It was winter in Arizona and Bill and I were in Payson, which is known as the ‘Crossroads’ of Arizona. Payson is a small town of about 15,000 people. It is a clean town with not much to get excited about, and is located near the base of the Mogollon Rim, commonly called Rim Country. Many people in the Phoenix area have second homes around Payson where they spend weekends to get away from the summer heat.

Payson was the closest shopping point for us, as we lived in Deer Creek thirteen miles away in a secluded village with 104 houses, with no street lights, or shops.

As we drove up the Bee Line Highway through town, my eyes were going to and fro as they always do, noticing people and places and every detail thereof. About a block away, I noticed a young man walking and carrying a foam mattress rolled up in a blanket and a few other worldly possessions. He seemed to be ‘on the road,’ or ‘homeless.’

I am drawn to this type of person, and I’m always curious what their story might be and fully aware it could be a very sad story.

‘Look there.’ I said to my beloved Bill as I pointed up the street.

Bill nodded and said, ‘I see him, but I’ve got several things to get done while we are in town.’

Bill knew that I always wanted to stop on a dime and talk to anyone a little out of the norm. Most people turn away from them, but I run to people who appear damaged, or under privileged. I believe it is God’s love and compassion working in me to bring some comfort to them. But mostly I believe it is to tell them about Jesus who has the will and power to change lives for the better.

I could see Bill really didn’t want to interrupt his schedule this morning, so I put the thought away and said a short prayer that went something like this, ‘Lord, bring that man to me so that I can talk to him about you. You know I am willing and available.’ We continued on our way.

Our last shopping stop was a pharmacy about an hour later. Bill parked near the entrance of the pharmacy and went in. To my delight I saw the man again. He walked purposefully and almost brushed our red PT Cruiser as he passed. He took a seat on a bench that sat against the wall of the pharmacy. He was directly in front of me as I sat in the car. I knew it was the Lord who orchestrated his steps right to where I was.

Excited, I wasted no time bouncing out of the car and walked over to him smiling. He smiled back at me, and was probably thinking, this stylish lady is going to give me some money, or
something to that effect.

I said, ‘Hey young man, how are you doing today?’

‘Very good,’ he replied, and smiled again.

‘Where are you going?’ I asked.

‘Wherever I want to, and wherever the wind blows me,’ he said with the smile still lingering.

The man was good looking and had curly blond hair hanging nicely from underneath a ball cap, and I noticed he was checking me out, as I had checked him out. He wore khaki colored trousers and jacket. He was well kept and didn’t appear as though he had been on the road long. A bedroll was attached to the top of a backpack that sat on the sidewalk next to the bench.

‘How old are you, and what is your name?’ I asked the two questions in rapid fire.

He said, ‘My name is Daniel, and I am nineteen years old.’

We stared at each other and then Daniel started laughing, and what a delightful laugh he had. I started laughing too, simply because he was laughing. We sat there like two silly kids just laughing, which seemed to both of us a good thing to do.

I had better cut to the chase, I thought. Bill would come out of the shop any minute now. ‘I have a very important message for you, Daniel,’ I said.

‘You do!’ Daniel replied.

‘I surely do. Jesus loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.’ I watched for his reaction and continued, ‘But God’s plan will not come to pass until you realize that Jesus is God, and repent of your ways.’ I went on to say, ‘Today is a new day and you are being given a chance to start again.’

Suddenly neither of us was laughing. ‘You have no idea who I am, or what I have done with my life,’ Daniel muttered, his eyes seeming to water up.

‘Frankly it does not matter, God knows everything and nothing is hidden from him. I bring you a message from God, and you can accept or reject the message, but if you are smart you will accept it and turn your heart toward God. If you do so he will intervene in your life and turn it into something beautiful. I know because God has greatly intervened in my life and totally changed me for his glory.’

Daniel lowered his head to look at the ground, and then back up at me.

‘Please don’t shoot me. I’m just the messenger,’ I said. ‘God had a message for you, and it has just been delivered. You are blessed to receive this message. God is interested in what happens to you, Daniel, and so am I.’

Bill walked out of the shop and saw me sitting with the young man. He passed by us so as not to interrupt and got into the car. He knew I was on a mission and did not want to get in the way of what God was doing.

I threw Daniel an air kiss, jumped up, and disappeared into our PT Cruiser to join Bill, probably never to see this young man again. The message had been delivered and now its up to Daniel.

I knew something glorious was happening in the heavenly realm and Daniel would not easily forget our encounter. Only in heaven one day will I know if Daniel accepted the gift I gave him, God’s promise of eternal life.

I’m struck at how perception changes things. Daniel’s perception of me caused us to laugh together, but the moment I began delivering the message God had for him, his perception of me and the situation changed. And when the perception changed, the laughter stopped.

I’m sure Daniel was contemplating the message as we drove away.

Another great example of wrong perception comes from a visit Bill and I had in our home in
Deer Creek.

It happened in the spring some time ago very soon after my beloved Bill was diagnosed with Prostate Cancer. The building of our new home in Deer Creek was almost completed. The shock of being told about the cancer was like a brick to my head and we were still reeling with the news.

A question was foremost in our thoughts as drove the seventy miles home from the Veterans Hospital in Phoenix, Arizona. It went like this, ‘What now, Lord?’

I told a few close friends about Bill’s condition and people were praying for us.

A friend of a friend heard about Bill’s cancer issue and while praying she felt from the Lord that she should do something for us in Jesus’ name. She contacted us and said she was coming from Phoenix to visit and pray with us.

We were pleased about that, as we know God answers prayer. I gave her directions to our home and said it was nearly two hours away. Two hours later I was looking out of our office window and I watched her pull into our driveway.

I noticed her eyes were wide open, and maybe her mouth too, when I walked out of the house to greet her.

The lady was beside herself, nervous and uncomfortable, as she spoke, ‘I think I have made a mistake.’

‘What do you mean,’ I replied?
‘Look at your lovely house,’ she said.
‘Yes,’ I said. ‘It is lovely, isn’t it?’

She pointed to the back seat of her car, and I noticed a number of full grocery bags. ‘You can’t need these,’ she said. ‘I must have misheard the Lord.’

‘I don’t think you misheard,’ I said, as I led her inside the house.

We entered the kitchen and I opened the pantry and then the fridge. Both were nearly empty.

‘Yes, we can use them, I said.’

A smile formed on the lady’s face and her excitement mounted. She realized that she had not misheard the Lord at all.

Clearly our Lord had used her to help provide what we were in need of, provision of food. This taught me a valuable lesson. ‘Life is not always what it seems.’ We were in need of prayer for Bill’s prostate problem, but also in need of food provision. God used this lady and her willingness, care, and kindness to meet the need.

How often do we look at people whom we do not know, and we decide with our puny minds that they are wealthy, or not, maybe they need help, or not, when we have no real clue? Their home, transportation, clothing, or any other material thing is no indicator of what is going on in their life.

This lady’s perception told her we needed nothing. Her perception was based on the nice home we lived in. Sure it was a nice home, but her perception was wrong about our need.

I recall a young boy of about ten years old, telling me, ‘You are rich.’

I asked him, ‘Why do you say that?’

‘Because, look at how your clothes all match.’

No, I just happen to know how to match things. It has nothing to do with riches. Wealth of knowledge maybe, but not wealth as he was thinking.

Our perception of things and people around us can get in the way of what God wants us to do. Many times we are led to do something by the Lord, and we look at the visible circumstances and think, ‘That can’t be right, I must have misheard.’ Be cautious the next time you hear God’s still
small voice giving instruction or direction.

We must lay aside our own perceptions and simply trust that we are hearing from God, and that God has the right perception every time. Then just do, or say, the thing he has asked us to do. God promises us that he will fill our mouth with the correct words when we are willing and available to be used by the Lord.

Even as I close this story that began with Daniel, I realize I could have easily had the wrong perception of Daniel. But, as long as I delivered God’s message to him, nothing else matters. And my perception won’t prevent God using me unless I allow that perception to convince me to refuse to do what God has asked of me. Obedience is the key to witnessing for Jesus, and obedience is the key to getting it right.

Let’s hold our perceptions loosely, and allow God to change them.

We must not fear, but act on what God’s Spirit is saying to us. In doing this, we can change the world one person at a time. Be a world changer and the joy of the Lord will be your portion always.

William Fay wrote in his book, ‘Share Jesus Without Fear,’ the following:

“If you wish to experience the level of joy so many others have found, you will have to drop those excuses for not sharing your faith. You will have to practice obedience to the Great Commission. Not only will this impact the lives of your loved ones, but you will also experience a new depth in your relationship with God that you never experienced before. After all, God promised, ‘I will be with you’ (Exod.3:12). Wait until you see what God will do with an ordinary person, like you, who is obedient in sharing his faith.”