or is our perception based on feelings, emotions, prejudices, myths, desires, etc. Just what lies at the root of our perception? Sometimes people perceive things to be a certain way because that is what they want. A person may falsely perceive another person is in love with them because such is what they want. However, the reality is the other person may loathe them. A person may falsely perceive something said was an insult or a form of harassment because they are overly sensitive or have a chip on their shoulder just looking for an opportunity to play the victim. Oh, I have seen such before and had to deal with it in the workplace. I used to challenge people to ask clarifying questions with others if they think someone said something inappropriate. Something like, “When you said this or that, this is what it sounded to me what you meant. Is this what you meant?” Give the person the opportunity to define what they intended by what they said instead of putting words in their mouth and possibly making a false accusation against them. Yes, perception is a tricky thing in our relationships with others. Robert Jackson once told a funny story of how his perception led him to a false conclusion about another. He got up to preach a sermon at a Gospel Meeting he knew might not be received well by some. He noticed a brother sitting towards the front who had a scowl on his face when he announced the subject. Brother Jackson perceived the man did not like the sermon subject. So, he decided to bear down and preach hard on the matter. He said, “The harder I preached. The more he scowled. So, I preached even harder.” After the lesson, the brother came up to shake his hand and said, “Brother Jackson, that was one of the best lessons I ever heard.” Brother Jackson said, “The man was not disgruntled. He just had a natural scowl on his face.” Well, with his comical wit, brother Jackson just described what can happen because of a false perception. In that situation, it was comical. In other situations, it can be tragic. For instance, when for what ever reason, a person does not see the evidence and facts in creation and fails to perceive or understand the existence of its Creator (Hebrews 11:1; Romans 1:20).

Peter saw the evidence and perceived or understood God's will based on the truth. Yes Pilate, “What is truth?” Let each of us make sure such is the case with our perceptions. “Of a truth I perceive.”

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