

**FIX
OUR
EYES**



ANNUAL FOCUS

September 2020–June 2021

WILLIAMSBURG COMMUNITY CHAPEL

ANNUAL FOCUS: Fix Our Eyes

KEY PASSAGE: “Our eyes fixed on Jesus the source and goal of our faith.” Hebrews 12:2 (Phillips)

DESCRIPTION OF THE FOCUS:

In 2020 there is no shortage of suitors for our attention. From advertising online to headlines in newspapers, it seems that everyone wants us to fix our eyes on something. In the midst of all that vies for our eyes, what do you fix your eyes on most?

Does the glow of a smart phone light your face at night? Is it the fluctuating numbers of the market that you check throughout the day? Is there a website you revisit constantly to make sure you don't miss anything? Does your Facebook feed get more time than your family? Is there a number on a scale you are so desperate to see that you check every morning? Has the coronavirus pandemic pushed you to look more and more at the challenges of the moment than the promises of God for the future?

The 21st century is not the first moment for God's people when competition for attention raged throughout the culture. In the New Testament book of Hebrews we read about a church that had its attention gobbled up by their circumstances. They had experienced a “hard struggle with sufferings,” public criticism, and loss of property (Heb. 10:32-34). This led to people drifting away from the faith (Heb. 2:7), people leaving the church (Heb. 10:26), and a crisis of confidence (Heb. 10:35).

What advice does God's Word have for God's people whose attention has been gobbled up by the concerns of the present moment? The author of Hebrews tells his beleaguered congregation to keep “our eyes fixed on Jesus the source and goal of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2, Phillips). When we find ourselves frustrated with our present circumstances, fix our eyes on Jesus. When our minds race with anxiety about the future, fix our eyes on Jesus. When we can't find our way through the darkness, fix our eyes on Jesus. When the noise around us gets louder and louder, fix our eyes on Jesus.

Jesus himself warns us to be careful what we look at: “The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full

of light, but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness” (Matthew 6:22-23)! Somewhere in the midst of this encouragement and challenge is a promise. If you want a life that is full of light, fix your eyes on what is healthy. You could paraphrase the promise like this: “fix your eyes on the right things and your eyes will be fixed.” What could be healthier than fixing our eyes on Jesus, the Light of the world? If we fix our eyes on Jesus, our eyes will be fixed.

From September of 2020 to June of 2021, let us have the courage to ask the question, “what do I fix my eyes on most?” Then, may we learn together how to fix our eyes on Jesus and experience how different our circumstances, suffering, and problems facing our church, nation, and world, all look through “fixed eyes.”

ORIGINS OF THE FOCUS:

The seeds for this annual focus were planted in preparing for a single sermon in the middle of our series on the 21 Letters of the New Testament. We had just finished the Apostle Paul’s letters and I (Travis) started refreshing my understanding of the circumstances surrounding the writing of Hebrews. A close reading of the letter reveals a church community on edge. They are experiencing great public criticism, violence and loss of property. Their members are drifting, lacking confidence and struggling to explain why God would allow all of this to happen. The church was being tested, and their time of testing had led to the temptation to give up. The church was described by preaching professor, Tom Long, like this, “Tired of walking the walk, many of them are considering taking a walk, leaving the community and falling away from the faith.”

As I prepared for the sermon, I was eager to find the solution God’s Word would offer to a people going through such a time of testing. I did not have to read for longer than a few seconds to find the answer to my question as the author made it clear in the first few verses of the letter. I read, “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Hebrews 1:1-3).

The author’s solution for a church in the midst of a time of testing is a clear description of Jesus. His depiction of Jesus gets sharper and sharper throughout the letter. He writes that Jesus is better than angels. Jesus is better than Moses. Jesus is better than the ancient priest Melchizedek. Jesus is better than the temple. On and on he goes, until chapter 12 begins with one of the Bible’s most powerful words, “Therefore.” This word signifies an opportunity for readers to apply God’s truth to their lives. “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:1-2).

What is Hebrews’ solution to the time of testing? Get a clear picture of Jesus and then look intently at him. J.B. Phillips put it like this in his translation of the New Testament, “Our eyes fixed on Jesus the source and goal of our faith.”

How does this lead to an annual focus? We encountered the book of Hebrews, its church undergoing testing, and the author’s wisdom to fix our eyes on Jesus toward the end of the initial coronavirus quarantine period. At this point in the pandemic, businesses were closed, school was not in session, sports were canceled, people were working out of their bedrooms, there were daily reminders of a rising death toll, and the 401-year-old wound of racial injustice had once again stunned our nation. It was a time of great testing.

The key to passing the test for the first century church to which Hebrews was written proved to be just as relevant for churches in the 21st century. We all wanted answers to our test in June of 2020, but in a pandemic, there are always more questions than answers. We needed something better than answers, and Hebrews offered it to us. In fact, it was better than angels. It was Jesus himself. The wisest choice we could make was to fix our eyes on Jesus.

Moving into the latter half of 2020 and early 2021, it is clear the testing will continue. No one knows how or when the coronavirus pandemic will end. No one knows what changes brought about by this season are just temporary and which ones will make a lasting

imprint on our society and culture. We still need to do a lot more patient listening to our Christian brothers and sisters of color in order to adequately respond to the wounds they carry and the fears they face. In addition to all of this, we are about to go through a national election. Over the next few months some of our nation's foundational ideals, like our pledge to be "one nation under God," and "E Pluribus Unum" — one from many — will be tested to their breaking points.

Knowing the testing will become more intense, we should intensify our commitment to Hebrews' wisdom for God's people in times of testing. Let our 21st century church join with the 1st century church to whom Hebrews was written by spending a year with "our eyes fixed on Jesus the source and goal of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2, Phillips).

PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE FOCUS:

From September of 2019 to August of 2020 the Chapel preached through a big picture overview of the whole Bible as God's story of creation, rebellion, redemption, and new creation with Jesus at the center. Getting through the whole Bible in a year is a challenge of "width." There is a lot of material to cover, and a wide angle lens is required to view the breadth of the Bible. A challenge of "width" is appropriately followed by a challenge of "depth." This year we will take a deep dive into the very center of the Bible, Jesus Christ Himself.

Some of Jesus' earliest followers took up this task of examining the depths of Jesus' nature and character. "No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side. He has made him known" (The Apostle John in John 1:8). "For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross" (The Apostle Paul in Colossians 1:19-29). What an opportunity we have in the upcoming year to join with them through our own deep reflection on the person of Jesus Christ!

In addition to the adventure it will be to plumb the depths of Jesus, it will help us as a church family to embrace more fully one of our core commitments, to spell JESUS in all caps! Spelling JESUS in all caps means that we recognize Jesus at the center of the Bible precisely because he is at the center of God's redemptive purposes for all of creation. Therefore, we reverently place him at the center of our church. Jesus unites us

across denominational lines, preferences for various worship styles, and helps us become what he prayed to the Father on our behalf, "that they may be one even as we are one" (John 17:22b).

Our culture is in a state of ever deepening division. God has placed the church in the world to be a visible representation of the unity of the one true Triune God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Believers who have been made one with God through Jesus have also been made one with others who have been made one with Jesus. The unity of our body has the power to spread the aroma of the Gospel throughout our community. May this year focusing on JESUS unite our body once again to make disciples of the One who has made us one with God and each other.

Finally, as I interact with a wide range of disciples, I often find their pictures of Jesus have been flattened out to make Jesus more palatable to their own tastes and desires. God gave us four Gospels precisely so we would be forced to wrestle with a full, multidimensional portrait of the God who took on flesh in Jesus. May this year fixing our eyes on Jesus force us to give up our small pictures of Jesus and exchange them for the grander vision to which the fourfold Gospel of the Bible gives witness.

GOAL(S): By the end of the annual focus, the Chapel family will have

- A larger picture of Jesus
- A clearer picture of Jesus
- An actionable picture of Jesus
- A Biblical picture of Jesus
- A greater desire to share their renewed picture of Jesus with others

ANNUAL FOCUS OUTLINE: Our long look at Jesus will unfold in five stages.

I. **Fall (9 weeks):** After a two week introduction to the annual focus theme, we will fix our eyes on Jesus with people. What did he say to them when they were afraid? How did he invite them into his mission? How did he respond to their limitations? We will be instructed by Jesus, the master teacher, and seek to apply everything we learn. In addition, we will examine what Jesus did when the crowds thinned, and he was alone with his Father.

- II. **Advent (5 weeks):** During the season of Advent we will ask the great question that hangs over any honest look at Jesus: who then is this (Mark 4:41)? We will look at the beginning of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke to answer the question, and join with Jesus' mother, Mary, by treasuring what we learn and pondering its mystery (Luke 2:19).
- III. **Winter (7 weeks):** We will look at Jesus' teaching on the practical matters of everyday life. What did Jesus say about money, poverty, marriage, parenting, and how to deal with broken relationships? We will be reminded that he taught "as one with authority" (Matthew 7:28-29). We will seek to surrender our own authority and autonomy to live under Jesus' authority in communion with him, our spouses, children, and the church.
- IV. **Lent (7 weeks):** during the season of Lent we will look at Jesus' offer of forgiveness. We will ask questions like: How does Jesus forgive? Who does Jesus forgive? Who needs to be forgiven? Why does Jesus forgive? Forgiveness plays a central role in the mission of Jesus. Mark records Jesus declaring the very reason he came like this, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." In addition to forgiveness being fundamental to why Jesus came, it is what his followers are told by Jesus to proclaim, "repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47).
- V. **Spring (9 weeks):** We will fix our eyes on Jesus' gentle care for those who are struggling to place their faith in him. We will then look at Jesus as he shares the good news of the Gospel with others, and sends his followers out to do the same. We will close out our long look at Jesus with two passages from the Gospel of John that challenge us to consider the exclusivity of Jesus' claims and follow him alone as the way to life in this world and the world to come.

TOPICS THAT WILL BE COVERED:

1. Jesus the provider
2. Jesus the healer
3. Jesus the caller
4. Jesus the teacher
5. Jesus the evangelist

6. Jesus the sender
7. Jesus the forgiver
8. Jesus at prayer
9. Jesus' warnings about money
10. Jesus' care for the poor
11. Jesus' teaching about family
12. Jesus' path to reconciliation
13. Jesus with our doubt
14. Jesus' identity
15. The challenge of Jesus

Note: All sermon titles are taken directly from God's written Word to serve as a weekly physical reminder to embrace the spiritual goal of the focus: to fix our eyes on God's living Word, Jesus.

CHAPEL-WIDE SMALL GROUP APPROACH:

This year, instead of asking each small group to commit to a Chapel-wide study, we are asking each group to commit to a new approach. The approach will help us embrace the Apostle Paul's words to his young protégé, Timothy, more deeply: "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Currently, the strength of our groups is in their ability to help God's people process the teaching from God's Word they review together. Our groups also do a great job helping people make applications between the Bible and their everyday lives so that we are more knowledgeable regarding righteous living.

With these two strengths in mind, this fall will provide an opportunity to grow in the area of gentle and grace-filled accountability when we fail to live out what we learn. Sometimes we don't follow through on what we believe God wants us to do because we've been taught what to do but not how to do it. We are committed to equipping our members in those areas.

What could happen in our family of faith if our groups added "reproof" and "correction" to the "teaching" and "training in righteousness" we usually focus on? The Apostle Paul provides the answer to Timothy: the people of God will be "complete, equipped for every good work."

Our Chapel-wide small group approach will seek to help us add

“reproof” and “correction” to the culture of our groups with a few simple statements/questions added to our leadership materials with which we will begin and end our meetings:

- At the end of our small group times we might say something like, “From the Scripture we have discussed, I sense the Holy Spirit is asking me to do ____ in the coming week.”
- At the beginning of the following group we might ask something like, “How did it go?”

Our small groups pastor, Dale South, hopes this type of unified Chapel-wide small group approach will help us become disciples that reflect the image of discipleship Jesus had in mind when he commissioned his first followers to make disciples of all nations:

“We have defined discipleship more about knowing what Jesus taught than doing as He instructed, ‘teach them to obey everything I have commanded you’ (Matthew 28:20).”
—Dale South

BIBLICAL QUOTES TO SUPPORT THE FOCUS:

- “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.” - Hebrews 1:1-4
- “Who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” - Philippians 2:6-11

- “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.” - Colossians 1:15-20

OTHER QUOTES TO STIR OUR IMAGINATIONS ABOUT THE FOCUS:

- “Our images of Jesus tend to be too small, too monochromatic, and too domesticated.”
— Professor Brent A. Strawn
- “You may never know that Jesus is all you need, until Jesus is all you have.”
— Corrie ten Boom
- “The Gospel is a person.”
— Dick Woodward, Late Chapel Pastor Emeritus
- “At the Chapel, we spell JESUS in all caps.”
— Bill Warrick, Late Chapel Pastor

Annual Focus Weekly Detail

ANNUAL FOCUS KICK OFF

September 13: “Our eyes fixed”: Hebrews 12:1-3

September 20: “But when he saw the wind...”: Matthew 14:22-34

STAGE 1: FALL (9 WEEKS)

Jesus with people

September 27: Fix our Eyes on Jesus the Provider: “Why are you anxious?": Luke 12:22-34

October 4: Fix our Eyes on Jesus the Healer: “What have you to do with me?": Mark 5:1-20

October 11: Fix our Eyes on Jesus the Healer: “He whom you love is ill.": John 11:1-37

October 18: Fix our Eyes on Jesus the Caller: “They left everything.": Luke 5:1-11

October 25: Fix our Eyes on Jesus the Caller: “Come and you will see.": John 1:35-51

November 1: Fix our Eyes on Jesus the Teacher: “He who has ears, let him hear.": Matthew 13:1-9

November 8: Fix our Eyes on Jesus the Teacher: “After a long time.": Matthew 25:13-30

November 15: Fix our Eyes on Jesus at Prayer: “Watch and pray.": Matthew 26:36-46

November 22: Eastside Sunday (Annual Focus Break)

STAGE 2: ADVENT (5 WEEKS)

Who Jesus is

November 29 – First Sunday of Advent: Fix our Eyes on Jesus' Identity: “Who then is this?": Mark 4:35-41

December 6 – Second Sunday of Advent: Fix our Eyes on Jesus' Identity: “You are my beloved Son.": Mark 1:1-11

December 13 – Third Sunday of Advent: Fix our Eyes on Jesus' Identity: “God with us.": Matthew 1:18-24

December 20 – Fourth Sunday of Advent: Fix our Eyes on Jesus' Identity: “Called holy.": Luke 1:26-38

December 24 – Christmas Eve Services: Fix our Eyes on Jesus' Identity: “A Savior, who is Christ the Lord.": Luke 2:1-20

December 27 – Guest Speaker

STAGE 3: WINTER (7 WEEKS)

Jesus and everyday life

January 3: Fix our Eyes on Jesus' Warnings about Money: “God said to him, ‘Fool!’”: Luke 12:13-21

January 10: Fix our Eyes on Jesus' Warnings about Money: “No one can serve two masters.": Matthew 6:19-24

January 17: Fix our Eyes on Jesus' Care for the Poor: “The least of these.": Matthew 25:31-46

January 24: Fix our Eyes on Jesus' Care for the Poor: “Invite the poor.": Luke 14:7-14

January 31: Fix our Eyes on Jesus' Teaching about Family: “Who are my mother and my brothers?": Mark 3:31-35

February 7: Fix our Eyes on Jesus' Teaching about Family: “The two shall become one flesh.": Matthew 19:1-9

February 14: Fix our Eyes on Jesus' Path to Reconciliation: How often...will I forgive?": Matthew 18:15-22

STAGE 4: LENT (7 WEEKS)

Jesus' offer of forgiveness

February 17 – Ash Wednesday: Fix our Eyes on Jesus the Forgiver: “Forgive us.": Matthew 6:5-15

February 21 (First Sunday of Lent): Fix our Eyes on Jesus the Forgiver: “This woman has been caught.": John 8:1-11

February 28: Fix our Eyes on Jesus the Forgiver: “She loved much.": Luke 7:36-50

March 7: Fix our Eyes on Jesus the Forgiver: “This man receives sinners.": Luke 15:1-10

- March 14:** Fix our Eyes on Jesus the Forgiver: “There was a man who had two sons.”: Luke 15:11-25
- March 21:** Fix our Eyes on Jesus the Forgiver: “His older son was in the field.”: Luke 15:24-32
- March 28 – Palm Sunday:** Fix our Eyes on Jesus the Forgiver: “Some who trusted in themselves.”: Luke 18:9-14
- April 1 (Maundy Thursday):** Fix our Eyes on Jesus the Forgiver: “For the forgiveness of sins.”: Matthew 26:26-35
- April 2 (Good Friday):** Fix our Eyes on Jesus the Forgiver: “Father forgive them.”: Luke 23:32-43
- April 4 (Easter):** Fix our Eyes on Jesus the Forgiver: “Come and have breakfast.”: John 21:1-19

STAGE 5: SPRING (9 WEEKS)

***Jesus with those struggling with their faith,
Jesus sharing the Gospel, and
Jesus’ sending his disciples on mission***

- April 11:** Fix our Eyes on Jesus with our Doubt: “I will never believe.”: John 20:24-30
- April 18:** Fix our Eyes on Jesus with our Doubt: “Help my unbelief.”: Mark 9:14-29
- April 25:** Fix our Eyes on Jesus the Evangelist: “You must be born again.”: John 3:1-21
- May 2:** Fix our Eyes on Jesus the Evangelist: “Where do you get that living water?”: John 4:1-35
- May 9:** Fix our Eyes on Jesus the Sender: “Go and tell.”: Matthew 28:9-10, 16-20
- May 16:** Fix our Eyes on Jesus the Sender: “I am sending you.”: John 20:19-23
- May 23:** Fix our Eyes on Jesus the Sender: “You are witnesses.”: Luke 24:36-49, Acts 1:6-9
- May 30:** The Challenge of Jesus: “This is a hard saying.”: Luke 24:36-49
- June 6:** The Challenge of Jesus: “How can we know the way?”: John 14:1-14



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