



Setting our Focus*

Leader Guide

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:2a NIV).

Main Idea As we keep our focus on Jesus through faith, He helps us to deal with the challenges of our earthly lives and to share His saving love with others.

Materials Needed this study; paper and pen/pencil; Bible; hymnal

Opening Prayer

Dear Jesus, because of You and Your unselfish actions as our Savior, we have God's gifts of forgiveness, eternal life, spiritual peace and security, as well as a home in heaven. Thank You, dearest Jesus, for Your saving love. Although we trust You and love You, there are times when our focus leaves You and instead rests on earthly and/or sinful pursuits. Forgive us, Lord, for these times when our focus may be blurred or misguided. Through Your Word and Your Sacraments, direct us to keep our eyes, hearts, and focus always on You and on Your will. Help us to share the truth of Your saving love to those who do not yet know it or who have lost their focus on it. Bless our endeavors to further Your kingdom. In Your name we pray. Amen.

Viewfinding Activity

Finding Your Focus

After greeting your fellow sisters in Christ as you arrive, take a few moments to make two lists. You will share your lists later in this session. [All answers from author's LG, 43-45.]

First, list some specific things that you do to help you focus on Jesus at worship, in your personal Bible study time, and throughout your day.

Some ideas participants may mention that help them keep their focus on Jesus include prayer; removal of distractions (cell phones); clearing their minds of schedules, activities, and responsibilities; studying in a special place in their homes that they use only for Bible study purposes (a quiet corner or alcove, a particular chair); physically scheduling time with Jesus each day on their calendars; decorating in various places in the home using Scripture verses and paintings of Jesus.

Then list some specific things that can cause you to lose focus during these same times.

Distractions participants may mention which cause them to lose focus on Jesus include worries, to-do lists, noise, requests from others, lack of sleep, world events, chaotic environment, work responsibilities, unexpected problems or events, ill health of self or family members, lack of interest.

Introduction

In order to take clear and compelling photographs, the camera lens must be clearly set and focused on the image to be photographed. In order to live clearly directed lives which glorify and serve God, our eyes must be set and focused on Jesus our Savior. Before you begin the Bible study for this session, carefully read **Hebrews 12:2a** (top of the page). As you make your way through this snapshot session, keep these words in mind.

Zooming Into God's Word

Blurred Vision

Have you ever looked at a developed photograph that was grossly out of focus? The blurred images of such a photo are not only confusing, but can also cause great discomfort if looked at for too long. The same can be said when our eyes have difficulty focusing. The images around us become distorted, blurred, even unrecognizable. When our eyes are not properly focused, the activities we want to do become difficult, if not impossible. Proper focus is essential for clear physical sight. Proper focus is also essential for clear spiritual sight. Blurred spiritual sight was a problem for many of the people Jesus encountered during His earthly ministry. Blurred spiritual vision was especially problematic for the Pharisees, so much so that their unfocused eyes blinded them to the fact that Jesus was the promised Messiah and hardened their hearts to His message of the salvation, light, and life found only in Him.

It is ironic that the first time Jesus proclaimed, "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12), was as He addressed the Pharisees in the temple court near the treasury (the place where the offerings were gathered). Historically, the Pharisees were aware of the messianic prophecies about light found in the Old Testament. The Pharisees would have read and studied such prophecies as Isaiah 42:7 where God promised to give His people "a light for the nations, to open the eyes that are blind." Jesus used this visual description because He knew it was one the Jews would understand. Despite this, the Pharisees rejected Jesus' testimony that He is the Messiah (*The Lutheran Study Bible*, Concordia Publishing House, page 1785, and study notes for John 8:12–13, page 1796).

Following this confrontation between Jesus and the Pharisees in the temple, He and His disciples encountered a man born blind. Read about what happened in **John 9:1–41**.

Jesus Heals a Man Born Blind

9 As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. ² And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" ³ Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. ⁴ We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. ⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." ⁶ Having said these things, he spit on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man's eyes with the mud ⁷ and said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing.

⁸ The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar were saying, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" ⁹ Some said, "It is he." Others said, "No, but he is like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." ¹⁰ So they said to him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" ¹¹ He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud and anointed my eyes and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' So I went and washed and received my sight." ¹² They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."

¹³ They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. ¹⁴ Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵ So the Pharisees again asked him how he had received his sight. And he said to them, "He put mud on my eyes, and I washed, and I see." ¹⁶ Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" And there was a division among them. ¹⁷ So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him, since he has opened your eyes?" He said, "He is a prophet."

¹⁸ The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight, until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight ¹⁹ and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" ²⁰ His parents answered, "We know that this is our son and that he was born

blind. ²¹ But how he now sees we do not know, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.” ²² (His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess Jesus to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue.) ²³ Therefore his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.”

²⁴ So for the second time they called the man who had been blind and said to him, “Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner.” ²⁵ He answered, “Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” ²⁶ They said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” ²⁷ He answered them, “I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?” ²⁸ And they reviled him, saying, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. ²⁹ We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.” ³⁰ The man answered, “Why, this is an amazing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. ³¹ We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him. ³² Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. ³³ If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” ³⁴ They answered him, “You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?” And they cast him out.

³⁵ Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” ³⁶ He answered, “And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?” ³⁷ Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you.” ³⁸ He said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him. ³⁹ Jesus said, “For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.” ⁴⁰ Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, “Are we also blind?” ⁴¹ Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, ‘We see,’ your guilt remains.

Reread verses 3–5. What are the “works of God” (verse 3) that were displayed in the man who was blind from birth? See also verse 7 and verse 38.

Jesus restored the man’s physical sight and delivered him from spiritual darkness.

How did the Pharisees react when the now sighted man was brought to them (verses 13–33)?

The Pharisees were spiritually blind to the fact that Jesus is the Christ. They cast the man out of the synagogue.

What does Jesus mean in verses 39–41?

Through faith in Jesus, all who are lost in spiritual blindness receive spiritual sight. All people are born spiritually blind, but by God’s grace are given spiritual sight. All who claim to gain spiritual sight on their own, such as the Pharisees, will remain spiritually blind. The Pharisees boasted of their knowledge of God. But they rejected Jesus. This rejection was the sin that condemned them. This remains so for all who reject Jesus today. (*People’s Bible Commentary John*, Gary P. Baumler, Concordia Publishing House, pages 146 and 148. Used by permission.)

Based on this account from John, what one word can be substituted for spiritual sight?

The word is faith.

Many people daily face chaotic situations. Though they may not find themselves cast out or running for their lives, they face problems and situations that are physically and emotionally draining. When we find ourselves in such situations, Jesus helps us to keep our eyes focused on Him. His power, guidance, and love as our good Shepherd leads us to safety from sin, death, and Satan.

The Proper Focus

As you earlier read, the main verse for this Snapshot is Hebrews 12:2a. Carefully read each Scripture passage referenced below. Briefly describe what each says about how Jesus helps us keep our eyes fixed on Him.

Psalms 25:4–5 Jesus leads us in the truth and teaches us.

⁴ Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths. ⁵ Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all the day long.

Psalms 119:18 Jesus opens our eyes so we know His Law and the love God shows us through it.

¹⁸ Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.

Psalms 119:105 God's Word (both Jesus Himself and God's written Word) show us the way of salvation.

¹⁰⁵ Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

Psalms 121:1–4 Jesus helps us and keeps us.

¹ I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? ² My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth. ³ He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber.

⁴ Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.

Acts 2:38 Through Baptism, we receive forgiveness of sins and faith by the power of the Holy Spirit.

³⁸ And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Luke 22:14–20 When we partake of Holy Communion, our sins are forgiven and our faith is strengthened.

¹⁴ And when the hour came, he reclined at table, and the apostles with him. ¹⁵ And he said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. ¹⁶ For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." ¹⁷ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, "Take this, and divide it among yourselves. ¹⁸ For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." ¹⁹ And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." ²⁰ And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.

John 15:5 Without Jesus, we can do nothing. The branches (us) cannot survive without the Vine (Jesus).

⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

Acts 2:42–47 Fellow believers serve God together and stay focused on Jesus through study of the Word and partaking of Holy Communion.

⁴² And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ⁴³ And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. ⁴⁴ And all who believed were together and had all things in common. ⁴⁵ And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶ And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Share with those in your small group the two lists you compiled in the "Viewfinding Activity" at the beginning of this session. Then pray together, asking Jesus to help you remove the distractions you listed and help you to focus on Him.

When Time Allows

•Read the story of Michael Hingson at: www.lwml.org → Bible Studies → Long/Multi-Session → Every Picture Can Tell God's Story → Study Guide → pages 19-20.

https://unite-production.s3.amazonaws.com/tenants/lwml/attachments/134127/20422-EveryPictureCanTellGodsStory_StudyGuide.pdf

- Incorporate the entire Bible study into your personal devotion time.
- Use the long Bible study as the basis for a workshop or retreat. Many helps and suggestions are included in the "Every Picture Can Tell God's Story" Leader Guide.
- Use your own photographs (Christmas? Convention? Retreat? Vacation? Family Event?) to create a witness album (see link above).

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, You created for us a perfect world. We ruined Your perfection with our sins. Daily we live with sins' consequences. We need Your help! Thank You for paying the price we owe for our sins through Your death on the cross. Thank You for conquering sin, Satan, and eternal death with Your resurrection. At all times, help us keep our eyes fixed on You. Help us turn to You first for guidance. As the "author and perfecter of our faith," give us hearts that trust in and follow Your direction. In Your name we pray. Amen.

Closing Hymn Say or sing together "I Want to Walk as A Child of the Light" (*LSB* 411) or "Renew Me, O Eternal Light" (*LSB* 704; *LW* 373; *TLH* 398)

*Third Snapshot of "Every Picture Can Tell God's Story" by Diane J. Grebing
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