A 60-Day Challenge to See, Serve, and Celebrate the People around You

one day at a time

kyle idleman

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WEEK 1

the practice of noticing

[zoom lens]

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DAY 1

what do you see?

THE CROWDS PUSHED IN all around her. Dozens of voices shouting so close her ears rang with their pleas and demands. Everyone wanted something from the man walking past.

She managed to catch glimpses of him between all the shoulders and was surprised to see he looked very ordinary. The way the crowd gravitated toward him suggested anything but that. Heart pounding against her rib cage, she knew her last chance at healing the sickness that had taken so much from her was about to walk past unless she did something.

A sliver of space between two people opened up, and she quickly slipped between them. Now nothing separated her from the Son of God but the distance of an arm's length. Awe at being this close to Jesus almost

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stopped her in her tracks, but the hope swelling in her chest urged her forward. She knew if she could just touch him, she would be healed, and so faith propelled her. She reached out and managed to just skim the edge of his cloak.

It was enough. Immediately, she knew. The constant bleeding was gone. Overcome with relief, she barely heard the voice that spoke over the crowd.

"Who touched me?" the voice asked. "I felt the power go out of me." *Oh no.* Her breath caught in her throat as she looked up and met Jesus's eyes.

But the men surrounding him, his disciples, laughed incredulously at his question. "You see the people crowding against you; it could have been anyone," they said.

Jesus continued to lock eyes with her and, as seconds that felt like minutes ticked by, she realized she couldn't go unnoticed. Fear shook her small frame as she hesitantly walked to him and fell at his feet.

"I-I was the one who touched you." She couldn't look him in the eyes as she spoke. "And now I am healed."

Jesus's gentle voice soothed her nerves as he said loud enough for everyone to hear, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering" (see Mark 5:24–34).

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QUESTION: Who has God put in your life who needs healing? If no one comes to mind, pray until someone does. How could you touch that person in a way that might relieve some of their suffering and possibly point them to Jesus?

CHALLENGE: One thing we tend to notice is . . . our phones. So, how about every time you touch your phone today, you say a quick prayer for a hurting person you can touch with Jesus's love?

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DAY 2

what do you want to see?

WE SEE WHAT WE WANT TO SEE.

Psychologists have a term for that: *motivated perception*. The idea is we don't see everything. What we notice is biased and selective.

You may have heard of your *reticular activating system*. No? Here's the scientific, super-nerdy definition:

> The reticular activating system (RAS) is a network of neurons located in the brain stem that project anteriorly to the hypothalamus to mediate behavior, as well as both posteriorly to the thalamus and directly to the cortex for activation of awake, desynchronized cortical EEG patterns.*

*"Reticular Activating System," Science Direct, accessed March 14, 2022, https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/veterinary-science-and-veterinary-medicine/reticular-activating-system.

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Do you get that? Me neither! But here's what I do know: the reticular activating system is your brain's gatekeeper of information. It leads you to ignore what you've predecided is nonessential and notice what you consider important.

This is why you never noticed a silver Honda Pilot until you started thinking about buying one. Then you were seeing silver Honda Pilots everywhere. Were they there before? Yep, your brain was just choosing to ignore them. You didn't notice them until they became important to you.

So, let me ask: What do you see in your home? When you're driving? At work? At the grocery store? On the sidelines at your kids' games? Walking through your neighborhood?

What do you see?

You see what you're looking for, what's important to you, what you've trained your eyes to see.

I bet you'd be stunned by what you *don't* see: that there are all kinds of hurting people God puts in your path.

I asked what you see. How about this: What did Jesus see? Forty times in the Gospels we read, "Jesus saw." Those two words are the launching point of so many amazing stories of transformed lives.

If we want to have the results Jesus had—those amazing stories—we need to see what Jesus saw.

What did Jesus see?

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He saw hurting people, desperate people, people who needed God. Why is that what he saw? Because that's what he was looking for; that's what was important to him.

QUESTION: Think back on the last couple of days. Who might God have put in your path—so you might love them and point them to Jesus—but you didn't notice or just ignored them? Ask God to bring those people to mind.

CHALLENGE: Start beginning your day with the prayer, "God, help me to see what you want me to see." Ask God to give you his eyes for hurting people who need him.

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DAY 3

what Jesus saw

THE MOVIE *SAW* came out in 2004. *Saw II* followed in 2005. In 2006 came *Saw III*. In 2007, *Saw IV*, and 2008 saw the release of *Saw V*. *Saw VI* came out in 2009. Then, in 2010, *Saw: The Final Chapter*.

What's my point? Well, putting out a movie every year is a lot for a film series. Also, there wasn't a lot of creativity in titling those movies. But mostly . . . in seven years there were seven *Saw* movies.

Is that important? Not at all. But in Matthew 9, the word *saw* occurs seven times.

Seven *Saws*. Seven "saws."

Kind of cool.

Anyhoo . . . while reading Matthew 9, I noticed *saw* kept appearing. Seven times we read about what someone saw. And that's not to mention the two blind men who

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couldn't see but then could. Reading the chapter, I realized I wouldn't have seen what Jesus did.

At the beginning of the chapter, some men brought to Jesus a paralyzed man. What would I have seen? Well, duh. A paralyzed man. But what about Jesus? "When Jesus saw their faith . . ." (v. 2).

Also interesting: Jesus told the man his sins were forgiven rather than his legs were healed. He saw a need in the man's life that wouldn't have been my focus in that moment.

Then Jesus turned to the religious leaders, whom I would've ignored, and told them what they were thinking, which I could never have seen either.

Next, we're told, "As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth" (v. 9). I would've looked at Matthew and seen a traitor, a Jewish man working for the occupying, oppressive Roman government. Jesus saw his next disciple. "'Follow me,' he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him" (v. 9).

Matthew then threw a party for his friends to meet Jesus and, we're told, "When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, 'Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?'" (v. 11). They saw Jesus eating with the wrong people. I wonder if that's what I would've seen. Jesus replied, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick" (v. 12). What he saw were people who needed spiritual healing.

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In verse 20 a sick woman fought through a crowd to get to Jesus and touch his cloak for healing. The disciples saw only the crowd. I'm afraid that's exactly what I would've seen too. But in the jumbled mass of the crowd, "Jesus turned and saw her" (v. 22).

Next, Jesus got to a home where people were weeping and wailing for a little girl who just died. Jesus "saw the noisy crowd" (v. 23) and then went in to the girl. If I were with him, I would've seen a dead girl. Jesus saw her as asleep, and he "took the girl by the hand, and she got up" (v. 25).

Jesus left there and started traveling through towns and villages filled with people. We're told,

> When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." (vv. 36–38)

I would've seen an overwhelming amount of people. I might have been tempted to condemn some. Jesus looked at them through eyes of compassion, seeing them as people who needed their heavenly Father and as a potential harvest.

I read all that and realize I have broken eyes. It breaks my heart. No wonder I haven't had the impact I want to.

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I pray God will heal my eyes the way he healed the legs of the paralyzed man. I pray he will wake my sleeping heart and give me new life the way he did for the little girl.

QUESTION: What do you think is the most common thing you don't see in people's lives? What are you missing that Jesus would see?

CHALLENGE: Today, each time you look at a person, ask, "But Jesus, what do you see?" Pray you'll have his eyes of compassion and see beyond the surface to the pain and need of that person.

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DAY 4

the secret way

IN THE MID-1990S, there were pictures with patterns in which, if you looked at them just right, a 3D image would appear.

I had a buddy in my neighborhood who had two or three of these "magic" pictures hanging in his house. He thought they were really cool. He invited me over and immediately wanted to show them to me. Several minutes passed of me gazing at the pictures. I looked with my eyes narrow then wide, from one angle then another, from up close then at a distance. Nothing seemed to do the trick.

"Can you see it?" My friend asked, practically bouncing on his feet with excitement.

"No, I don't see anything!" I snapped at him.

A few seconds passed.

"How about now?" he asked. "Can you see it now? You've got to really want to see it!"

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My eyes were watering from not blinking for so long, but I still didn't see "it." Eventually I was sweating, feeling a little lightheaded and defeated. I told my friend I gave up. I decided it was either a practical joke or my friend was smoking something. (In hindsight, my friend may have been smoking something.)

I turned around as we were walking out of the room and glared at the picture. I decided to make one last-ditch effort. My eyes practically popping out of my head, I thought to myself, *Don't blink, Kyle. Just look. Stare at it just right. You can do this.* Suddenly a sailboat in the clouds emerged from the picture.

"I see it! I see it!" I shouted at my friend, and we both started hollering in triumph. I'd been looking at it and looking at it and couldn't see the image. But then when I saw it, it was all I could see.

Going back to the story of the woman whom Jesus healed in Mark 5, let's focus on verse 30, when Jesus asked the crowd, "Who touched my clothes?" His question seemed nonsensical. There were dozens of people surrounding him and bumping into him. But Jesus asked the question because he always saw things other people didn't seem to notice. One of the secrets of his amazing influence is that he noticed the overlooked.

When we examine Jesus's one at a time lifestyle, we find that everything he did was intentional. The only way to see the image of the sailboat emerge from the

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messy pattern was to look intentionally at the picture. Jesus asked the question of "who" and suddenly, out of the messy swarm of people in front of him, a woman appeared. She was no longer a part of the crowd. She was an individual with a unique story and a specific need. She was God's daughter.

QUESTION: When was the last time you asked the "who" question and thought about a specific person's needs and how you could meet them? So, who? Who needs help, encouragement, a warm meal, a kind note, a hug?

CHALLENGE: Today you're going to see lots of people. They may look like a crowd. Ask God "who" and try to meet someone's need. Do something kind for them that may inconvenience you but might make their day.

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DAY 5

a new lens

IN THE THIRD GRADE, I started having trouble in class. No matter how hard I tried, I just couldn't keep up with the other students or with my homework. Both my teacher and parents were quick to assume it was because I struggled with focusing. My report cards all said the same things: "Kyle doesn't sit still. He doesn't listen to or follow directions." This was such an established issue that when my grades started declining, it was the go-to assumption.

In class, my teachers gave me lectures on paying closer attention. When my performance didn't improve, privileges were taken away from me. But it just kept getting worse.

Eventually, my dad decided it was probably because I just wasn't all that smart. Well, he never *actually* said that to me, but he did tell me, "Son, I'm just as proud of your *C*s as your sister's *A*s, as long as you're trying your best."

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While all this was going on, I went to the eye doctor for the first time in my life. When the eye chart was put in front of me, I had a hard time deciphering the different letters and numbers. Then the doctor set a big contraption in front of my face and had me look through different lenses he flipped through. Finally, everything came into focus as I looked through one of the lenses.

I was very soon the owner of a pair of unfortunate Clark Kent–meets–Sally Jessie Raphael glasses. The next day at school, while the other kids were making fun of me for wearing glasses that were slightly bigger than my entire head, I discovered I could read the chalkboard. It turned out it wasn't my effort, my intellect, or my ADD that was the problem.

The problem was that I needed to see the world through a new set of lenses.

When Jesus asked, "Who touched me?" in Mark 5, the disciples couldn't believe their ears. They asked him in verse 31, "You see the people crowding against you . . . and yet you can ask, 'Who touched me?'" In that moment, the disciples looked at the people through a crowd lens, seeing them as distractions and disruptions. They wanted Jesus to just shrug his shoulders and keep moving, to dismiss one person's need because there were so many others piling up.

What they needed was to put on Jesus's one at a time lens so they would stop seeing people as inconveniences

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but instead as God-given opportunities to love and meet needs.

QUESTION: Do you see the people around you as inconveniences or opportunities? When is the last time you dismissed someone because they couldn't do anything for you in return or because you just didn't have time for them?

CHALLENGE: Ask God to help you look at the people around you through a new lens. With that transformed outlook, go out of your way (today, or tomorrow at the latest) to stop and have a conversation with someone you normally wouldn't notice. It can be as simple as asking them about their day.

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