A Spiritual Eye Exam

"Do You See Jesus?" Series, March 7 & 8, 2026 John 16:1-4a
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Following Jesus costs.

In North Africa, it will likely cost you your family.

Take Elmahdi for instance. He married and loved his wife deeply. But he also loves Jesus. Secretly. Elmahdi discovered Christian teaching on Facebook. He was so moved by what he found that he gave his life to Christ. But he kept it hidden because he knew his wife was a devout Muslim. He went to church secretly. But his odd excuses for leaving the home made his wife suspicious. She started searching his phone and found text messages with Christians, Christian books and songs, and (worst) a digital copy of the Bible. She knew his secret. At first, she didn't confront him. She thought it might be a phase. She encouraged him to say prayers, fast during Ramadan, and go to mosque. Elmahdi kept making excuses. Finally, she confronted him. He confessed his faith in Christ but professed his love for her and said that he would not pressure her to convert. He loved her. But she made it clear—revert to Islaam or face divorce.[1]

In North America, it may cost you your family as well.

There is a story that repeats itself here at Valley. Imagine Faith. Faith grew up here at Valley. Her parents brought her and her brother to church every week—multiple times. She was in Summer Bible Club every year and went on a mission trip to Pennsylvania that changed her life when she was a teenager that changed her life. But in college, she started asking tough questions about her faith. Her parents worried because she stopped going to church when she came home. When she was 25, she moved in with a guy she was dating; he wasn't a Christian, and when her parents raised concerns about their relationship, she got angry and accused them of being judgmental. She's married to him now, and they have three children of their own. But she doesn't let her parents see her kids except on carefully supervised visits because she doesn't want them to say anything about Jesus. If you think you know Faith, you don't. She's made up. But this story has happened so many times that many of us know it by heart. The cost of Christian faith keeps rising; it touches our politics, our life online, the workplace, and our friendships.

Jesus saw it coming and warned us.

It was the night before Jesus' crucifixion. He was in the Upper Room with His disciples celebrating one Last Supper together. He washed their feet, and Judas left to betray Him. He explained that He would leave them but told them to take heart for the Holy Spirit would come to them. Then at the end of John chapter 15, He promised them persecution. "If they persecuted Me, they will persecute you." As we turn to John chapter 16, Jesus gets even more specific. He tells the 11 remaining disciples that they would be thrown out of their synagogues. A day would come when those who killed them would think that they were doing a righteous thing! Persecuting Christians would seem like cleansing society of an

[1] https://www.opendoors.org.hk/en-US/news/latest/morocco-faith-family/

evil. Jesus wasn't just talking to those 11 disciples. He was talking to us. We will face a cost when we follow Jesus.

Facing a cost can make us fall away.

The way that people reject Christianity and Christians really is hard to bear. You may have faced the pressure yourself. That's what Jesus is warning us about in verse one. "You might fall away. I don't want that to happen, so I'm warning you now." But how does Jesus' warning help us to face and pay the cost of following Him? First, it's in seeing others more accurately than they see themselves.

The people causing problems couldn't pass a spiritual eye exam.

I feel like a child learning my letters for the first time when I take an eye exam now.

I put my face up against a machine and look through tiny lenses at a letter chart on the wall. "Is that an e? Or a b?" It sounds like I don't know my letters. Sometimes we slowly lose our eyesight as we age.

Cavefish lose their eyesight in the dark, and so can we.

Cavefish live underground in limestone caverns in a rainforest in Mexico in total, perpetual darkness. These cavefish are born with eyes. But their eyes dissolve as they grow. Even the bones in their eye sockets collapse. They use their other senses to find the rare food in their underground home, but they have lost not only their sight but their eyes.[2] Imagine the same thing happening to us spiritually.

Spiritual eyesight lets us glimpse a reality most people miss.

God is Spirit, so we can't see Him with our physical eyes. It takes spiritual sight to see the spiritual realm. Some of us have it while others don't. At least not yet. They miss God's existence, His presence with us, and everything He's doing among us and saying to us.

Jesus says that those who persecute or reject us are spiritually blind.

Look at what He says in **John 16:3**,

> "And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me."

Those who reject you and persecute you do so because they do not know Jesus. Hence, they really don't know God the Father either. They can't accurately know God the Father if they don't know God the Son. They are spiritually blind.

Knowing that makes me feel something more than anger.

It's easy to get angry when someone rejects or persecutes me. Or other Christians. It's even easy to get angry when I see people just rejecting the Christian message. But Jesus tells us that it's all happening because they're spiritually blind. That's different. They're missing something. That must be awful. It makes me think Jesus was right when He said from the cross, "Father, forgive them. For they don't know what they're doing." But that doesn't mean it's easy when it actually happens.

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[2] https://research.uc.edu/news/2017/09/28/how-do-blind-cavefish-find-their-way

Don't stumble when inflation sets in.

It would be tragic if Elmahdi gave up and reverted to Islam.

Elmahdi's wife divorced him. Because he had converted to Christianity, the court took his children away. Worse, they prohibited him from ever seeing his sons. Elmahdi has lived with this separation for years. He's tormented wanting to see his children. Can you imagine the pressure he faces? If he would just renounce his Christian faith and start living as a Muslim—even if it's just an act—the pain would be over. The pressure on him to stumble—to fall away as Jesus puts it in John 16:1—is immense. What does it look like to stumble?

When we stumble, we Renounce – Remove – Retreat.

First, sometimes we **Renounce**: We walk away from God or our beliefs. We may declare that there is no God, get angry with Him or say that He's not good, or even embrace another, competing faith. Instead of renouncing, we may **Remove** ourselves: We don't walk away from God, but we do walk away from the Church. We stop engaging in public worship. We don't want to be seen as "one of them." Third is **Retreat**: We protect ourselves like a turtle pulling its head into its shell. We become quiet about our faith and inactive in Church. These are ways we stumble. Does one of them describe someone you know? Jesus warned us because He didn't want this to happen to us.

But warning us in advance proves that Jesus is trustworthy.

In **John 16:4** Jesus says,

> "But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you. …"

The future isn't a surprise to God. He can tell us what is coming because He knows what's coming. Yes, when we suffer, God is allowing it to happen, and that isn't easy to know. But it is encouraging to know that God isn't surprised and isn't being defeated. God is still in charge, He is still working, and He is with us. That is all very comforting. Jesus says, "Remember that I told you this when things get tough." Because we aren't spiritually blind, we see it coming. But is there any hope for those who are spiritually blind?

Jesus gives sight to the blind.

Cavefish's above-ground cousins give us hope.

Cavefish are a species of tetras, and near the caves where cavefish are found, tetras swim the creeks and rivers. They are so closely related that the two fish can interbreed easily. Not all tetras are blind. Some can see perfectly well. The same is true of humans. Some of us are spiritually blind while others of us can see perfectly well. But a Mexican cavefish that has lost its eyes is never going to see again whereas a person who is spiritually blind can see again.

The Gospel never gets stuck in Chapter 2!

I think of the Gospel as God's Story divided it into five chapters. Chapter 1 is creation. God created the world and everything in it. That includes us. Chapter 2 is brokenness. We sinned. When we did, we

broke our relationship with God, we broke the world, and we broke ourselves. This is the chapter where we became spiritually blind. But chapter 2 is never the end! For every chapter 2, chapter 3 is available, and chapter 3 is Jesus!

Repeatedly in the Gospels, Jesus gives sight to blind people.

They can't see; He opens their eyes; now they can see the world around them. It's a picture of what He's doing for all of us. We are spiritually blind. He heals us, and we can see spiritually.

That's real hope for us, for persecutors, and for you.

Jesus has come to those of us with the offer of salvation and spiritual sight. We said "yes" and now can see. Even people who actively reject and persecute Christians can receive the gift of salvation and spiritual sight. That's why we still hear stories of ISIS fighters becoming evangelists and of Communists joining house churches. And if that can happen, then there is an offer coming to you. If you are not yet a disciple of Jesus, He offers Himself, forgiveness, new life, and spiritual sight to you today. But what God is doing is even bigger still.

God opens the eyes of the blind through us.

Instead of stumbling, we can Affirm – Assemble – Advance.

Renounce -> Affirm: Rather than walking away from God and our beliefs, we announce them and own them. **Remove -> Assemble**: Instead of walking away from the Church and our spiritual family, we get together. Even though we're broken and sometimes odd. **Retreat-> Advance**: Rather than stepping back to protect ourselves, we engage. We recognize that God is on mission and join Him in that mission. That's what Jesus really wants.

We can be like Omar.

Omar is 30 years old, and he has been a Christian for 14 years. Even though he lives in a country where his candor isn't welcome, he's open about his Christian faith. He wears a black t-shirt with the name "Jesus" written in big white letters on his chest. Although he is careful in public, in his apartment, he has a cross and several Bibles out in the open. His father discovered Omar's faith a year after he converted and kicked him out of the house. He slept outside as a teenager. Eventually, he found a new home with a Christian pastor; it was like being adopted into a new family. After finishing school, Omar studied video production and started making Christian videos. Jesus has changed Omar. He knows he is loved by his Heavenly Father, so talking about Jesus comes naturally to him. He makes videos about the Christian faith and posts them online so that other people can find what he has. Traveling throughout the region, he meets people who are curious and shares his faith in Christ with them.[3] He was spiritually blind, but Jesus opened his eyes. Now God is opening the eyes of many blind people through him.

God opened the eyes of the blind through our World Outreach Partners 44,238 times last year!

Sometimes it happened when a person was at home scrolling social media making decisions about their ultimate loyalty. Other times it happened in conversations over coffee. It happened in house

[3] https://www.opendoors.ph/news/latest/2025-10-09-14-years-following-jesus-in-secret-omars-story-of/

churches meeting in upstairs rooms with the blinds drawn so as not to attract attention. It happened person-to-person on the streets of a redlight district in Southeast Asia. Jesus, the Light of the World, was shining brightly, and a person's eyes miraculously opened for the first time to see that light shining. Now their future is eternal life.

How will God open blind eyes through you?

Maybe you'll be an Omar and start a social media channel yourself or wear Christian t-shirts in public places to start conversations. Maybe you'll go on a mission trip and find yourself on a baseball diamond, on the streets of a redlight district in Southeast Asia, or in a coffee shop in North Africa where you start a conversation with someone who doesn't know Jesus. Maybe you'll open your backyard this summer to a friend who needs Jesus. The dreams God is putting on your heart excite me.

But you play an important part in stories that God is already writing.

There are workers who have gone around the world in Jesus' name and in our name! They are already on baseball diamonds, online, in office buildings, and in house churches meeting behind closed doors with drawn blinds. God is using them to open the eyes of the blind. Will you pray for them? Will you give to support their work? And will you go to serve with them?