

### Focus

The Hubble Space Telescope was designed to take crystal clear pictures of the far reaches of space, and scientists fully expected that once it launched they would be able to see things never seen before. Then it went into orbit. The pictures looked good, but not as great as expected.

The problem was that the telescope had been launched with a flawed mirror, keeping it from getting the sharpest focus possible. How could they hope to repair and restore a delicate scientific instrument thousands of miles up in space, far from the lab where it was created?

They came up with an optic solution (on people whose eyes don't focus well, we call these a pair of glasses.) The astronauts who carried out the repair mission installed the optics and the telescope achieved its proper focus, which in turn allowed it to perform its proper function as originally intended.

As God's people, we often have trouble focusing properly on the things God intends for us to see and do. This week, let's study God's purpose for his people: to focus on God and on those around us, to serve God by serving others, and to receive God's blessing by being a blessing to those he puts in our lives.

#### Monday – A Call to Action

*"The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing."* Robert Browning, 19<sup>th</sup> c. English poet

1. Please read Isaiah 58:1-14. To whom is God speaking in verse 1? How does God speak to us today? How do you normally respond when he speaks to you?
2. What was Jeremiah's initial response when God spoke to him in Jeremiah 1:4-6? How did God reassure Jeremiah in verses 7-10?
3. Describe how Jeremiah's obedience led to a deeper relationship with God in Jeremiah 1:11-16. How would you feel if God's pronouncement in verses 17-19 were directed at you instead of Jeremiah?

**Digging Deeper (optional):** Read Exodus 3:1-22. What parallels do you see between Moses and Jeremiah? What words and phrases show God calling Moses to look beyond himself, to focus externally?

#### Tuesday – Are You Only Pleasing Yourself?

*"A hypocrite is in himself both the archer and the mark, in all actions shooting at his own praise or profit."* Thomas Fuller, 17<sup>th</sup> c. English pastor and historian

1. Please read Isaiah 58:2-5. What did God's people complain about? Why?
2. How did God answer these complaints? Why do you think the people had become so mistaken?
3. Look at God's earlier statement on this theme in Isaiah 29:13. How did Jesus apply it in Mark 7:1-13?

**Making it Personal:** How can you make sure that you do not "nullify the word of God by your tradition"?

#### Wednesday – An Outward Focus: serving others

*"The actions of men are the best interpreters of their thoughts."* John Locke, 17<sup>th</sup> c. English philosopher

1. Please read Isaiah 58:6-10. How did God shatter their concept of fasting? What is the shift in focus? What did God promise would happen if his people engaged in true fasting?
2. What part of God's definition of fasting is attractive to you? What seems beyond your ability?

**Digging Deeper (optional)** – Please read Isaiah 41:9-11 and 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17. How do these passages give you courage to serve others as God desires?

**Putting it into Practice:** Plan to fast this week (one or more meals) and give the time/money you save to be a blessing to others.

#### Thursday – Repair and Restore

*"Let us not be content to wait and see what will happen, but give us the determination to make the right things happen."* Peter Marshall, 20<sup>th</sup> c. American pastor

1. Please read Isaiah 58:11-14. What are God's people called to do? What do you think it means for the world that God's people, the Church, will be like a garden?
2. Imagine if the Church were well-known for its work in repairing and restoring people and the world (v. 12). What might that look like? How would this glorify God and lead people to praise and worship him?
3. How do verses 13-14 serve to keep God's people rooted in him, and not just to focus on people?

**Prayer Focus:** Pray for FBC, that we would become a congregation known for repairing and restoring lives and the world.

#### Friday – Good News and Good Work go Hand in Hand

*"Nothing happens until something moves."* John Denham, 17<sup>th</sup> c. English poet

1. Please read Acts 10:34-38. Who is intended to receive Jesus' message of peace? What did Jesus do besides just tell people the good news? How did this support his message?
2. Now look at James 2:14-18. How can people who believe in God demonstrate their faith to others?
3. What danger is there for people like those described in Isaiah 29:13 and 58:4, according to James 2:19?

**Making it Personal:** What can you do to honor God and serve those around you in a way that lives out your faith and spreads the good news about Jesus?

**For the Weekend:** Re-read Isaiah 58:1-14. What concrete steps can you take to make sure you worship God by focusing on him and serving the people around you? Ask God to help you take those steps now.