

I recently came across a book by O. Carter Snead, titled, *What It Means to Be Human: The Case for the Body in Human Bioethics*, published by Harvard University Press. Carter Snead is a law professor at Notre Dame University and director of its Nicola Center for Ethics and Culture. Barton Swaim, who writes for *The Wall Street Journal*, interviewed him about his book and its message in our post-pandemic world.

Mr. Snead told Swaim about a specific court case in New Mexico in which an elderly man had to sue the state to care for his wife. The couple lived in an assisted-living facility—the husband in independent living and the wife in the dementia unit—and a government edict had prohibited them from touching each other. Their health declined precipitously, but eventually “the guy won, thank God,” says Snead. This suggests that our cultural elites and policy makers haven’t thought deeply, or at all, about what the human person is.

Mr. Snead says, “I’m worried that our risk calculus has shifted in a dramatic way. You think about the flu, you think about other diseases that could be dangerous—or just driving your car—and it feels to me that our risk tolerance is basically zero at this point. And what does that mean? Is the point of human life simply to hide away in a bubble-wrap container so that you don’t ever encounter any risk?” (*The Wall Street Journal*, June 19, 2021).

The quote from the interview that really stood out to me is, “Our risk tolerance is basically zero at this point.” Then, how should our risk tolerance be calculated in order to calibrate the right response? I suggest that the right response to any of life’s challenges is to focus our attention on “Trusting in God.”

King David bears his heart in Psalm 16 when he writes: “8 *I keep my eyes always on the LORD. With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken. 9 Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, 10 because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, nor will you let your faithful one see decay. 11 You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.*” David knew what it meant to trust in God completely. He believed that the invisible God of the universe is as near to us as our right hand.

Another quote from the Carter Snead interview that stood out to me is this: “Is the point of human life simply to hide away in a bubble-wrap container so that you don’t ever encounter any risk?” Whenever we respond to other people in our lives there is risk involved. You bet there’s risk. For example, what do we do with people we can’t stand? The co-worker who daily makes us look stupid. The classmate who gets the glory for our hard work. The brother-in-law who always *has* to get his way.

In the grocery checkout line there are numerous tabloids filled with articles about the hardships of life. But trusting in God is never mentioned. Here's a sampling of tabloid wisdom: "It's a dog-eat-dog world, so get on top," "Don't get mad, get manipulative!" or "Designer labels make the person. Your frenemy will be infuriated when she sees you dressing better than she does." Do they ever talk about more than these kinds of petty topics?

Lora Copley, a minister in the Christian Reformed Church says, "When I was in first grade, I could not see the chalkboard. Everything Mrs. Zuidema wrote on the board looked fuzzy. I tried different ways to live in this reality. I purposely broke my pencil point so I could slooowly walk by the chalkboard on my way to the sharpener. One time I snuck my older brother's binoculars in, so I could use them to take a peek at the board. I'll never forget when I got my glasses. Trees weren't just blobs of green—I could see leaves! And grass had blades on it! It was a new world for me—I saw things as they really were."

We all need special glasses; none of us see things as they really are. Scripture testifies that we're designed for a world where God is clearly in the picture, "*walking in the cool of the day,*" but the serpent whispers in Genesis 3, "*When you eat from the tree, your eyes will be opened and you will be like God.*" Eve's eyes were opened—opened to sin, but shut to God. But throughout history, God intervenes, and gives people a reality check. A big "Hello! I am God! This is reality!" Think of Hagar, Moses, the Bethlehem shepherds, the two on the Emmaus Road, or Saul on the Damascus Road.

This Scripture from 2 Kings 6 is among the most dramatic of biblical "eye-opening" stories. The king of the Aramean raiders is frustrated because his surprise attacks were being foiled time and again. He throws his hands in the air, bellowing "Who's the traitor among us?" But he's told that Israel's God has a prophet. And this prophet, Elisha, knows every scheme the Aramean king cooks up. Like a fly on the king's bedroom wall, Elisha passes everything on to the Israelite king.

It is clear to the raiding king that to defeat Israel he will have to get rid of the prophet. The king sends his strongest force to encircle Dothan under the cover of night. But unlike the earlier times, no Israelite army waits for them. It appears the Israelite prophet is already losing his powers. Yet in verse 15 the story changes perspective and we see the servant of Elisha rising early in the morning. He makes his way to the roof, and yikes! Arameans are everywhere! Sure enough, the whole city is surrounded! Reality is clear to the servant. There is no escape, no hope.

But what does Elisha have to say? Verse 16 says, *“Don’t be afraid. Those who are with us are more than those who are with them!”* “Get real, Elisha!” The servant thinks. “Face the facts, man—snorting horses, glinting spears, iron chariots, WWF sized warriors—all of these enemies are right in our backyard!” Elisha prays simply that his servant might have a reality check. God opens the servant’s eyes. He saw an ocean of chariots and horses blazing, burning, fierce beyond telling, surrounding the army that was surrounding Elisha.

Of course, this is the same Elisha who had just made an axhead float in the Jordan river after it was lost. Elisha’s servant is convinced this battle is lost as well. But Elisha knows God’s protection. He views God’s world differently. Elisha takes a huge risk! One can defeat a thousand, as Joshua was promised! *“As the enemy came down toward him, Elisha prayed to the Lord, ‘Strike this army with blindness.’ So he struck them with blindness, as Elisha had asked.”* What a reversal of fortune! The mighty Aramean military becomes blind prisoners. Toto backs Fang into a corner. That’s the first eye-opener of the story: the Lord protects his people, in this case, even with chariots of fire.

Then Elisha leads the helpless men eleven miles up the road to the last place the enemy wants to be, Israel’s capital city, Samaria. And then, he prays for their eyes to be open. Imagine this for an Aramean raider. The Israelite God has just opened your eyes. You look up at the stone walls, and your heart sinks. *“And there they were, inside Samaria!”* The King of Israel comes straight towards you. You go on your knees, begging for mercy. He yanks your head back and puts the cold iron of his blade against your throat. You hear him say, *“Shall I kill them, my father? Shall I kill them?”*

According to the rules of the world, the king is right to put the blade to the neck of his enemies. These raiders have been terrorizing his people. An eye for an eye. A punishment that fits the crime. But what says Elisha? *“Do not kill them,” he answered. “Would you kill those you have captured with your own sword or bow? Set food and water before them so that they may eat and drink and then go back to their master.”* What happens next is even more shocking than heavenly chariots. Verse 23 says the king did not just provide those enemies with bread and water, he *“prepared a great feast for them.”* The king goes all out. The Arameans eat to their hearts’ content and the King of Israel...lets them go.

God’s world—the true reality—is a reality of humanity and forgiveness. First eye-opener, we see the chariots. Second eye-opener, we see a party, a meal among enemies. In the Middle East to eat with a person is to call them family. Meals are events of reconciliation. Even though these raiders were anti-God’s prophet and anti-God, God feeds them, God forgives them, and God shows them his grace. Why does God do this? Because of One who is like Elisha but greater. Elisha prayed for open eyes, but Messiah opens eyes

himself. Elisha trusts in God's reality, but Messiah is the reality of God himself. Jesus comes in our history to reverse the trouble that Eve invited, to remove our blinders.

Elisha's blinded servant sees God's protection in the chariots and his mercy in the meal. In Jesus, our blind eyes are opened to God's protection through his Holy Spirit and his mercy in a meal of his own body and his own blood.

Any perspective that doesn't take this reality into account is fuzzy and incomplete, like a first grader who can't see the chalkboard. How will the reality check of Jesus' protection and mercy make a difference in our dealings with a person we have a conflict with? When the call for forgiveness or throwing a party is given, we automatically recoil. "Get real! You don't know this person like I do! It would kill me to forgive her. What if he doesn't even acknowledge there is a problem? What if she just walks all over me? I've got to stand up for my rights on this. You don't see the situation clearly. This can't be changed."

What if we took our eyes off our offender? Took our eyes off ourselves? See the chariots. See the nail-scarred hand of One who has made us a meal. We can throw parties for our enemy, because he protects us and he has thrown a party for us. But it all comes down to *trusting God* who protects and feeds each of us.

Dave Burchett writes, "For the past year I have been standing on my tiptoes looking for the light at the end of the Pandemic Tunnel. Full disclosure. I have been discouraged by how (insert your descriptive word here) long this tunnel has become. Just when I start feeling hopeful some news report informs me the sky is falling and will likely fall very soon. I allowed myself to wonder if the world will ever be the same. I needed a postcard from God."

Maybe you are fighting personal battles on many fronts and you are finding it hard to trust in God given the circumstances of your health or work or relationships or whatever your challenge. Maybe you could use a postcard from God.

Remember the words of King David, who was a gold medalist in the "Trusting in God" Olympics of life: "*I keep my eyes always on the LORD. With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken*" (Psalm 16:8). Amen.

(Thanks to Lora Copley for the story about getting glasses)