



SEEING PEOPLE

Do You See Me?

Learning to See People the Way Jesus Does

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We look at people every day. We pass them in grocery stores, sit beside them in waiting rooms, drive past them at intersections, work alongside them, worship beside them, and scroll past their pictures on our phones. We see faces constantly.

But how often do we actually see the person?

That question has become increasingly important to me through mission work, particularly during two trips to Athens, Greece. In Athens I encountered refugees, people experiencing homelessness, immigrants, people struggling with addiction, and people who simply seemed lost in a city where thousands of people walked past them every day.

I went there intending to serve. Instead, God began teaching me how to see. And one of the first lessons was uncomfortable.

The God Who Sees

Hagar may be one of Scripture's clearest examples. She was an Egyptian servant in Abraham and Sarah's household. When Sarah could not have children, Hagar became caught in the consequences of decisions made by other people. She became pregnant with Abraham's child, and the relationship between Sarah and Hagar deteriorated badly.

Eventually Hagar fled into the wilderness. She was a foreigner, a servant, a woman with little social power, pregnant, alone, and running away. Yet in the wilderness, God found her.

The angel of the Lord found Hagar near a spring in the desert; it was the spring that is beside the road to Shur. And he said, "Hagar, slave of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?"

"I'm running away from my mistress Sarai," she answered.

Then the angel of the Lord told her, "Go back to your mistress and submit to her." The angel added, "I will increase your descendants so much that they will be too numerous to count."

The angel of the Lord also said to her: "You are now pregnant and you will give birth to a son. You shall name him Ishmael, for the Lord has heard of your misery."

She gave this name to the Lord who spoke to her: "You are the God who sees me," for she said, "I have now seen the One who sees me."

Genesis 16:7-13 (NIV)

What an extraordinary name for God: the God who sees me. Hagar may have felt invisible to everyone around her. She was not invisible to God.

God did not merely see a pregnant servant beside a spring. He saw Hagar. He knew where she had been, what had happened to her, where she was going, and her misery. He called her by name.

That truth should shape the way followers of Jesus see other people. If we worship the God who sees, should we not become people who see?

Three Men Saw Him. Only One Truly Saw Him.

Jesus develops this idea powerfully in the story we know as the Good Samaritan.

An expert in the law asked Jesus, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus pointed him to the commands to love God with all his heart, soul, strength, and mind, and to love his neighbor as himself. Wanting to justify himself, the man asked, "And who is my neighbor?"

Jesus told of a man attacked by robbers and left half dead. A priest came down the road and, when he saw the man, passed by on the other side. A Levite also came, saw him, and passed by. But a Samaritan came where the man was and, when he saw him, took pity on him. He bandaged the man's wounds, brought him to an inn, cared for him, and paid for his continued care.

Luke 10:25-35 (NIV, condensed)

The language is striking. The priest saw him. The Levite saw him. The Samaritan saw him. So who actually saw the man?

All three saw a body beside the road. Only one allowed what he saw to become compassion. Only one moved closer, touched the wounded man, interrupted his journey, spent his resources, and treated the wounded stranger as though his life mattered.

That is the difference between looking and seeing. True seeing changes something in us.

Perhaps that is what it takes to truly see someone. We see with our heart. We see with our soul. We see with our strength. We see with our mind. We see because we love.

She Wanted a Red One

In July 2025, I traveled to Athens on what I consider my first official mission trip. I had participated in service projects before and had certainly done work in the name of Jesus, but this was different. We had intentionally traveled somewhere for the purpose of serving people and sharing the love of Christ.

One evening our team walked through Athens distributing food to refugees and people experiencing homelessness. We carried sandwiches, chocolate, and small juice boxes. Some of the juice boxes were blue. Others were red.

I approached a refugee woman who did not speak English and offered her a sandwich and some chocolate. Then I handed her a blue juice box. She immediately shook her finger. “No, no, no!”

Our guide explained that she wanted a red juice box. I looked through my bag. I did not have any red ones left. She continued insisting that she wanted red.

Internally, my attitude began to change. I remember thinking how ridiculous the situation seemed. We were walking through the city giving away food and drinks. Everything was free. Why should the color of the juice box matter? My attitude became something like: You get what you get. You should be grateful for what we are giving you. Eventually she walked away without a drink because she would not take the blue one.

Later that evening our team gathered to talk about the day. When it was my turn, I told everyone about the encounter. I told it almost as though the woman's behavior demonstrated how unreasonable people could be.

One of the women on our team listened and then said something simple. “Brent, you don't understand. She wanted a red one.” I responded, “I know. She wanted a red one.” Then she said it again: “Brent. She wanted a red one.”

Something changed in me. Suddenly I understood. The issue had never really been the juice box. The issue was that I had stopped seeing the woman.

Somewhere in my thinking, she had become a category instead of a person: refugee, hungry person, someone receiving charity. I had unconsciously placed myself above her. I was the person with something to give, and she was the person who ought to gratefully accept whatever I chose to hand her.

But she was not merely “a refugee.” She was a woman. She had preferences, memories, fears, hopes, things she liked and things she disliked. She probably had family members she loved and people she missed. She had experienced happiness and disappointment. She had a personality. She had a story. Just like me.

And on that particular evening, she wanted a red juice box. It was such a small thing, yet it exposed something significant in me. I had looked directly at her without truly seeing her.

Jesus Saw the Crowd - and the People Inside It

Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. 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."

Matthew 9:35-38 (NIV)

Jesus saw crowds differently than we do. We tend to turn crowds into statistics: hundreds, thousands, millions; refugees, homeless populations, prisoners, migrants, poor communities, the uninsured, the addicted, the elderly, the grieving.

Statistics can help us understand the scale of suffering, but they can also unintentionally hide the people inside the numbers. Jesus could look at a crowd and somehow never lose the individual. Matthew does not merely say Jesus observed a large number of people. He saw them. He understood that they were harassed and helpless. And when Jesus saw them, He had compassion.

That pattern appears repeatedly throughout His ministry: Jesus saw. Jesus understood. Jesus had compassion. Jesus responded. The question for us is whether we are willing to do the same.

The Loneliness of Being Invisible

I returned to Athens in June 2026. During another evening feeding walk, I met a man from England whom I will call John. He had been living homeless in Greece for more than twenty years.

After giving him some food and something to drink, I began talking with him. The rest of our team needed to continue the feeding walk, but they encouraged me to stay. They would come back for me later. So I sat and talked with John.

When the group returned, I asked whether I could pray for him. He allowed me to. Later our guide, Artur, told me that John normally did not invite people into his life that way.

The following evening we went out again. Before we started, I told Artur, "I want to find John." We found him sitting on the park bench he jokingly called his "office." This time I stayed for about an hour.

We talked - not ministry-talk, and not a carefully constructed evangelistic presentation. We simply talked like two human beings. John told me about his life. I learned how he survived, about his nightly routine of finding food and hoping for enough money for a glass of wine, about his distrust of governments and authority, and about his former wife, his daughter, and his grandchildren.

For an hour, the man people walked past every day was not merely a homeless man sitting on a bench. He was John.

Eventually I had to leave. As I stood to go, I told him, "John, I am going to try to come back and see you again this week. But until then, please take care of yourself." His response has stayed with me ever since. He told me that taking care of himself was never really the problem. The real problem was the loneliness.

John sat beside a path traveled by thousands of people. People saw him every day. Some probably gave him money. Others gave him food. Some hurried around him. Others deliberately avoided eye contact. Thousands of eyes saw someone sitting on that bench. But how many people actually saw John?

For that hour, I had an opportunity to see him. But something else happened too. John allowed me to see him. He became vulnerable. He shared pieces of himself that he could have kept hidden. And as we talked, he saw me too.

That is part of what makes genuine human connection so powerful. I saw him. He allowed himself to be seen. He saw me. And I allowed myself to be seen. For a little while, neither of us was a category. We were simply two people sitting together on a bench.

The Bible is filled with people longing to see and to be seen. Moses longed to see God. Thomas wanted to see evidence before he could believe. People repeatedly asked Jesus for signs. But Scripture also reveals something even more profound: before we ever begin searching for God, God sees us.

Jesus Stopped

As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving Jericho, a blind man named Bartimaeus was sitting by the roadside begging. Hearing that Jesus was passing, he shouted, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more.

Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." When Bartimaeus came, Jesus asked, "What do you want me to do for you?"

"Rabbi, I want to see," he said.

"Go," Jesus replied, "your faith has healed you." Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.

Mark 10:46-52 (NIV, condensed)

Mark prepares us for this encounter with a striking contrast. Just before Bartimaeus appears, James and John ask Jesus for positions of honor (Mark 10:35-45). Jesus asks them, "What do you want me to do for you?" A few verses later, He asks Bartimaeus exactly the same question. James and John ask for status. Bartimaeus asks for sight. The disciples can see Jesus with their eyes, yet they still misunderstand the road of sacrifice and service He is traveling. Bartimaeus, though physically blind, recognizes Jesus as the Son of David and follows Him along the road.

Even his name adds meaning to the encounter. Bartimaeus means "son of Timaeus," and the name Timaeus carries the sense of being honored or valued. Yet this "son of the honored one" is sitting beside the road as a dishonored man - a blind beggar whom the crowd attempts to silence. The crowd treats him as an interruption. Jesus stops, calls him forward, listens to him, and publicly recognizes his faith. Jesus sees the honor and value in the man others have dismissed.

Two words in that story deserve our attention: Jesus stopped. There was a crowd. There was noise. Jesus was traveling somewhere. The people around Bartimaeus considered him an interruption and told him to be quiet. But Jesus stopped.

The crowd heard noise. Jesus heard a person. The crowd saw a beggar. Jesus saw Bartimaeus.

The crowd's response echoes the priest and the Levite in Jesus' story. They encounter a suffering person, but they do not allow his need to interrupt their journey. They create distance - this time by trying to silence him. Jesus responds as the Samaritan did. He allows another person's need to interrupt His journey. He stops, calls Bartimaeus closer, listens to him, and responds with mercy. The crowd sees an interruption beside the road. Jesus sees a neighbor.

Then Jesus asked an interesting question: "What do you want me to do for you?" The need might have seemed obvious, but Jesus allowed Bartimaeus to speak. He gave him dignity. He let the man describe his own need.

Sometimes seeing people means resisting the temptation to decide who they are and what they need before we have listened to them. Sometimes seeing means stopping. Sometimes it means asking. Sometimes it means listening.

Jesus did not hand Bartimaeus the equivalent of a blue juice box and assume it met his need. He stopped, asked, and listened until Bartimaeus could name what he truly wanted: "Rabbi, I want to see."

Zacchaeus Wanted to See Jesus. Jesus Saw Zacchaeus.

Zacchaeus was short, so when Jesus came through Jericho, he climbed a sycamore-fig tree to get above the crowd. He was a wealthy chief tax collector who wanted to see who Jesus was.

Then something remarkable happened. Jesus reached the place. He looked up. The man trying to see Jesus discovered that Jesus saw him first.

Jesus called him down and announced that He would stay at Zacchaeus's house. The crowd grumbled because Jesus had chosen to associate with a man they regarded as a sinner. But the encounter changed Zacchaeus. He pledged generosity to the poor and restitution to people he had wronged.

For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.

Luke 19:10 (NIV)

The crowd saw a tax collector. Jesus saw Zacchaeus. The crowd saw his reputation. Jesus saw the man behind it.

We do something similar today. We call someone homeless, addict, prisoner, immigrant, alcoholic, poor, mentally ill, divorced, unemployed, difficult, or lost. Sometimes our labels describe something true about a person's circumstances. But no circumstance contains the entirety of a human being. Jesus sees beyond the label.

“Daughter”

A woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years had suffered greatly under many doctors and spent all she had, yet grew worse. She came behind Jesus in the crowd and touched his cloak, believing she would be healed. Immediately her bleeding stopped.

Jesus realized that power had gone out from him and asked, “Who touched my clothes?” His disciples pointed to the crowd pressing around him, but Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it.

The woman came, fell at his feet, and told him the whole truth. He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.”

Mark 5:25-34 (NIV, condensed)

Jesus initially did not know who had touched Him. Yet He did not simply acknowledge that a healing had occurred and continue walking. He looked for her. He wanted the person.

And when she finally stood before Him, Jesus did not call her “woman.” He called her Daughter. There is intimacy in that word. There is identity. There is belonging. There is dignity.

She came hoping to anonymously receive healing. Jesus gave her something more. He saw her.

Seeing the Face of Jesus

My mother-in-law, Jerri Savuto, understood something about this kind of love. Jerri had wanted to be a missionary since she was a young girl growing up in New Mexico. She became a nurse, married Bill Savuto, and together they spent significant portions of their lives serving through missions in Native American communities in the southwestern United States, Belize, Nigeria, and eventually Kenya, where they served at Maua Methodist Hospital.

During one of the times my wife, Corrie, and I visited them in Kenya, Jerri had become involved in helping local patients who could not afford their hospital bills. The hospital would treat emergency patients, but patients could face difficulty leaving until arrangements had been made for payment. Corrie and I contributed some of our tithe money to help Jerri assist people caught in that situation.

After we returned home, a father brought his adult daughter to the hospital with an emergency. She received the treatment she needed, but the family had no money to pay the bill. Jerri learned what had happened and quietly used donated funds to pay the woman's bill. The father and daughter had never met Jerri and did not know she was doing anything for them.

After taking care of the bill, Jerri walked toward her office in an area where patients and their families normally were not supposed to be. She turned a corner and saw a man walking toward her. It was the father. Somehow, he knew. He thanked her for what she had done.

When Jerri later told the story, she described looking into his face and feeling that she had seen the face of Jesus. Perhaps that is exactly what Jesus meant.

When Did We See You?

All of these stories lead toward one of Jesus' most challenging teachings.

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, he will separate the people as a shepherd separates sheep from goats. The King will say to those on his right that they gave him food when he was hungry, drink when he was thirsty, welcome when he was a stranger, clothing when he needed it, care when he was sick, and companionship when he was in prison.

They will ask, "Lord, when did we see you?"

The King will reply, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me." He will also say that whatever was not done for one of the least of these was not done for him.

Matthew 25:31-46 (NIV, condensed)

The question running through this passage is not merely, "What did we do?" It is also, "When did we see you?"

Jesus identifies Himself so closely with hungry people, strangers, those needing clothing, the sick, and prisoners that our response to them becomes a response to Him. Seeing people is not merely an act of kindness. It is an encounter with Christ.

Jerri looked into the face of a grateful father in Kenya and saw the face of Jesus. I sat beside John on a bench in Athens and discovered the sacred gift of seeing and being seen. Hagar learned that the God of the universe knew her misery and called her by name. And a blue juice box taught me one of the most basic truths about our shared humanity: every person has preferences, desires, dignity, and a story worthy of being seen.

The world may see a problem. Jesus sees a person. The world may see a category. Jesus sees a name. The world may see an interruption. Jesus sees someone worth stopping for.

Learning to See

To truly see another person does not always require a dramatic act. Sometimes it begins with eye contact. A name. A question asked without rushing the answer. A willingness to sit on a bench. A recognition that the person receiving help still has preferences, dignity, agency, and a story.

Food matters. Clothing matters. Housing, medical care, safety, and justice matter. Jesus met physical needs, and His followers are called to do the same. But people also hunger for dignity, relationship, and the assurance that they have not disappeared from the human family.

We cannot see every person with the perfect, limitless attention of God. We will miss people. We will become distracted. We will sometimes discover, as I did with the woman and the juice box, that our service has been mixed with pride or impatience. But grace allows us to recognize our blindness and learn a better way.

The question is not simply whether people pass through our field of vision. The priest and the Levite saw the wounded man. Thousands saw John on his bench. I saw the woman holding out her hand for a drink. The deeper question is whether we allow another person's humanity to reach us.

When we truly see, compassion becomes possible. We draw near. We listen. We learn names. We surrender the comfort of our assumptions. We let another person's need interrupt our schedule, and we allow that person to give something to us in return.

Because true seeing is never entirely one-directional. John did not merely receive my attention; he offered me his trust. The woman with the juice box gave me a lesson I still carry. The people we think we are serving often become the people through whom God serves, teaches, and changes us.

The One Who Sees Us

At the foundation of all Christian compassion is this truth: we have already been seen. God saw Hagar in the wilderness. Jesus saw individuals within crowds. He saw Bartimaeus when others wanted him silent. He saw Zacchaeus behind a reputation. He looked for the woman who hoped to remain anonymous, and He called her Daughter.

He sees us too - not as categories, achievements, failures, or problems to be solved, but as people known and loved. We do not learn to see others in order to earn His attention. We learn to see because His attention has already found us.

And when we see the hungry, the stranger, the lonely, the sick, the prisoner, the refugee, the neighbor, the family member, or the person everyone else has learned to overlook, Jesus tells us that we are also seeing Him.

So perhaps the question we should carry into our streets, churches, workplaces, and homes is not simply, "Who needs my help?" It is more personal and more demanding: Who is asking, whether aloud or silently, 'Do you see me?'

May we become people who can answer with more than a glance. May we stop. May we listen. May we draw near. May we love with our heart, soul, strength, and mind.

And may we discover, in the faces of those we finally learn to see, the face of the One who has always seen us.

Scripture passages are identified in the text. Condensed passages preserve the article's original wording and references.