

TOZ
20/20

NEW YEAR NEW VISION
JANUARY 5 - 26

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**LIFE GROUP LEADER
MATERIALS**

ABOUT THIS SERIES

Have you ever been in a situation when you couldn't see where you were going? Maybe you had to get up in the middle of the night and no lights were on in the house. Or maybe you were in a movie theater that was almost completely dark. In those moments—when we can't see what's happening around us, and are blind to the obstacles in front of us—our potential to trip or fall goes way up! But at the instant when someone turns on the light? All of a sudden, we're seeing 20/20. In the same way, faith can sometimes feel like walking in the dark.

When it comes what God wants for us and how He wants us to live out our faith, nothing seems clear—and that lack of clarity can create serious obstacles in our lives. Thankfully, about 2,000 years ago, God sent Jesus to turn on the "light" once and for all. In this series, we'll take a look at exactly what Jesus said and did to bring ultimate clarity to God's will for our lives. We'll discover that God is not only willing to shed light on every aspect of our faith and lives, but He's also willing to walk with us, so we never have to feel like we're walking blindly again.

WEEK 1

THE WAY WE SEE DETERMINES THE WAY WE LIVE.

"As Jesus approached Jericho, a blind beggar was sitting beside the road. When he heard the noise of a crowd going past, he asked what was happening. They told him that Jesus the Nazarene was going by. So he began shouting, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" "Be quiet!" The people in front yelled at him. But he only shouted louder, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" When Jesus heard him, he stopped and ordered that the man be brought to him. As the man came near, Jesus asked him, "What do you want me to do for you?" "Lord," he said. "I want to see!" And Jesus said, "All right, receive your sight! Your faith has healed you." Instantly the man could see, and he followed Jesus, praising God. And all who saw it praised God, too."

Luke 18:35-43, NLT

WEEK 1 SUMMARY

“Ignorance is bliss.” We've all probably heard this before, and there's some truth to it, right? After all, if you're ignorant to the number of calories in that slice of cake, or in that soft drink, we'd have less guilt and more bliss. There's only one problem with living this way: The bliss doesn't usually last! Why? Because eventually, the truth catches up with us— those extra calories will have an impact on our bodies. In a way, living in ignorance is a bit like living life with our eyes closed. And if you think about it, the same thing is true when it comes to our spiritual lives.

Sometimes we live in spiritual ignorance—sometimes even willingly. And though things may seem fine and blissful at first, that ignorance can have a negative impact on our faith and lives after a while. So is there a way we can make sure that we're living with our eyes opened? Interestingly, during His time on Earth, Jesus had several unique encounters with people who were blind physically and people who were blind spiritually. This week, as we take a close look at these interactions, we'll discover what Jesus said and did to open their eyes. It can also help us open our eyes and give our faith a 20/20 vision going forward.

LEADER NOTES

BIBLE READING PLAN

Day 1:

"First take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye." -Matthew 7:5

This is rarely the most exciting verse to read. No one wants to be told that there's something wrong with them. We'd all rather go around pointing out the flaws in others—that's way easier. But when it comes to seeing clearly—to having 20/20 spiritual vision—Jesus makes it clear that looking for the mistakes and sins of others isn't the best place to start. Instead, He says that we are to look at ourselves. And if we're able to do this honestly, we might not like what we find. Chances are, you've got some stuff in your life that you don't like, some habits that you can't break, some things that you can't quit. But here's the good news: We all do. Everyone has "planks" and "specks" in their own eyes. That's why Jesus came! He came to Earth to give His life for our "planks" and "specks." He came to take the punishment for them and then to give us His perfect record—His perfect right-standing, His perfect righteousness—before God. So we are just as forgiven and just as righteous before God as anyone else. We all stand equally forgiven and equally righteous because of Jesus. If we start to see our lives through that lens—that we are all forgiven sinners who all need Jesus—that's 20/20 spiritual vision.

Day 2:

"Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."

—Matthew 6:33, ESV

What are you looking for? That's a hard question, right? We get asked this question a lot when we're shopping in a store—by clerks who want to help us find the item or product we need. But when it comes to life—not just shopping—what are you looking for? Happiness? Peace? Comfort? Those are all valid answers. But Jesus offers us something better. "Seek first the kingdom of God." That's what we're supposed to be looking for. But what does that mean? Well, God's Kingdom is anywhere where His ways are the order of the day. Where love, justice, kindness, peace, joy, gentleness, forgiveness, goodness, and any of His attributes rule. It's where neighbors are loved and needs are taken care of. Where things are right and fair and true. So, what would it look like in your life to seek God's Kingdom today? And could it be true that what you're really looking for is God's Kingdom after all? Day 3: The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Galatians 5:22-23 If you're looking for a life that is defined by godliness, then these are your indicators. These are characteristics of God—who He is and what His heart is like. These are attributes of the fruit that His Spirit easily overflows with. While it's easy to look at this list like something to be checked off, that's not really how the Christian life works. Christianity is marked by having a relationship with God, who lives inside you through His Spirit, and who wants to produce this fruit in your life so you can overflow goodness like Him. But as we look for ways God wants to work in our lives, this list is a great place to start. Do you demonstrate love to the people in your life? Do you live joyfully? Do you feel like you bring peace to situations? How is your patience? As you ask yourself questions about each aspect of the fruit of the Spirit, you'll begin to get clarity on areas of your life where God wants to work. And you can invite Him to do that work in you through His Spirit inside of you. What are some aspects of the fruit of God's Spirit that you'd like Him to grow more in you? He wants to fill you to overflowing!

BIBLE READING PLAN - CONTINUED

Day 3:

"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." -Galatians 5:22-23

If you're looking for a life that is defined by godliness, then these are your indicators. These are characteristics of God—who He is and what His heart is like. These are attributes of the fruit that His Spirit easily overflows with. While it's easy to look at this list like something to be checked off, that's not really how the Christian life works. Christianity is marked by having a relationship with God, who lives inside you through His Spirit, and who wants to produce this fruit in your life so you can overflow goodness like Him. But as we look for ways God wants to work in our lives, this list is a great place to start. Do you demonstrate love to the people in your life? Do you live joyfully? Do you feel like you bring peace to situations? How is your patience? As you ask yourself questions about each aspect of the fruit of the Spirit, you'll begin to get clarity on areas of your life where God wants to work. And you can invite Him to do that work in you through His Spirit inside of you. What are some aspects of the fruit of God's Spirit that you'd like Him to grow more in you? He wants to fill you to overflowing!

Day 4:

"Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." -John 8:32

Freedom. We all want it, yet somehow even in a "free society," so many of us feel trapped by either our circumstances, our choices, or maybe a combination of the two. So, what is the truth that Jesus is talking about in this verse? What is it that we need to know in order to be set free? The simple answer is the life and love of Jesus. That's the truth. The truth is that God sent His Son to come to Earth and live as a Man. The truth is that while Jesus lived a sinless life, He let Himself be killed so He could pay the punishment for our sins and give us His sinless record. The truth is that even though He died, God raised Him from the dead, conquering death because one day, He will raise us all from death to life. The truth is that Jesus ascended back home to Heaven, but He sent His very Spirit to live inside of us so we can be closer than close with Him and walk through life with Him. The truth is that, as His followers, we have started a relationship with Him that will last forever. Knowing that is freedom because no circumstances can take that truth away. No decisions can keep us from the unending and ultimate love of Jesus. Freedom is found in who Jesus says He is, what He has done for us, and how much He loves us.

Day 5:

"Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path." - Psalm 119:105

It's hard to see in the dark. Have you ever gone camping or been walking somewhere late at night and thought you heard something? Maybe it was the sound of a wild animal, or maybe it was footsteps or something crashing in the darkness. That type of stuff is scary, not to mention dangerous. Yet, at the same time, life is a bit like a midnight hike. It's hard to understand what we're doing, why we're here, and where we're going. But then, that person at the front of the hike turns on a flashlight, and all of a sudden, we can see the trail and the trees, and we have a better understanding of what's going on. In a lot of ways, Jesus is like the Person leading the hike. And His flashlight? The Bible. That's the simple truth of this verse. God's Word is a light to our feet. It's here to illuminate the dark places, to help us see what's around us, so that we're not scared of the noises in the dark (or to let us know what noises we should be scared of!). If the Bible isn't a part of your life, then you're living in the dark without a flashlight. Open up this book. See what it has to say. Then, look at the world around you and see what God is trying to show you with His light!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. If you had to give up one of your five senses, which one would you choose to lose?
2. When it comes to miracles, Jesus healed several blind people throughout His time on Earth. Do you think there's any significance to why, out of all the five senses, Jesus was always giving people sight?
3. We're all familiar with the phrase, "Ignorance is bliss." So, what does that actually mean? Can you think of a time when you chose to stay "ignorant" even when you knew that wasn't the best thing for you?
4. The truth is it always costs something to change. When was a time when you had to give up something to experience change for the better?
5. Read Luke 18:35-41. Why do you think Jesus asked Bartimaeus the question that He did?
6. How would you have answered that question if you were in Bartimaeus' shoes?
7. What are some areas in your life where Jesus may be offering you a better way, yet you're choosing not to see it?
8. What are the blind spots in your life—the things you may not be willing to change?
9. How can our group help you stay aware of these things?

20/20

WEEK 1 - LEADERS GUIDE

LEADER NOTES

WEEK 2

SEEING A BETTER FUTURE ALWAYS REQUIRES SACRIFICE.

"You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

-Matthew 16:16b, NLT

"From then on Jesus began to tell his disciples plainly that it was necessary for him to go to Jerusalem, and that he would suffer many terrible things at the hands of the elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of religious law. He would be killed, but on the third day he would be raised from the dead. But Peter took him aside and began to reprimand him for saying such things. "Heaven forbid, Lord," he said.

"This will never happen to you."

-Matthew 16:21-22, NLT

"If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it."

-Matthew 16:24-25, NLT

WEEK 2 SUMMARY

In just about every good story, there's a hero—someone who is willing to sacrifice something personal for a greater cause. Think about your favorite movie or book, chances are you'll see a hero giving up something—sometimes even themselves—for the good of someone or something else. While it's amazing to see someone acting in a sacrificial way, if we're honest, we love the idea of sacrifice mainly when someone else is doing the sacrificing. Because, well, let's face it: We all hate denying ourselves and telling ourselves No! In other words, we can see the value in sacrificing something for a greater good, but at the same time, we're blinded by our own fear of sacrifice—so much so that we often aren't willing to do it ourselves.

But what if there is a way to overcome that fear? What if there is a way to truly open up our eyes and see past the pain of sacrifice? The good news is that, thanks to Jesus, there is—and the answer has to do with what we're looking at. This week, as we take a look at how Jesus modeled personal sacrifice, He'll show us exactly what we needed to set our eyes on, to not only see the value of sacrifice, but also the better future on the other side of it.

LEADER NOTES

BIBLE READING PLAN

Day 1:

“Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”
-John 15:13

Sacrifice is the ultimate act of love. This happens every day in our relationships. For example, spouses have to constantly let one another decide things like where to eat and what movie to watch. And while those two examples may sound trivial, think about how difficult their lives would be if neither one of them was willing to sacrifice. What if two people wanted to eat at different places, but neither was willing to budge? That’s the opposite of love. Love, as Jesus clearly explains here, is laying down our life for our friends. That doesn’t mean we have to die for everyone we know—although Jesus did!—but it does mean we’re called to choose others as our first priority. This type of life is both radical and challenging, but imagine what the church would look like if it was full of people who were constantly trying to serve one another! That’s what we’re looking for with this verse. Who is someone in your life you can make a loving sacrifice for today? How would your life look differently if you lived with this verse in mind this week?

Day 2:

“Whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it.”
-Luke 9:24

This verse seems completely backwards. What does it mean to lose our lives in order to save them? How is that even possible? For an answer, we need to look no further than Jesus. See, even though Jesus is the Son of God, He surrendered His life for God’s purpose. He was willing to do whatever the Father had for Him to do—even when that meant death. And when Jesus gave up His life, He saved the entire world. While we won’t save the entire world, (it has already been saved!), this verse promises that our lives will be saved when we lose our lives for God. What does that look like? It looks like surrendering our will to God’s will, choosing to give our lives up and over to Him. God promises that when we hold our lives with an open hand, we’ll find that He has such a fuller, richer life in store for us than we could have ever experienced if we held our lives with tight reins. God calls us to let go of our tight grip and hold His hand for the ride.

Day 3:

“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” -Mark 10:45

This verse never gets less shocking. How could this be true? If you want to put yourself in Jesus’ shoes, imagine an anthill. You’ve seen them, maybe in your yard or in a park. Picture you’re looking down at an anthill one day, and suddenly you become an ant. Imagine your mind in an ant’s body. What would you do? How would you go about life as an ant? Think about how much more you’d know than the other ants! They’d be so busy trying to build their little dirt pile while you on the other hand know that things like oceans and continents exist. They’d seem so small to you. That’s an attempt at explaining how Jesus might’ve felt. Yet, what did He do with this power? He gave it up. He served people. In fact, He died for us. What would it take for you to let ants kill you as a sacrifice for their greater good? The comparison isn’t perfect, but it does bring into light just how shocking Jesus’ life was. And if He chose to serve, who are we to do otherwise?

BIBLE READING PLAN - CONTINUED

Day 4:

"He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" - Romans 8:32

When was the last time you really wanted something from God? Like really really wanted something? Maybe it was trivial—like a certain Christmas present as a child. Or maybe it was something serious, like the healthy recovery of someone you love. When you were praying and asking God for these things, did you ever wonder if He'd come through for you? Isn't it frustrating to know that God is all-powerful and all-knowing, yet we still have to wonder if He's going to give us what we want? Here's the good news: He already gave us everything we could ever want. Maybe you got that Christmas present as a child or maybe you didn't. Maybe the someone you loved got better or maybe they didn't. But what we did get is the opportunity to have a relationship with God that will last forever and on into Heaven. And there, sickness doesn't exist. It's not just that everyone "gets better"—it's that they're already perfectly healthy. What Paul is saying in this verse is that we don't have to wonder about what God will give us. Yes, there is no guarantee of what we'll get in life on this side of Heaven. Some people's lives will be better than others. But when we die and go to Heaven, when we see God in all His glory, we'll have no doubt about who He is and about how much He has given us.

Day 5:

"My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise." -Psalm 51:17

Do you ever get tired of hearing about sacrifice and service in church? Does it ever feel like they're asking too much from you? Sometimes, living life as a Christian can be exhausting. It can be completely overwhelming to do all the "good things" we can do while trying to avoid all the "bad things" too. But what if God was less focused on our actions and more concerned with our hearts? What if instead of trying to put on a fake smile at church this week, you prayed what was actually on your heart? What if instead of singing worship songs that you don't resonate with, you talked to God about what was actually going on? The truth is, the best thing we can give to God is our true selves. That's all He wants. This week, keep this verse in the back of your mind. Ask God to open up your eyes to see what it means for you, and what it might look like for you to offer Him your true self just as you are.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Who is your favorite superhero and why?
2. Why is sacrifice such an important part of every superhero story?
3. Why do you think we look up to people (real or fiction) who are willing to sacrifice something for others?
4. At the same time, even if we think sacrifice is such a great thing, why is it so hard for each of us to sacrifice things for others? Even though we value this virtue in others, why is it so hard to live it out ourselves?
5. What's something in your life you're having a hard time sacrificing? This can be little (like eating out too much, watching Netflix instead of hanging out with the kids, or not living within a budget), or something big. Whatever you want to share.
6. Read Matthew 16:16-25. Why do you think the disciples, Peter specifically, were so against the idea of Jesus sacrificing Himself?
7. Read Matthew 16:24-25 again. What do these verses mean for your life?
8. How can our group help you live out those verses this week?

WEEK 3

**WE ARE HERE TO HELP OTHER
PEOPLE LEARN TO SEE.**

“You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor? Can you make it salty again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless.”

-Matthew 5:13, NLT

“You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house.”

-Matthew 5:14-15, NLT

“In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.”

-Matthew 5:16, NLT

WEEK 3 SUMMARY

Have you ever had a friend telling you about a new restaurant in town that you just HAD to try? Or a new movie they saw that you just HAD to see, too? When close friends make recommendations, we usually listen. Why? Because we trust them! But this isn't only true with restaurants and movies— it's also true when it comes to faith.

When faith becomes a real and powerful part of our lives, we wouldn't want to keep it to ourselves—we want to share Jesus and His amazing love with the people around us! But before others are willing to hear what we have to say about faith, the truth is, we need to first become the people who others will listen to. In other words, we need to build trust. But what does it look like to build trust and credibility with the people around us? How can we become the ones who turn on the light spiritually for others? This week, as we look at what Jesus had to say about being a light to the world, we'll discover what it looks like to build trust, and become people who can help others see faith more clearly than ever before.

LEADER NOTES

BIBLE READING PLAN

Day 1:

“Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.” -Matthew 5:16

It's easy to fall into the trap of doing good deeds in order to impress people or for them to make a big deal about it. Who doesn't want to be liked, right? But the reason we strive to do good deeds shouldn't be to bring attention to ourselves—it should be so others may see the Source of our good deeds and the reason behind what we do. That's a different challenge. Your role here isn't simply to do good things; it's to do things that help others see God more clearly. This way of living flies in the face of a world focused on likes and retweets because we aren't called to live for our own gratification and satisfaction. We're called to be the lenses through which people see God. So, how can you do that today? What are the ways you can live a life that helps others see God? What can you do to avoid falling back into the habit of doing things for your own recognition? Ask God to open your eyes to both see Him clearly and to see how you can help others do the same.

Day 2:

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. -Romans 12:2

Have you ever encountered someone who follows Jesus who seems different? Maybe they have a deep peace in the middle of a storm that life is throwing at them. Or they serve other people in a way that seems to come naturally. Or there's a genuine kindness that exudes from them. There's something about these types of people that draws our attention, right? They're people who don't quite fit into the “pattern of this world.” It's this type of “different” that Paul was encouraging the believers in Rome (and us!) to take on. Paul was saying that believers are supposed to be examples of Jesus to those who don't know Him. But, he explained, that in order to be “different,” in order to show Jesus to the world, it takes a transformation. And that transformation comes from renewing your mind. So, how do you renew your mind? Jesus can help you through His Spirit and His Word. As you read the Bible, God's Spirit inside of you can teach you to see yourself and the world through the lens of His Truth. He can break through the “patterns of this world,” that you're so used to living by, and instead teach you the ways of His Kingdom. And over time, as He teaches you to see the world the way He does, you'll find that you're becoming “different” too.

Day 3:

"Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity." -1 Timothy 4:12

Do you ever feel like you're too young to be an example for others? Or do you ever wonder if you've been a Christian long enough to actually talk about the things you've read in the Bible? Sometimes, we're our own worst enemies. Before we even get in the game, we disqualify ourselves from being able to play. Paul wrote this verse to Timothy, a younger disciple of his, and his encouragement was simple—get in the game! God has qualified you. You don't have to wait for permission to start living a life you know is true to who God is and who God made you to be. Everyone is looking for an example to follow, so why not be that example? Easier said than done, of course. But that's the challenge Paul gave to his young follower, and it's a challenge that stands for us today. How can you be an example for other believers today? How can you live in such a way that shows other people God's love?

Day 4:

"Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do." -Philippians 3:17

There once was a young man, a freshman in college, who was beginning to question faith and Christianity and what it all meant. He had heard of an older student who believed in Jesus, so he went to ask what it was like and why Christianity was the way to go. They met and talked about faith, life, and Jesus, and after that conversation the Christian student said, "Come live with me for a few days. Follow me around and see how I live. Then you can decide for yourself whether you want to follow Jesus." That sounds like a crazy invitation, right? Would you be confident enough in the way you're living your life to invite someone to look over your shoulder and decide if a relationship with Jesus was right for them? At first, this invitation seems a little arrogant. How could that guy think that his life was enough to convince someone else to follow Jesus? But it wasn't arrogant. It was honest. He just offered the young man an example to follow. Who do you have in your life that is your model for a Christian life? And who are you an example to?

BIBLE READING PLAN - CONTINUED

Day 5:

"In everything set them an example by doing what is good." -Titus 2:7

This verse is pretty straightforward. Not much to expand upon here, right? Set an example by doing good. How hard can that be? The message all week has been about being an example, about giving others someone to look to. Here's why this is important. For many people, you could be the person who God wants to use to invite them into a relationship with Him. That's a powerful thought! You are a walking billboard for Jesus, and you may just be the person God uses in someone else's life. That's both a big responsibility and a big load of pressure. But here's what's great: All you have to do is try. You will fail. Every day you'll fail to be an example of Jesus. You'll get mad at your kids, cuss at someone in traffic, and think a lot of things that are probably far worse than anything you'd be willing to share. But God still might use you as an example of Jesus. That's how good He really is. So, whether you're willing to be used by God or not, He's ready to send you out to others. He's ready to use you to show others the power of His love and His grace. Who knows—maybe He's got plans to use you today.

LEADER NOTES

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What was the last great movie you saw?
2. How many people did you talk to about this movie?
3. Do you have people who you trust with suggestions for restaurants, movies, books, etc.?
4. What makes someone trustworthy to give out recommendations?
5. When it comes to faith, who are the people you listen to and why?
6. Why is it so important for people's actions to line up with their message? Why does the phrase "practice what you preach" actually have significance?
7. In a world where it's easy to create a certain appearance or reputation, why is it so valuable to have people you can trust?
8. Now, let's look at ourselves. Are you credible? Is your life lining up with your beliefs so that others can see it and trust you? Would anyone take your recommendation on faith? These are hard questions, so take as much time as you need to answer them.