

Through the Lens

Focusing on Matthew 25

Lessons & Activities that
Challenge Our Eyes
to Open Our Hearts

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Dedication

To Lucia Hutchison Oerter ...

whose name means “light” and whose smile radiates God’s love to all those she serves. [A.L.L.]

To Courtney L. Kubly ...

whose focus on faith offers a lens for others to see opportunities for service. [P.V.W.]

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreward	5
Introduction	7
Week 1 • Overview	9
Week 2 • The Hungry	15
Week 3 • The Thirsty	19
Week 4 • The Stranger	25
Week 5 • The Poor	31
Week 6 • The Sick	37
Week 7 • The Imprisoned	43
Resources	49

FOREWARD

In *Through the Lens*...

- ▶ a camera helps us frame the subject
- ▶ a telescope opens a range of possibilities
- ▶ a magnifying glass enlarges our view
- ▶ a periscope lets us see around barriers
- ▶ a pair of glasses guides us to choose the best focus
- ▶ a microscope allows us to identify the need
- ▶ binoculars serve to extend our vision.

Through the Lens combines several themes: a variety of lenses that help improve our vision, a Bible story about people focusing on faith, and a frame on Jesus' teachings that helps us see and serve God. Using a theme serves like a lens—focusing participants

on something tangible to bring to life an intangible concept.

Activities used in church, home, and school provide many ways for children, youth, and adults to learn both how we see the world around us and how we see God. Merging the study of how light moves through lenses and the study of the “When-did-we-see-you?” verses of Matthew 25 provides opportunities for meaningful conversations—both about living life in light of scientific truths and living life in the light of faith. The real world focus on lenses provides a construct for shining a light—literally—on the spiritual focus of where and how we see God. The study challenges participants to find their own answer, then, to the ultimate question – “How do we serve God?”

<i>Week</i>	<i>Theme</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Lens</i>	<i>Scripture</i>
One	Overview	Framing the Subject	Camera	Matthew 25:31-40 (41-46) ▶ The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats
Two	The Hungry	Exploring a Range	Telescope	John 6:3-13 ▶ The Feeding of the 5,000
Three	The Thirsty	Enlarging Our View	Magnifying Glass	John 4:1-24 ▶ The Woman at the Well
Four	The Stranger	Seeing around Barriers	Periscope	Genesis 18:1-8; Leviticus 19:33-34; Hebrews 13:2 ▶ The Welcoming of Strangers
Five	The Poor	Choosing to Focus	Eyeglasses	Mark 12:38-44 ▶ The Widow's Mite
Six	The Sick	Identifying the Need	Microscope	Luke 10:25-37 ▶ The Good Samaritan
Seven	The Imprisoned	Extending Our Vision	Binoculars	Luke 17:11-19 ▶ The Healing of Ten Lepers

INTRODUCTION

What?

Through the Lens is a series of seven lessons/stories, with activities for each, to help children, youth, and adults in congregations, families, and schools explore and experience Jesus' teaching on seeing—and serving—God with the hungry, thirsty, stranger, poor, sick, and imprisoned.

Resources in each segment are organized into:

Heading

Week / Subject / Title

Lens

Tool used to explore the theme

Look Up

Bible story that is the focal point of the message

Locate

Teaching tools needed to present the lesson/tell the story

Lead

Lesson that combines the lens and the Bible story and challenges learners of all ages to respond to Jesus's teachings in ways that minister to and with God's people.

Learn

Suggestions for six activities to help participants see Jesus and serve God in engaging ways.

Each of the seven stories and response suggestions of *Through the Lens* can be supplemented and expanded with lessons and activities from the corresponding book, *Seeing Jesus: Social Justice Activities for Today Based on Matthew 25* (Wezeman, Phyllis Vos. Alameda, CA: The Pastoral Center, 2020.). Charts in the Resource section of this book outline the themes and the methods used in the ten lessons for each of the *Seeing Jesus* chapters: Hungry, Thirsty, Stranger, Poor, Sick, and Imprisoned.

Where?

Through the Lens is intended for use in four main settings. They include:

Liturgical Services

- ▶ Children's Church
- ▶ Children's Liturgy of the Word
- ▶ Children's Message/Time

Leader-facilitated Education Classes

- ▶ Christian/Religious Education Programs
- ▶ Faith Formation Groups
- ▶ Sunday School Sessions
- ▶ Week-day Ministries
- ▶ Week-day Schools

Leader-led Intergenerational Gatherings

- ▶ Church Community Events
- ▶ Multi-family Groups

Parent-Child Sessions

- ▶ Parent-led Home Sessions

How?

Liturgical Services

Through the Lens may be used in liturgical settings that take place during a service of worship or in a program that occurs in a separate location. During worship, share the story and the scripture passage as an age-appropriate homily, message, or sermon. In a separate program such as Children's Church or Children's Liturgy of the Word, offer the message as part of a lesson. If additional activities are needed in separate programs, refer to the list for the lesson and pick those that are suitable for the group.

Leader-facilitated Education Classes

During Christian/Religious Education programs and faith formation groups, on Sundays and weekdays, *Through the Lens* may be used in churches and schools. In addition to sharing the messages, enhance each segment with the activities. To extend each lesson, refer to the Resource section for charts of activities from the chapters of

the corresponding book, *Seeing Jesus: Social Justice Activities for Today Based on Matthew 25*.

Leader-led Intergenerational Gatherings

For sessions involving individuals and groups from the congregation, several families, or even parent-child events, there are many choices. If this type of gathering is held on a weekly basis, follow the suggestions for Liturgical Settings or Leader-facilitated Education Classes. If it is held as a one-time function, consider setting up a station for each of the seven themes with a storyteller and activity leaders for the topic. Enhance the session by singing songs and by providing snacks.

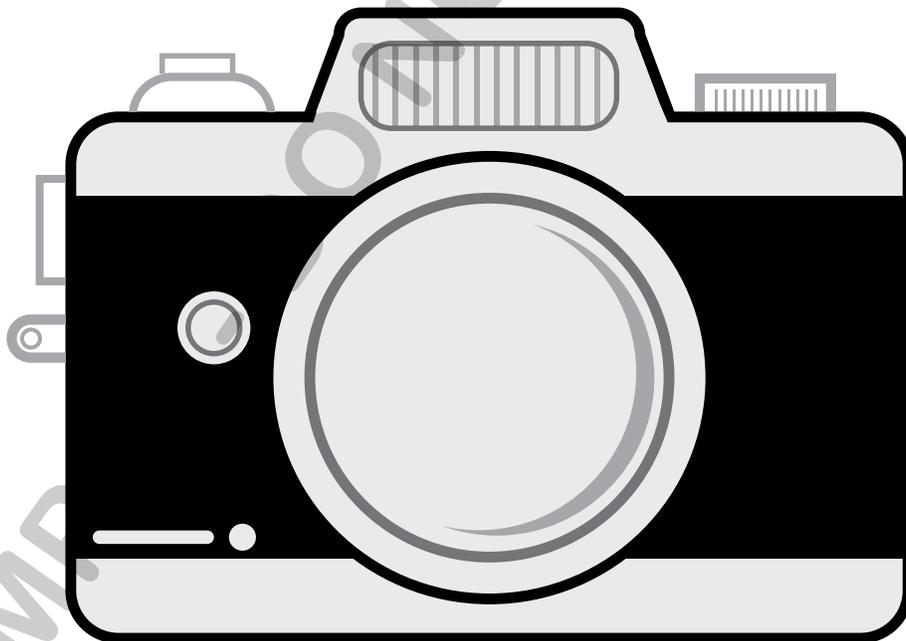
Parent-led Home Sessions

For parent-led sessions at home, share the story during family gatherings at meals or another time of the day and follow-up by doing the activities, one a day or several at a time.

WEEK 1 • OVERVIEW

Framing the Subject

A camera uses a lens to frame the subject so we can focus on what is important.



Framing the Subject

Look Up

Jesus uses a story to frame the image of God so we can see God's presence in the world.

Matthew 25:31-40

[Jesus said:] "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left.

"Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.'

"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?'

"And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of

these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'"

Locate

- ▶ Bible
- ▶ Camera

Lead

We can't take a photo of God, right? [Hold up a camera and pretend to take a photograph.] God is unseen, like the air around us, but wouldn't it be amazing if we could take a picture of God! While Jesus did not have a camera, he did use a story to give us word pictures about God.

In Matthew 25, verses 34 through 40, Jesus tells a parable—an ordinary story with an extraordinary meaning—to help us see God through six different lenses. A lens is something round, curved, and transparent that allows light to pass through. You and I have lenses in our eyes that bend the light to produce an image. Through our eyes, that image is transferred to the brain and we say we "see" it. A camera lens works in a similar way to capture its subject.

Lenses in our eyes help us see light reflected from far and wide, but the camera lens limits our vision to a portion of what the eye can view. The camera's viewfinder shows what part of the subject the lens will be able to see. [Help the learners understand where to find the lens and the viewfinder on the camera and to see how it limits the field of vision.]

Photographers often make a “finger frame” as a viewfinder to help them know what the camera has in focus and what they want to make the focus of the photograph. [Demonstrate making a “finger frame” by putting each thumb on an index finger to create a rectangle. Ask participants to do the same and focus on objects nearby.]

When we create limits we block out clutter or things that don't matter in order to study a subject more carefully, more closely. We find a focus on what is most important. In other words, the camera lens creates a frame around what we see so that the subject becomes more obvious for others to view.

Jesus' story in Matthew 25 frames six images that help us see God more clearly. Jesus shows us six views of who God is: we see God in the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the poor, the sick, and the imprisoned. In other words, Jesus says the way to know and love God is to see the needs of others and respond to them. So now that we know to focus our attention on each of the six subjects Jesus pictures for us, we will study each one through a different lens. In the process we will begin to frame our own God-given purpose in the world.

Learn

- ▶ Decorate an eight inch by ten inch frame to hold a “Family Portrait” of pictures the participants will draw or take in response to each lens they use to see the hungry, thirsty, stranger, poor, sick, and imprisoned throughout this series. Recycle a used frame or make one from cardboard or construction paper to hold the display. To prepare for the pictures, trim a letter-sized piece of paper or card stock to fit the frame. Then fold the paper into six equal sections by creasing it in half lengthwise and then in thirds horizontally. Set aside the frame and the paper to use for each week's reflective activity.
- ▶ Find directions for making an “Eye of God,” *Ojo de Dios*, ornament. Share supplies and instructions and guide the process of constructing the craft. While everyone is working, read the “Parable of the Sheep and the Goats,” Matthew 25:31-46, to the group. Discuss the actions of caring for others that Jesus looks for in God's faithful people. When the project is completed, invite everyone to hang their “Eye of God” and use it as a daily reminder that they are to see God in the faces of those in need around them.
- ▶ Learn more about finding meaning in scripture by understanding how to use photography as a method of telling a story. Play a Word Search game to review basic photography vocabulary, especially the words used in the children's message/family devotion for the Overview of the series, *Through the Lens*. Read each term, and its definition, and then find and circle the word on the activity sheet. By having the words to talk about images, participants learn how to notice and focus on meaning. Those skills are also important when interpreting scripture, especially in the word pictures Jesus used to describe God and concepts of faith.
- ▶ Play or sing the song “Open the Eyes of My Heart” by Michael W. Smith. Then, pray that each heart will be open to seeing God's image in the people around them everywhere in the world.
- ▶ Read the book *The Dot* (Reynolds, Peter H. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press, 2003) and explain that each person has the opportunity to make a difference in the world. The secret is to focus on what

we CAN do. Think together about one difference each listener could make by seeing God in the needs of those around them.

- ▶ Take a walk, inside or outside of a building, and encourage everyone to make a “finger frame” to view objects with more focus. Remind them that limiting what we see helps us notice important details. Invite the participants to focus on the same scene and describe what details they observe. Explain that God welcomes all of our points of view as we experience the world around us and try to see God.



WEEK 2 • THE HUNGRY

Exploring a Range

A telescope uses two lenses both to expand and to narrow our vision in order that we may focus clearly on important needs whether nearby or far away.



Exploring a Range

Look Up

Jesus feeds 5,000 people with five loaves and two fish, not by focusing on the whole crowd, but by seeing one little boy who was willing to share.

John 6:3-13

Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do.

Philip answered him, "Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?"

Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all. Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost." So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets.

Locate

- ▶ Bible
- ▶ Telescope

Lead

How do we see possibilities? [Hold up the telescope and look through the eyepiece.] Are possibilities far away or close by? [Keep looking through the eyepiece and move the telescope from a distant viewpoint to the faces of the listeners.]

Did you know that sometimes possibilities are disguised as problems? That's the lesson we learned last time when we discussed how Jesus said we see God. Do you remember the six possible ways to focus on—or see—God that we framed from our story? [Review the themes of Hungry, Thirsty, Stranger, Poor, Sick, and Imprisoned.]

Today we will narrow our field of vision from Matthew 25 to the first way Jesus mentions, the hungry. And, guess what lens we will use to discover where we find them? [Let them guess the telescope.] That's right! The telescope has two lenses that help us to see both far away and close by.

A basic telescope has two lenses that are each convex, one smaller, one larger. They work together to take in the light reflected from an image. [Point to the larger lens.] Then they reduce the size of the image with the second lens. [Explain or use a diagram to show how convex lenses curve inward to bend the light to make an image appear smaller and, therefore, closer to the eye.]

The way the telescope bends the light inward from the first lens to the smaller second lens reduces the size of the image so our eye can take more in. We can see far away images as though they were much nearer to us. The convex lens closest to your eye is called the “eyepiece lens.” The bigger lens at the opening or aperture is called the “objective lens.” The larger the aperture and objective lens, the bigger the field of vision and the farther we can see through the telescope. In other words, a telescope helps us see beyond our eye’s ability, and the second lens helps us narrow in and focus on objects as though they were close by. If we wanted to see the hungry, would we need to look far away or close by? [Elicit responses and then introduce the Bible story as the place to learn the answer.]

There is a familiar story from the Bible about Jesus feeding the hungry. The miraculous event is found in John 6:3-13. It’s the story of Jesus feeding 5,000 hungry people with five loaves and two fish. [Read aloud the story and invite any discussion.]

The idea of the two lenses of a telescope helps us better understand Jesus’ miracle by the Sea of Galilee. You see, the disciples looked at the big, hungry crowd and saw big problems of hunger. When we look at the “big picture” of hunger in the whole world, we can feel overwhelmed, too. The problem seems too big to comprehend. That’s what the disciples seemed to feel when they said to Jesus, “Six months wages could not buy enough bread for these people to eat.”

But Jesus adds a second lens. He narrowed in and reduced the size of the focus to the generosity of one small boy who was willing to share what he had. Jesus’ disciple, Andrew, had found the boy, but Jesus saw the possibilities.

Now some people understand the story literally, meaning that Jesus blessed the food and miraculously the loaves and fishes became enough to create twelve baskets of leftovers even after 5,000 people were fed. Others interpret the story as transformational, meaning that the generosity of the little boy and Jesus giving thanks for the goodness of God caused others to begin sharing the food they had as well. They believed that when Jesus had the people sit down in small groups, each one began to share what they had brought with each another. Perhaps changing people’s hearts is an even greater miracle than multiplying loaves and fishes.

Either way we interpret the story, whether we look far away at all the people who crowd this earth or whether we focus in on the community that surrounds us, we understand that there are hungry people everywhere and that God challenges us to feed them. And, when we offer the little we have to our hungry neighbors, we begin to see God.

Learn

- ▶ Act out the scene with the disciples trying to figure out what to do with the hungry crowd. Include the meaningful use of the telescope to help tell the story.
- ▶ Add the first “Family Portrait” to the top left square formed on the folded paper for the decorated frame from Week 1. Create a picture of how family members did or will help the hungry. Consider questions such as: *What in the discussion of scripture or telescope lenses inspired you to take action? What did or will that action look like?* Emphasize that artistry is not as important as capturing the way they visualize seeing God by serving the

hungry. They may want to add the phrase “The Hungry” as a title or caption.

- ▶ Check with a local food pantry to learn needs and gather items to share from your own kitchen, from neighbors, or local stores. Consider organizing a neighborhood food drive, or gathering a group for a scavenger hunt for especially needed items and/or not-often-donated goods.
- ▶ Plan and prepare together a meatless meal to discover healthier eating habits and to remember that not everyone can afford to have meat as their main dish. Consider making a family tradition of finding new recipes for meatless meals and of setting a day once a month or more often as a reminder to be grateful for plenty and to help combat hunger. Make contributions from the money saved to organizations dedicated to fighting hunger like Heifer

International (1 World Avenue, Little Rock, AR 72202; www.heifer.org).

- ▶ Read the children’s book *Petra’s Pier Picnic* (Wezeman, Phyllis Vos and Oscar Joyo, Illustrator. Chicago, IL: ACTA Publications, 2019) to explore the topic of hunger in our own neighborhoods. Let Petra’s adventure on the pier and the lessons she learns on her birthday guide your own discussion about when and how we see the needs around us and the many ways we can make a difference.
- ▶ Search the internet for songs based on the miracle story from John 6:3-13 using the phrase “Songs for the Bible story of Feeding the 5,000.” Then listen to examples, in many styles, from children’s tunes to hymn texts to worship melodies. After sampling a selection of music, create your own song to a familiar tune or a made-up one to communicate the importance of caring for the hungry.