

Friday Night:

"In a desert land he found him, in a barren and howling waste. He shielded him and cared for him; he guarded him as the apple of his eye, like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them aloft."

Deuteronomy 31:10-11

During the first day of class this semester, my professor had someone read these verses from Deuteronomy. Then, she had everyone in the class pick up an apple from a large basket. She told us to study our apple, to write down its characteristics, and to commit it to memory. When class ended, we gave our apples back, and she had us try to pick out our exact apple the next class. Long story short, I did not pick out the right apple.

My professor had our class do this activity to demonstrate that each and every one of us are an "apple of God's eye." And you, too, are the apple of God's eye. You are favored and known. You are God's, and He calls you beloved.

God is focused on you. God always cares about you.

When you feel lost, and life feels overwhelmingly blurry, God sees you and your life, with all of its mess and struggles, in focus. Whatever you are going through right now, it is known by the God who created the whole world. You are known. You are loved.

God's focus on you means that God is actively working in your life to meet your needs and remind you that you are loved. When Jesus first appeared to his disciples, he showed them his hands and side to remind them that they are in the presence of the One who loves them unfailingly. He showed them his hands and side to remind them that they are image-bearers of God and they worthy. And Jesus appears among us still and does the same for you.

How does it feel to hear that you are the apple of God's eye?

Do you believe this is true? Could you believe this more fully?

What do you want God to know about your life right now?

Saturday Morning:

"On a Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, "Women, you are set free from your infirmity." Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God." Luke 13:10-13

Since I first got my permit and began driving, I have only run two red lights. The first red light I ran because I was talking to my friend who was sitting in the passenger seat, and I was looking at her instead of the light. The second one I ran because I was looking at the road instead of up at the light. I wasn't paying attention and I missed an important signal, one meant to keep me safe and to help me thrive.

I think a lot of people, including myself, live life like that. We live life bent over, much like this woman Jesus healed. We fall into the trap of focusing on too many things that really don't matter and therefore not focusing on God. When you aren't paying attention, when you aren't focused on God, you miss the ways God is moving in your life. You miss Jesus.

Do you know the first thing this woman probably saw when she was finally able to stand? Jesus. Do you know the first thing the blind people saw when healed throughout the gospels? Jesus.

When you choose to stand tall and focus on Jesus, you encounter him. It's when we are focused on Jesus that He begins to redeem our distractions, blind spots, and the blurry parts of our lives.

There isn't any one correct way to focus on Jesus, but I suggest prayer, reading scripture, silence, faith-based friendships, time with youth group, being part of a Bible Study, and coming to worship. Find the things that point your focus to God and keep doing them! You will encounter Jesus more and more.

What keeps you bent over and distracted?

This woman is set free. Is there something in your life from which you want to be set free?

What do you need to look away from this morning, to have your focus fully on God today?

Saturday night:

"He must become greater; I must become less." John 3:30

When I was in middle school, an elderly woman at my church became sick. I asked my youth pastor if the youth group could make cards for her, and we did just that.

My mom told me the idea was kind and loving. But my response was not one of humility... instead I asked my mom "She knew it was my idea and not someone else's, right?" I felt so ashamed when my mom looked at me in disappointment. Instead of giving the rightful credit to the Holy Spirit for the idea, I had managed to make it all about me. I desired the credit and to be the center of attention, and God was not my focus.

To truly focus on God, you have to stop focusing on some other things; you have to focus less on yourself. As you choose to focus more and more on God and less on yourself, you begin to recognize God's presence in others. You begin to see as God sees. You see the hungry, the poor, the afraid, and the grieving; they are brought into focus.

The Holy Spirit begins to pour through you as you focus on God. It doesn't take some huge commitment. All it takes is choosing to focus on God and you begin to see the ways you can be a part of answered prayers.

Focusing on God and others is being an image-bearer of God. Knowing that you are made in the image of God, that you are a masterpiece, is the life God wants for you. It is the life that frees you to see the needs of others, and empowers you to love them.

What do you think it means to see as God sees?

What would it mean for your life if you focus on what God focuses on?

Are there people that God is bringing into clear focus around you?