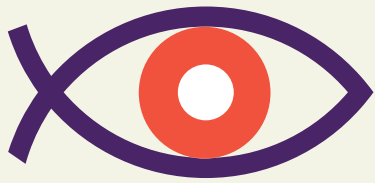


**SEEING
THROUGH
THE EYES OF
JESUS**

**YOUTH
CURRICULUM
SESSION 4**

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SEEING THROUGH THE EYES OF JESUS

Calling us back to
the central focus of
our Christian faith:
The Risen and
Living Jesus!

SESSION AUTHOR:
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SESSION 4: THE DANGER OF DISTRACTION

SCRIPTURE:

Matthew 14:22-33

John 15:1-11

MAIN POINT:

Seeing through the eyes of Jesus will help us trust Christ more deeply as we let Christ be the center point of our lives.



INTRODUCTION:

Say the following or something similar: “As we talked about last time, we’re going to learn more today about focusing on Jesus and why that’s so important for our lives. It can be hard to follow directions, so I want to give you a test to see how well you can do. Do your best and try to finish as quickly as possible.

Hand each participant a copy of the “Following Directions Test” included with this study. Then, set a timer for a short amount of time, approximately three to five minutes. Offer more urgency to the moment by counting down to start (“3, 2, 1, GO!”) and countdown to finish (“3, 2, 1, STOP!”)

After time is up, offer this: “Our test was not really much of a test. If you followed the initial instruction and read the whole page, there was really nothing to be done. Instead, there were lots of prompts to distract you and seeing friends act accordingly may have drawn you to do the same. We’re going to talk about why focusing on Jesus is so important and especially about how other influences can keep us from doing so.”

Important debriefing note: *While the goal is to illustrate our tendency to become distracted, make sure to highlight that it was a silly activity for which failure should not be taken too personally.*



SCRIPTURE INTERPRETATION:

Matthew 14:22-33; John 15:1-11

Having established the importance of maintaining focus on Jesus, we do not need to look further than Peter's own faltering to begin to realize the hazard of not remaining connected. Rather than opening ourselves to new possibilities through Jesus the Christ, distractions draw us into a more self-centered and anxious reality. This isn't to say Peter is at fault. It would be incredibly difficult to keep focus on Jesus with the swirling storm around him. And, it is not ignorant that there may be positive forces to which we feel drawn. Distraction leads to separation from Jesus, revealing the deeper difficulties of isolation from Christ.

John 15 continues to outline the danger of not fully abiding in Jesus. Whereas focusing on Jesus, growing closer with and following him, lead to positive transformation, distraction from our call can lead to damage of the opposite extreme. The warning is not limited to gospel accounts, but further illustrated in the writings of others in the New Testament—specifically in Hebrews where “weight and sin” might detract from faithfulness and in Colossians where Paul asserts that there are “elemental spirits”—societal pressures, forces or ideas—that might deter our focus on Jesus. Considering the story of Peter, in light of the admonitions of Jesus in John, and alongside the work of Paul in the epistles, it becomes important for modern Christians to identify and limit prevalent distractions to remain focused on Jesus.



ACTIVITY:

Provide participants a week's calendar that breaks each day down by the hour. Have them fill in how they spend their time each day in a typical week. The youth should fill each block of time with something that might draw their attention (i.e. 7:00 am – “Get ready for school”). This activity will take some time and can be enriched by having an example chart available for them to see. In creating your example, remain true to your experience and try not to overly emphasize spiritual aspects of your own life. For example, if you are not one who takes quiet time each morning for study and prayer, don't include that in your weekly schedule. Authentically represent your routine and learn alongside the youth in debriefing the activity.

Afterwards debrief:

- Which actions or activities routinely occupy most of your time during the week? Is that surprising to see?
- Which actions or activities routinely occupy the least amount of your time during the week? Is that surprising to see?
- How many of the blocks did you fill with actions or activities that pertain to your faith (i.e. going to church)?
- Based on your calendar, would you say that you give priority to growing in your faith?

Important debriefing note: *Remind the youth that there are no wrong answers and that this activity is not intended to shame them. Rather, it is an opportunity for all of us to examine the amount of time in an average week that we work to focus on and be transformed by Jesus.*



DISCUSSION:

The truth is, we do not want to be distracted from following Jesus. It can be hard to follow the spirit's gentle, personal nudges while so many other things call for our attention. We're going to talk now about some of the things that might distract us from focusing on Jesus. What are some of the things that might occupy your time and keep you from giving time to growing your spiritual life?

There are a few things that we experience in this world that might prevent us from focusing on Jesus. I'd like to share a few of those with you and then hear how you think these influences have impacted your life.

First, it seems that life just moves so fast. As we saw in the calendar activity, we are all really busy. We've got lots to do and no time to do it. Sure, we have lots of interests, but also society tells us we need to be busy. Having a full calendar "proves" just how important we are. At your age, you might have lots of things you want to try and that can keep you busy, or you might feel like you need to do a lot of different things to help you get into your dream college or university. Regardless, there's pressure to stay busy. So, we overcommit ourselves.

Also, we are so connected to each other and to the world at large. Not only do we need to be busy, but we need to show other people how much fun we're having. We need to post about a particular social issue to show everyone just where we stand or we need to maintain streaks so that someone doesn't think we don't like them. When it comes to our spiritual lives, faith relies on what we cannot see. In a world

where so much information is easily accessible, it can be frustrating not to feel the same connection with God or we can become overwhelmed by what we perceive as a lack of response from God and doubt whether God cares about us at all. We are overconnected.

Finally, and related to the first two points, there is a sense that we must always act like we have it all figured out. At school, you need the perfect track of classes to get you to the next class to get you to the next school to get you into the career that you ultimately hope to pursue. Even having an idea of what career you want to pursue many years from now plays into this idea. Despite our social tendencies and connection, the pressure to have everything under control means that we draw further into ourselves. We can't let anybody in too far because they might see that we really don't have it all figured out. And if those closest to us know that, then what will the rest think when they find out too? We've got to have it all under control, and are overconfident that we do.

All three of these ideas—overcommitment, over-connection and overconfidence—distract from the call of Jesus. And, when we let them consume us, they leave us feeling lonely, anxious and exhausted. The Bible shows us that Jesus placed priority on loving others and helping to create heaven on earth. It also tells us of God's faithful guidance, taking care of us before we even know what we need. If we're really going to be the hands and feet of Christ in our world, we have to work together to remove those distractions and find a new way forward focused on Jesus.



SMALL GROUP REFLECTION:

Have the youth break into groups of roughly three or four. Instruct them that the goal is for them to be in a group in which they feel comfortable sharing and one that's small enough that each person will have a chance to respond to the questions. Provide the following questions and allow each group to work at their own pace. After a reasonable amount of time, or when most groups seem to be done, draw the group back together for shared discussion around the same questions.

Small Group Questions:

- What routinely calls for your attention? What do you find yourself focusing most on during the average day or week?
- How have you felt the pressures of the distractions of overcommitment, over-connection or overconfidence?
- How might your life look different if you didn't feel those pressures?
- How can you break the cycle of distraction and refocus on how Jesus calls us to live?



PRAYER:

Dear God, we want to focus on the example set by Jesus. We want to prioritize loving others, serving your world, and sharing the unique gifts and talents you've given us. There are lots of things that might distract us from focusing on you. Whether good or bad, they all ultimately leave us feeling incomplete and wanting or needing more. Give us today the faith to focus on Jesus, the courage to shield ourselves from the distractions around us, and the peace to remember that your grace is enough, even when we fall short. And, help us share that gift with others. AMEN.

ACTION STEPS:

Ask the youth to pay attention to moments, influences or situations that might distract them from living out their faith. Invite them to keep notes or to journal their thoughts. Then, provide an opportunity for sharing these moments in your next meeting.

FOLLOWING DIRECTIONS TEST

1. Read everything before doing anything.
2. Write your name on this paper.
3. Circle your name.
4. Underline the title at the top.
5. Flap your arms and crow like a bird.
6. Open your Bible and write the first word you see here: _____
7. What day is it?
8. Draw a star on the back of this paper.
9. Say the following out loud: Twinkle, twinkle little star. How I wonder what you are?
10. Do 10 jumping jacks.
11. Draw a cross on the top of your paper.
12. Circle the cross you've just drawn.
13. Write "Jesus" underneath the cross and circle.
14. High five your neighbor.
15. Fold this page into a paper airplane. Then, unfold and continue.
16. Whisper the answer you wrote down to prompt 6.
17. Write a favorite song lyric at the bottom of the page.
18. Draw a stick person performing that song next to the lyric.
19. Ask out loud: Won't anybody join me in passing this test?
20. Ignore all of the previous instructions and sit quietly until time is called.