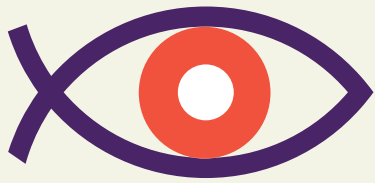


**SEEING
THROUGH
THE EYES OF
JESUS**

**YOUTH
CURRICULUM
SESSION 7**

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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 7: SEEING JESUS: TRANSFORMING ME

SCRIPTURE:

Romans 12:1-2
Philippians 2:5-11

MAIN POINT:

Seeing the world through the eyes of Jesus will transform the way that we see our world. Through the lens of Jesus' love and grace, we begin to see other people as God's beloved children who, like us, stand in need of God's forgiveness, healing and love.



INTRODUCTION:

In the spring of 2019, my family moved to a new city after spending 12 years living in a small town. In case you don't already know this, moving is hard work. It requires hiring a moving company, boxing up all your stuff, selling your old house, buying a new house, selling your unwanted items in a yard sale, donating other stuff to a thrift store, saying goodbye to dear friends, and much more. Moving can be an exhausting season of transition and busy work. It disrupts life and causes feelings of instability. Going through this laborious process is enough to make anyone say to themselves: "I'm never moving again." What's more, moving can be a daunting reminder that we have too much stuff piled up in our closets, attics and garages. Where did all this junk come from? Do I really need all this stuff? The answer is almost always "no." The process of moving can leave you longing for a simpler, less-cluttered life.

During the process of this recent move, I uncovered a box in my attic full of memories from my high school and

college years. I found yearbooks, awards and movie ticket stubs. There were pictures from proms and varsity football. I found a cassette tape of my favorite country music band. (If you don't know what a cassette tape is, just Google it.) There were also pictures of my moving into my freshman dorm room at college. "Wow!", I thought to myself. "Was that really 20 years ago?!"

Time flies, they say. And "they" are right.

That's when I saw it: a haunting picture from my freshman year in college. It was there, mixed in with other pictures and mementos in that box from my attic. I now held it in my hands. I had forgotten all about that picture. When I saw it, I was at a loss for words. I felt a mixture of emotions rushing over me—shock, embarrassment, disbelief. Should I throw it away and forget about it? To keep it would mean that I needed to confront the realities of it. And believe me, those realities are painful to grasp. The easiest option was to throw it away, for sure.

What did this haunting picture depict? I hesitate to say. It was me—a freshman in college—sitting beside one of my new college friends from down the hall. Who was this new friend? His name was Stevie, a smart, fun-loving African American. We were pictured together—smiling, hanging out, doing what college freshmen do. We had become fast friends. So why was this picture so haunting? Right there on the wall behind us was a confederate flag that I had proudly hung on the wall of my freshman dorm room. How did that flag get there? What circumstances led me to hanging that specific flag in my dorm room for all the world to see? What did that flag communicate to others about my identity?

In September of 1999, I began my college experience by moving into that freshman dorm room. I brought my clothes, toiletries, and school supplies. I carefully and methodically situated my things throughout my dorm room. I remember doing this with great excitement. I bought a new computer and printer and a mini-fridge. My roommate provided a small microwave. I decorated my walls and furniture with pictures that reminded me of my family and friends from back home. And I proudly hung that confederate flag on my wall as a statement of my identity. After all, I was a white southern boy, proud of my heritage.

It never occurred to me—not even once—that this flag might be offensive and harmful to someone like Stevie. I had never unpacked the meaning of that flag. I had never wrestled with its history or symbolism. I had never asked myself: “Will this flag cause someone I care about harm or trouble?” I was blind to the deeper, more sinister realities of that flag. I was born and raised in a culture where having that flag hanging on my wall was perfectly acceptable.

Now, 20 years later, holding this picture in my hands, I was shocked by it. My jaw dropped. In one instant, I was teleported back in time. I was grappling with realities about my life that had been hidden in my past. Light was suddenly shining into a shadowy place of my personal history. And I didn’t like how that felt. I didn’t like this photo one bit. But something inside me knew that I needed to grapple with it.

I tried to imagine how Stevie must have felt the first time that he walked into my dorm room. I tried to imagine Stevie

bringing his parents into my dorm room during Parents Weekend that same year. What crossed their minds when they walked into my room and saw that flag hanging there? Their feelings about that flag had never once crossed my mind. I wanted to crumble that picture up and throw it away. How embarrassing! I can’t believe that there was a time in my life when I did such a thing—and proudly so. Twenty years ago, I didn’t see that flag as a problem. But a lot has happened in these past 20 years. I see my world differently today.

In the 20 years of my life since that picture was taken, I’ve grown a lot. I’ve wrestled with much about my past. I’ve changed. I have graduated from seminary, gotten married, had three children of my own, and I’ve served in pastoral ministry for almost 20 years. I’ve seen some things. I’ve learned some things. And I’m humbled by that whole process. Twenty years later, I see the world differently. As I’ve grown in my faith and discipleship, I’ve come to see the world a bit more like Jesus does. And that growth process continues to this day.

A life lived in Christ is a life spent learning to see the world rightly. That process is slow but steady. It takes time to learn to see our world as Jesus does. There are many ways of seeing the world. There are many lenses through which we view our world. In fact, many of these lenses are competing to lay claim to our lives. But as faithful disciples of Jesus, we are called to see the world through the eyes of Jesus. The gospels make this point crystal clear. Jesus saw his world with compassion, forgiveness and mercy. Jesus’ way of seeing his world got him into trouble. Jesus’ way of seeing his world confused his disciples and the religious authorities of his day. And as I read the gospels, I’m left thinking: “Jesus came to do more than save me. He came to teach me and others how to see the world rightly.” It may sound a bit cliché, but I’m reminded of the 1980’s hit song by Cyndi Lauper entitled, “True Colors.” If you don’t know this song, just Google “True Colors” by Cyndi Lauper. It’s worth a listen. The lyrics remind me that over time, our faith in Jesus can help us to see the world rightly. And when we do, it’s beautiful.

I think the Apostle Paul would agree with this assessment. Let’s explore more deeply how he made this argument in his letter to the Romans and the Philippians.



SCRIPTURE INTERPRETATION:

Romans 12 is one of the most potent chapters in the New Testament. I have long used this chapter of Paul's writing to articulate some of the finer points of Christian theology. Verse 2 reveals one of Paul's most eloquent statements about a life of faith. Here, Paul encourages Jesus' disciples to not be "conformed to the patterns of this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you can figure out what God's will is—what is good and pleasing and mature." Wow, Paul. Well done!

In this one statement, Paul sums up Christian praxis. As the Mandalorian would say, "This is the way." Here, clearly stated, is the Christ-centered way; a rule of life rooted in Christ. This is not a treatise on overturning corrupt institutions. This is not a workshop on overthrowing the powers and principalities of the world. This is not about blaming others for the world's many problems.

Instead, this is a clarion call to thorough and intentional personal transformation. In other words, Paul is here saying, "I must change if I'm to have any power and influence on the broader problems of this world." Paul is doing us all a favor here. He's helping us take responsibility for our own lives and shortcomings.

In Romans 12, Paul is laying out an argument for personal transformation. This argument reminds us that following Jesus is an inward-to-outward process. How does this process work?

First, Jesus changes us so that we're not conformed to the ways of the world. Following Jesus alters the way we see the world and engage in service to the world. Then it is through this personal, interior transformation that we begin to effect positive change on the world around us.

The Christian life is both a deep dive in and an intentional flow out. Jesus changes us. And out of that change flows Jesus' love and grace into the world. Through prayer, study,

worship and personal devotion, we invite Jesus into our lives. We are changed. And over time, that inward change creates a more poised, compassionate engagement with the world around us.

Our Philippians 2 text reminds us that this deep inward dive is a process that is rooted in humility and selflessness. Through Christian disciplines like prayer, service and worship, we learn to tame our ego, discipline our desires, and quench our thirst for material things. We learn that we must change within. And as we change, grow and mature, we begin to engage the world around us as Jesus did. We learn to see through the eyes of Jesus.

This doesn't happen overnight. Instead, we will spend our lives growing into more Jesus-centered disciples. It takes time. And time is exactly what we need.

Just think about it: The local church exists to provide Jesus' disciples with a place to learn, grow, and serve for a whole lifetime. The church is not like a local school. We will NEVER graduate from church. Instead, we stick with the church as we develop into more faithful followers of Jesus. God is not finished with us. And thanks be to God that our local churches provide us with a loving community to support us for a lifetime.

Think of your own church family. In some ways, it is very similar to your nuclear family. From the youngest to the oldest, we're all in this life together. Through struggles and celebrations, our family is there nurturing the life of God within us.

The Christian life is not summed up by one decision we made at summer camp. It's more. It's more than our baptism, more than our first communion, more than our favorite mission trip. It's a lifelong, inward-to-outward transformation. From our first breath until our last—and all in between—may Jesus be glorified.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Can you think of an embarrassing picture from your childhood? Does that picture capture who you still are? How have you changed since that picture was taken?
2. Take a moment to reflect over the major changes or events in your life. How has your life been punctuated by these changes? How has your life been shaped by these changes?
3. Have you ever changed your mind about something? If so, what did you change your mind about? What led you to that change?
4. Think about Paul's words in Romans 12: "Be not conformed to the world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." How does this one verse capture the main themes of Christianity? How does this verse inspire you?
5. What point is Paul making in Philippians 2:5-11? What do these verses teach us about Jesus? What do these verses teach us about the nature of Christianity?
6. How is God at work in your life? Think about the inward-to-outward process introduced above. How is God helping your faith to grow in this inward-to-outward way?



ACTIVITY:

We all make mistakes. It's hard to admit it, but mistakes are fairly common in our daily lives. Our mistakes range from hapless goofs (stumping a toe—ouch!) to planned, premeditated harmful actions against another person. Take a moment to think about a mistake that you've made in the previous year. What was the prime motivator to this error in your judgement? Was it jealousy? Anger? Pride? Greed? Laziness? Dishonesty? How did you make amends? What did you learn from this mistake?

Now—think of someone who has wronged you. As best as you can tell, what was the prime motivator in their action that

hurt you? Jealousy? Anger? Greed? Sometimes we know and sometimes we just can't say why someone has hurt us. That's OK. Now—this may be difficult but give this your best try. See this person who wronged you through the eyes of Jesus. Really see them. Remind yourself that this person is created by God, this person has a purpose, this person's life matters greatly to God and others. Can you forgive them? Name two or three characteristics about this person that you can appreciate. Can you think of an action or gesture that would help you communicate to this person that you have forgiven them? If so, are you willing to put this action or gesture into use?



SENDING FORTH:

This week, be on the lookout for invitations to follow Jesus into mission in your daily life. Be intentional about not conforming to the ways of the world. Be intentional about being transformed by the renewing of your mind.

Go forth into this week knowing that God is at work—healing you from the inside out. Breathe in God's grace, mercy and love. And breathe out compassion, patience and respect for others.