

An Eye-Opening Sunday

Worship resources

We hope these resources will make it easy for your church to learn more about the people supported by Christian Blind Mission (CBM) and be inspired to pray and give to help children with sight problems in Kenya.

The resources are designed to be flexible so you can include Christian Blind Mission in your worship and activities in a way that suits you and your church. However you get involved, we hope that your church will choose to hold a collection, make a donation, or undertake some fundraising activities to support CBM's work.

Prayers

Call to worship - based on Psalm 119

Blessed are you, O Lord;

teach me your ways.

With my whole heart I seek you;

do not let me stray from your commandments.

Your word is a lamp to my feet

and a light to my path.

Give me understanding, that I may keep your law

and observe it with my whole heart.

Turn my heart to your decrees,

and not to selfish gain.

Open my eyes,

that I may see wonderful things.

My tongue will sing of your promise,

for all your commandments are right.

Give life according to your justice

For great is your mercy, O Lord.

Prayers to open your eyes

Loving God,

Open our eyes

To see the world as you do

Open our eyes

To each person's immense potential

Open our eyes

To the needs of all your children

Open our eyes

To opportunities to make a difference

Open our eyes

And help us to see the way to your glorious Kingdom

Amen

Prayer cards with this prayer are available free to order from CBM for members of your congregation.

Prayers of intercession

You could use the stories from Kenya on this sheet, supported by images from the downloadable photo gallery, as a focus for your prayers of intercession:

- Pray for Joy, Joseph and Christine and their families, that with the right support, they will have the opportunity to fulfil their potential.
- Pray for the staff of Christian Blind Mission's partners in Kenya – doctors, clinicians and support staff – as they seek to improve the quality of life of people with visual impairments.
- Pray for teachers, health workers and governments that they will grow in their understanding and help people with disabilities to be properly supported and included in society.
- Pray that people in this country will be inspired to support Christian Blind Mission so that more people will get the help they need.

Reflection

Christ has no body now upon the earth but yours; no hands but yours; no feet but yours. Yours, my brothers and sisters, are the eyes through which Christ's compassion has to look upon the world, and yours are the lips with which his love has to speak. Yours are the hands with which he is to bless people now, and yours the feet with which he is to go about doing good. Christ has no body now upon the earth but yours.

Various sources

Children's presentation

See the **Eye Opening Sunday children's activities** sheet for a suggested activity and talk to use when children are in church.

Fundraising ideas

See the **Eye Opening Sunday fundraising ideas** sheet for suggestions of creative ways that the children and young people in your church could raise money to support other young people in Kenya.

Stories from Kenya

Putting it in context

In the world's poorest places, if you struggle to see, life can be incredibly difficult. As a result, people who are blind or visually impaired are among the world's poorest people. Most receive little or no support – not even a pair of glasses. Imagine trying to learn at school if the words on the blackboard are a distant blur, or you can't see a textbook. Or trying to collect water from the river if you can't see where you're going.

This is not just something that just affects a few individuals. In the East African country of Kenya alone, there are an estimated 840,000 people living with poor vision – that's one in 50 of the population.



The good news is that the simple, low-cost, practical support offered by CBM's partners

can make all the difference to people with poor vision.

Eye problems in early childhood left **Joy**, who is now 11, blind in one eye and with very limited vision in the other. As a result, she's had a very hard time at school. She says, "I had to strain to see words in the books. I had to go



forward so I could see the black board; even if I sat at the front I could still not see the words on the board." Her classmates would tease her, and teachers who didn't understand the support she needs would sometimes beat her for falling behind with her work. "Those who don't know what is happening to her find it difficult to understand her; they want to harass her, and want to abuse her," comments her mother, Jacinta. "She used to be a very active girl, very jovial. It makes her feel that she is not whole."

Joy and her mum recently visited a special Low Vision Unit in an eye hospital supported by CBM in Kenya, where she was fitted with new glasses to help her read much more easily, and a special telescope so she can see the blackboard at school without having to go very close. She has also been issued with sunglasses to help protect her remaining working eye from dust or damage. Jacinta is now feeling more hopeful about Joy's future. "I would like her to have a bright life," she says. "When you show her love, she can do things."



Joseph, who is 10, has had vision problems since he was young, but as they were not identified early on, his sight continued to deteriorate. It caused him pain, he struggled to help at home and his performance at school suffered. Eventually teachers noticed the problem and advised the family to take him to an eye hospital supported by CBM in Kenya. Now he has glasses for everyday use and a special telescope to see the blackboard at school. As a result, he's gone straight to the top of his class, and dreams of becoming a doctor.



Christine, who is 15, was struggling at school until CBM's partner in Kenya tested her vision and fitted her with glasses and magnifiers so she could see her work. It's also trained her teachers about how best to help her, so she won't miss out on any more learning.

An inspiring short film featuring Joy is available to download from the CBM website. Also available is a downloadable photo gallery and presentation featuring

these stories. Visit www.cbmuk.org.uk/church-resources

Using the Bible

Key Bible verses

"Open my eyes, that I may see wonderful things." *Psalm 119:18*

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set the oppressed free." *Luke 4:18*

"The Lord opens the eyes of the blind. The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous. The Lord watches over the sojourners; he upholds the widow and the fatherless." *Psalm 146:8-9*

Continuous readings:

Exodus 32:1-14. Aaron gives up on God and creates a golden calf to worship, but Moses persuades the Lord to change his mind about destroying his people. Do we have the strength to keep pursuing God's ways of love and justice, for all people, even when the going gets tough and we are surrounded by the tempting 'golden calves' of our consumer society? And are we, like God, willing to change our minds about people who we might otherwise think are worthless?

Psalm 106:1-6, 19-23. The psalm recalls the events of Exodus 32, and reminds us: "Happy are those who observe justice, who do righteousness at all times."

Related readings:

Isaiah 25:1-9. The prophet sings about God's protection of the poor and needy, and his promise of abundant life for all people.

Psalm 23. David's familiar psalm celebrates God's continual care for us.

Whether we are blind or sighted, with God beside us, even in the darkness, we should not fear.

Philippians 4:1-9. Paul encourages the church to focus on what is good and pleasing to God rather than on things that cause them to quarrel. Responding to those in need is something all Christians can agree should be a priority, and can do together. CBM brings together Christians of all denominations to improve the lives of disabled people in the world's poorest communities.

Matthew 22:1-14. The parable of the wedding banquet. The invitation to God's kingdom is not just for those with high social status, but is for everyone, even those on the streets. What are the implications of the poor being among God's honoured guests? The message that "many are called, but few are chosen" reminds us that the path of discipleship is costly. Many of us claim to be Christians, but it is not easy to follow the ways of God's love and justice as modelled by Jesus.

Sermon outline

As Jesus walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' Jesus answered, 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him.' John 9:1-3

Back in 1999, Glenn Hoddle was famously sacked as England football manager. Unlike other England managers, he wasn't sacked for being unsuccessful in his job (he got England through to the quarter finals of the World Cup in 1998 - remember the Michael Owen wonder goal?). Hoddle was sacked because of his belief and comments around disabled people. He said that to have a disability was a punishment for misdemeanours in a former life. The comments caused outrage and resulted in the FA dismissing Mr Hoddle. In response, the then Education Secretary, David

Blunkett – who is blind – brilliantly quipped, "If Glen Hoddle is right, it must mean I was a failed England football coach in a previous life!"

At the time of Jesus, it was widely believed that to have a disability meant that you were cursed or had done something wrong in a previous life. There was a stigma around it, and to be disabled meant to be seen as unclean and to be excluded from society. The ancient nations regarded visual impairment as the lowest degradation that could be inflicted upon a human being, and the blind man in this story had therefore spent his life as beggar. So the question Jesus's disciples asked would not have seemed shocking or outrageous. They were learning on the job. They didn't set out to be offensive, but were immersed in the culture of the day, and held the belief that the man born blind – or one of his parents – must have done something bad in a previous life.

In many places in the world today, people who are disabled – who make up 1 billion of the 7 billion people on this planet – continue to be treated badly, excluded from society, and denied the opportunity to fulfil their potential. If you live with a disability in a poor country, you will probably have very few chances in life. 82% people with disabilities in developing countries live in extreme poverty, and children with disabilities are more likely to miss out on education than any other group. *You may wish to refer to Joy's experiences of being teased and bullied at school; her story is recounted in this resource and in the short film available from CBM's website.*

Jesus' response to the disciples' question was counter-cultural and radical, and gives us a model to reflect on and follow.

First, Jesus saw the person before the disability. Of course he could see that the man was blind, but he saw the person, the character, the potential. To Jesus, the man

was a person who happened to be blind. To the others he was a blind man: notice the difference.

We might reflect on our own views and attitudes to disability. When we are at the shops, or on our way to work or college, and see a person with a disability e.g. someone who is blind or in a wheelchair, with a mental health condition, do we see the disability or the person first? If we're really honest, do we see disabled people as individuals to be pitied, or even as an inconvenient drain on resources?

You may remember the radio programme called 'Does he take sugar?' the title of which encapsulates the attitudes so often faced by people living with a disability. Jesus challenges us to see each other, including those who might be a little different to ourselves, in the way that Jesus saw this man, and sees all of us: as people who are whole and made in God's image. Jesus saw the man who was blind, not as a sinner or a problem to be dealt with, but as an opportunity to show God's glory.

Second, Jesus helped the man, in a practical way. The story goes on to recount how Jesus put mud on his eyes and miraculously gave him sight. Recognising that someone with disabilities is a person first does not mean that we shouldn't support them or help meet their physical needs.

For people with low vision in Kenya, simple practical things such as glasses, magnifiers and special telescopes can make all the difference for their ability to participate in daily life. They enable children like Joseph and Joy to learn and play.

Third, Jesus's actions overcome the man's exclusion from society. As the story continues, we see how for the first time in his life he begins to be included in his community, and even became a voice that others listened to. He becomes a witness giving powerful testimony to God's

glory. This is an important aspect of Jesus's healing of the man.

For children such as Joy, overcoming the physical difficulties of having poor vision is only part of the challenge they face. Stigma and social exclusion involves changing society's attitudes and preconceptions. That's why an important part of CBM's work in Kenya is raising awareness about disability to help address people's misconceptions. Another important element is training to enable teachers and health workers to support people with visual impairments. CBM also works with governments and decision makers to ensure that the voices of people with disability are heard.

When we stand alongside those who are disabled we can play a part in building a more inclusive world, in which people living with disabilities are given an equal standing and able to enjoy their human rights.

When Jesus met the man who was blind, he saw potential, he saw a chance to include, and he saw an opportunity to say something important about God.

Questions to consider:

1. What attitudes or preconceptions do we bring when we think about people with disabilities?
2. It's been said that all of us have some kind of disability. Do you agree?
3. How does it feel to be excluded because of something you have no control over?
4. What does healing involve for the blind man in John 9?
5. A parent of a child with quadriplegic cerebral palsy once said, "I wouldn't change my son for the world, but I would change the world for my son." As you reflect on the way that people with disabilities are treated, how would you want to change the world?

About CBM

CBM transforms the lives of people with disabilities, their families and communities in the world's poorest places. Driven by Christian values, we prevent blindness, improve health and help people with disabilities go to school, earn a living and play active roles in their communities.

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