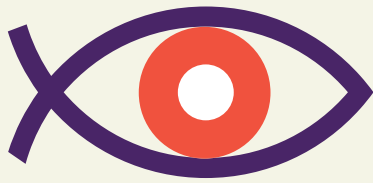


**SEEING
THROUGH
THE EYES OF
JESUS**

**YOUTH
CURRICULUM
SESSION 5**

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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!**

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SESSION 5: A COMMUNITY TO CHECK OUR VISION

SCRIPTURE:

Matthew 14:22-33
Mark 8:22-26
1 Corinthians 13:11-13

MAIN POINT:

Seeing through the eyes of Jesus requires our involvement in a loving, nurturing, Jesus-focused community. In other words, “some assembly is required.”



INTRODUCTION:

During the summer between my fourth and fifth grade experiences, I participated in my first overnight summer camp. The night before, my mom and I packed my duffle bag. We checked off every item on the packing list: Bible, bug spray, sunscreen, flashlight, sleeping bag, toiletries. For five days and four nights, I was going to be away from the comforts of home, like snacks, air conditioning, my bed, and my parents’ near-constant supervision. I would be sleeping in a wooden bunk house out in the middle of the wilderness of the Western North Carolina mountains. My days would be spent hiking, playing flag football, swimming in a freshwater lake, and teambuilding on a low-ropes course. I thought to myself: “This is going to be epic.” I couldn’t wait to make new friends and to experience the freedom of being mostly unsupervised by adults.

As she zipped my packed duffle bag shut, my mom reminded me how important personal hygiene would be during this week at camp. And she made me promise that I would brush my teeth and shower (with soap) every

single day. “Mom. Relax. I know what I need to do.”

Well, I was right. My first away-from-home summer camp experience was totally epic. I zip-lined down the side of a mountain. I played capture-the-flag at night during a clothes-drenching rain shower. I skipped rocks across the lake. And I did not take one shower that entire week.

When I came home, I told my family story after story about my week at camp. I told them about the snake that slithered across the rocks as I waded nearby in the creek. I told them about the piles of bacon that I enjoyed every morning at breakfast. I told them about the kid in the bunk next to me that talked in his sleep. And then my mom zipped open my duffle bag to find the unopened bar of soap that she had packed that previous Saturday night. That shifted the mood in the room rather quickly.

My parents were angry at first. “I can’t believe you didn’t shower at least once.”

I reminded them that I swam in the lake every single day. “That doesn’t count,” they reminded me. The next few weeks were filled with impromptu lectures on the importance of personal hygiene. Then one night, I heard my mom on the phone recounting to my aunt all about my summer camp experience. She laughed so hard about my lack of hygiene that she nearly hyperventilated. “I guess he got distracted with everything else going on that he forgot to clean himself.”

I agreed with this explanation. I did get distracted. I had better things to do than shower.

Fast forward a few years: I’m sitting with my fiancé on the night before our wedding at our rehearsal dinner. My family is there; my fiancé’s family is there. And guess which story my mom decides to tell them during her toast? With a big smile

on her face, she began her toast (or roast) with: “A few years ago, Blake was going off to summer camp for the first time and guess what he didn’t do...” I wanted to crawl under the table. “Gee whiz, Mom,” I complained. “I learned my lesson. Why do you still tell that story?”

I grew up. And much to my parents’ satisfaction, I learned the importance of personal hygiene. But given the chance to obey my parents’ reasonable request to shower while at camp or to do just about anything else, I chose my own path. I got distracted. I lost my focus. And I stank to high heaven, I’m sure.

Has this ever happened to you? Have you ever gotten distracted or lost your focus? It happens. In fact, it happened to one of Jesus’ disciples named Peter as recorded in the 14th chapter of Matthew’s Gospel.



SCRIPTURE INTERPRETATION:

Imagine this scene in Matthew 14. The waves are crashing; the wind is thrashing your boat. You’re scared. And suddenly, in the midst of this chaos, your eyes see a mysterious figure—a ghost!—walking on the water. Peter probably asked himself, “Is this how I’m going to die?”

Who is that out there in the storm? Is that Jesus? Peter wanted proof. He wanted in on this unfathomable action. So, he asks to join Jesus out there on the water. And Jesus told Peter, “Come to me.”

What would you do? Do you step out of the boat in the middle of a storm? Does your curiosity begin to outweigh your better judgement? Reflect on the boldness of Jesus in this scene. Jesus didn’t tell Peter to stay put, where he’d be safe. Instead, Jesus invited Peter out of the boat, out where only faith and trust could keep Peter alive. That’s bold, and it proves to us that faith in Jesus is a bold enterprise. So, what did Peter do?

Peter stepped out of the boat. And for a few seconds, Peter participated in Jesus’ unbelievable power. What a rush! But it didn’t last. Peter got distracted. He lost his focus on Jesus and began to sink.

When life comes at us from all directions, it’s easy to get distracted. It’s easy to take our eyes off Jesus. And when we do, we begin to sink deeper into life’s complicated, often harmful waves. When we take our focus off Jesus and choose instead to focus on other things, we begin to feel the weight of our choices. Life, vitality and joy begin to slip away from us. How can we stay focused on Jesus? And how can we sustain that focus on Jesus for a lifetime of storms and challenges?

What we need is a community—a loving, nurturing network of relationships that helps us to stay focused on Jesus during the storms of life. We can’t “do” life alone. We weren’t designed that way. So, thanks be to God that the Church of Christ can become for us our community, our tribe, our people, who through thick and thin help us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus.

We need community. We’ve heard it said: “It takes a village...” And as we mature in our faith, we come to know that this is true. We need a community to keep us in check. We need a community that helps us—as Paul mentions in 1 Corinthians 13—“to put an end to childish things.” Imagine how my week at summer camp would have changed if a few of my peers had pulled me aside and said, “Blake. Come on. Go take a

shower—with soap. We'd all appreciate it greatly." Alone, I'll lose my way. Alone, I'll sink. I need a community of Jesus-focused friends to help me stay focused on what's best for me.

A community that is focused intently on Jesus is a powerful force in our world. It can be a place of profound healing and life-giving abundance in God's grace. But often, given the choice, we go our own way. Foolishly, we tell ourselves that we know the path forward, only to later find ourselves sinking. What we need is a community to keep us focused

on Jesus. Jesus wants to offer us healing. Jesus wants to connect with us—like he did with the blind man we read about in Mark 8, so that we can live a life rooted in truth and grace. Jesus wants to look intently into our eyes to heal our brokenness, to forgive our shortcomings, and to invite us into abundant life. It bears repeating: A life lived in Christian community is richer, more profound and more fulfilling than a life lived apart from it. Within a Christian community, we find support, accountability and a place to keep our spiritual and moral development headed in the right direction.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. To what communities do you belong—sports teams, band, clubs, shared-interest groups? What are the things on which your communities keep you focused? How do your communities improve your life? How do your communities make your life more complicated or challenging?
2. Put yourself in the boat alongside Peter. How would you respond to Jesus' saying, "Come to me"? Have you ever felt like Jesus has invited you to follow him? How did you respond?
3. Reflect on an experience when you felt deeply loved, held and nourished in community. Where were you? How did you know you were loved by these people? How was your life bolstered by the community?
4. Living a life in community takes effort and maturity. How can you contribute to the life and vitality of your faith community? Can you identify people in your community who need you to step up and step out with support, love and acceptance?



ACTIVITY:

Take a moment to visualize your community. As you have navigated this week thus far, who have you seen, had conversations with, interacted with in ways simple or profound? As you picture your community in your mind, name the one or two people in your community who seem to have it all figured out. Can you picture them? This person/ These people are cool, calm, and collected, confidently living their best life. Now imagine the one or two people in your community who are currently struggling. Can you see

them? Call their names out to God. In what ways are they struggling? Financially? Mentally/emotionally? Spiritually? Take a moment sometime this week to reach out to them and let them know the following: 1) You see them. 2) You care. And 3) You're there for them if they need a friend. Just imagine the difference this simple engagement will have on their lives. Just imagine the difference you'll make when you see your world through the eyes of Jesus.



SENDING FORTH:

This week, be on the lookout for your community. What are the names, faces and personalities that belong to your community? How is God inviting you to step “out of the boat” to engage in Jesus’ mission of love and grace in your community? Keep your focus on Jesus and see how it goes.

May God give you deep peace to trust that when you step out of the boat, when you keep your eyes fixed on Jesus, when you find yourself nurtured by the beloved community of God, you will find a life that is abundant in joy, grace and love. This week, try to see your world through the eyes of Jesus.