

Some version of this conversation has happened a hundred times in the Bowen home. I'll come home and be telling Lisa about my day, and I mention that I met so-and-so. Instantly, this triggers an avalanche of questions: "Oh, really? Where is he from? What does he do? Is he married? Does he have kids? How's he doing?"

And I'd appreciate it if some of you men can back me up on this, but it might just be me. I have the same answer to all of those questions, every time. "I don't know." We talked for ten minutes, twenty minutes, half an hour, it doesn't matter. Sometimes, we might even be talking about someone I've known for years, but I still don't know! Those questions just do not occur to me. We fulfill the mission that brought us together; sometimes that means we talk about the mission, but those other things don't come up! So now you know how to pray for me! Lisa too!

Contrast my obliviousness with the heart of my sweet little Maggie, who was listening to a CD where the lyric talked about someone whose "heart was as black as night." This little girl instantly got her parent's attention and told them that they needed to pray for the singer and tell her about Jesus, so He could help her with such a terrible heart problem. It's a sweet story, but it's also a challenging example of eyes and ears that are open to a glaring need for Jesus. When I hear a song, all I'm thinking about is me: what does this song say to me, do for me, do I like it? That's what I'm talking about; selfishness that closes my eyes to the needs of those around me.

When I want to get myself off the hook, though, I point out that some of what's going on is simply personality. We shouldn't overlook differences in the way God wired each one of us. Part of the issue is my introverted personality. But not all.

I might also point out the very real differences between men and women. Men and women were created differently, for different purposes. (Reality and I have just committed hate speech, but there you have it.) Usually, as a result of the way we were made, men tend to be more mission-oriented, and women tend to be more relationally-oriented. Part of the issue is that I come at things with a different purpose in mind.

And that's where I want the explanation to stop, with personality and purpose. And the reason I want to stop there is because we haven't gotten to sin yet. Being a mission-focused introvert isn't a sin, and so I wish that were the whole explanation. But it isn't.

Part of the explanation for why I don't know some fairly basic information about the people that I've interacted with is because I am a selfish sinner, more concerned about myself than I am about you. And as we saw last week from 2 Cor., one reason for that is that I am still recovering from closed heart surgery. I miss some open doors because I don't have an open heart.

But today I want to press on to another challenge: Even someone with an open heart will miss open doors if they don't have *open eyes*. If my eyes are focused on myself, then I will miss the needs right in front of me. And so what I need is for Jesus to open my *eyes* as well as my heart.

Now, the eyes and the heart work together: an open heart is what moves you to open your eyes. But while eyes and heart are meant to work together, they are capable of working independently. The open heart is about *affection*; open eyes are dealing with *information*. It's possible to have a heart full of love, and to be blind. Think of it this way: your heart might be wide open to your best friend, but it's probably happened to you at some point that a situation arose in your friend's life and you didn't hear about it until later. This is what leads someone to say, "Why didn't you call me?" Or something like that.

What happened there? You loved that person the whole time; you just didn't know they needed help! And God bless me, and you, too, if you're like me, because that's how I am. I love you all (Do you know that? I hope you do.) I love you, but I don't always *see* you, or see your needs. I need open eyes! The open heart desires to help, but that doesn't mean that the eyes automatically see the need! You have to be *looking* for it, which means disciplining your eyes, training them to see like Jesus saw!

And the reason why we need to see the distinction is so that we don't give somebody heart medicine when what they need is eyedrops. Helping someone to *feel* more loving towards others doesn't automatically enable them to *identify* those people who are in special need of gospel love. Here's the point: the gospel needs to work on your eyes in addition to your heart. You need gospel *awareness* just as much as you need gospel *affections*.

The two proverbs that we read give us two sides of the coin when it comes to your eyes. A bountiful eye, a wide-open eye, leads to blessing, but whoever hides his eyes or closes his eyes will get many a curse. Open eyes: blessings. Closed eyes: curses. That's biblical motivation for opening your eyes, and a warning against closing them!

I hope you noticed that the burden of both proverbs was physical – the need in question was for bread. Open eyes see the need of the poor, and they meet that need by feeding the poor. Do not lose sight of that! Open your eyes to the poor.

But I also want to focus our attention on the poor in Spirit, who need to be fed with another kind of bread: they need the bread of life, which came down from heaven. And so look again at John 4:34-36, which ties both the physical and spiritual need for bread together. Jesus and the disciples were hungry, and so the disciples went to get bread. Meanwhile, Jesus met the woman at the well, and saved her soul. When the disciples came back, Jesus was full! Full of joy, because He had eaten heavenly food with this woman.

Where did Jesus find this bread? Jesus looked out into the harvest field of people, lifting up His eyes to see a soul who was white for the harvest. And that’s the exhortation He has for the disciples and for us. While we’re spending our days in search of daily bread, we need to lift up our eyes to the harvest! *Look!* Jesus says, there are people who need the gospel all around you! Don’t miss them because of your routine of eat/work/sleep/repeat! Gather fruit for eternal life, so that you both may rejoice together!

And notice there at the end, the glorious motivation for those who open their eyes to the harvest: joy for you, joy for them. That is a joy that we have not known nearly enough of as a congregation. In fact, we should be *starving* for some of that joy, and our hunger should prompt us to open our eyes! When just one sinner is harvested safely out of the field of the world into the storehouse of God; there is more joy in heaven in that moment than God has over all the rest of us who don’t need to repent.

Doesn’t that excite you? It has to. We’re about to have a Fellowship Dinner, and I know that many of you take joy in blessing others through the food that you make. Don’t you know the joy of feeding a hungry stomach, the joy when your cooking is gobbled up by eager eaters?

That joy doesn’t even compare to the joy of feeding someone on the bread of life; the joy of seeing a sinner saved by the grace of God. So if you want *that* joy, then open your eyes and look for those who don’t have that bread. Listen to what Jesus says: “Look! Lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for the harvest!” O God, give us eyes to see the spiritually poor and hungry, so that we can know the joy of sharing heavenly food with them!

And as we open our eyes to pursue that joy together, here are five things to help us on the way. First, repent of closed eyes. Ask God's forgiveness for those times when selfishness has caused you to avert your eyes, or when laziness has allowed your eyelids to droop so that you never saw the person right in front of you who needed the gospel.

Second, remember God's eyes for you. God loved you in creation, but because He kept a close eye on you, He saw your fall into sin and your need for a Savior, and so He sent Jesus. God's eyes are open to you; open your eyes, also!

Third, pray for open eyes. Ask God to open your eyes to the people who cross your path every day, so that you see them not just as neighbors or workers or citizens, but as people in spiritual poverty with whom you can share the bread of life.

Fourth, open your eyes and identify others who need the gospel. It's not enough to have an open heart that loves *everybody*. You need to open your eyes to see *somebody* who needs the gospel. Open your eyes and look for someone in particular who needs the gospel.

Something I've found helpful with this has been to break my life down into different groups, and look for someone in each group that needs the gospel. Otherwise, *everybody in general* becomes *nobody in particular*. So I encourage you to start with these five categories: Open your eyes and find someone where you work, someone in your family, someone in your neighborhood, someone at a place you regularly shop, and someone where you regularly play. *Work, family, neighborhood, shopping, playing*. Keep a rotating list of five names to pray for, and keep your eyes open for any opportunity that God sends for you to share your bread with them.

Fifth, see Jesus in your neighbor. Last week, we heard that because Jesus died for us, we no longer live for ourselves. And we might think that now we live for others, but that's not what comes first. No; we live for Christ, and only then, because of Christ, do we live for others. This means that when we look around with open eyes, we are looking to see Christ in our neighbors, and when we serve them, we are serving Christ. And this is what keeps us from quitting or giving up when our neighbor proves to be stubborn or ungrateful or unkind or resistant to the gospel. We aren't discouraged by that, because we aren't living for them or their approval. We're living for Christ, who hides Himself in our neighbors. And if sometimes we have trouble seeing Jesus in our neighbors, well, that's why we need Jesus to open our eyes.

- *In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.*