The Invisibles (1): Can You See Me?

BOTTOM LINE: At some point in your life, you were invisible—but Jesus saw you.

Sometimes you can stand in a room or walk down a hallway or sit in a chair and no one notices you. It’s not that you have some type of special ability that makes you invisible—people just don’t see you. They know nothing about you—nor do they seem to want to know anything about you. It’s like you’re not even there, even when you are physically in the room. You’re invisible. The good news is Jesus sees invisible people—even those who never realized they were invisible.

OPENERS/ICEBREAKERS/ILLUSTRATIONS

SESSION 1 GAME: MOVIE INVISIBLES
(Play this game as an icebreaker to Session 1.)
Go to www.filmwise.com. This website contains games based on the question, “Can you guess what movie this is from a screenshot?” You’ll find screen shots from different movies with pieces of the shot missing. The first to answer correctly wins. Play this game each week, picking several screen shots from www.filmwise.com.

When you get to the site, click on the navigation button at the top titled “FilmWise Invisibles.” From there, you can pick different quizzes. You can either play the game directly from the web site by showing it on your TV or screen through your computer, or download the pictures into a PowerPoint/Keynote Presentation. You can break your group up into teams so that they work together to find the answer or choose individual players. If you choose to use individual players, consider making the players race from the back of the room and the run to the front when they know the answer, so that the first person to run to reach the stage gets to answer the question.

SESSION 1 ILLUSTRATION: THE INCREDIBLES
(Use this illustration in place of the INTRODUCTION section of the teaching script.)
The lesson this week helps us to understand that we often don’t notice the invisible people around us. To illustrate this idea, show a clip from the movie The Incredibles. In this clip, Violet, the daughter, wants a boy to notice her but she turns invisible when he looks her way. Start the clip at 15:40 and play until 16:15.
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TEACHING SCRIPT
The teaching script is divided into five sections.

INTRODUCTION: The introduction is intended to connect you, the communicator, to the audience, usually through a personal story or observation. We’ve included our stories, but you may want to substitute your own story in this section.

TENSION: The tension moves the message from the “me” mentality of the introduction to a “we” mentality. For example, a transition statement might be, “At some point in our lives, we have all been jealous of someone over something.”

TRUTH: Once the tension builds, the next logical step is to uncover the truth of what the Bible says about the topic.

APPLICATION: At this point, the message moves to a “you” mentality in order to teach the application. The “you” is the student. Take God’s truth and unpack how it relates to each student so that he or she can apply it to everyday life.

LANDING: Here it is important to land the message on what each student needs to know and do with what they’ve heard. Just as the message began with a personal story or observation, the message also ends with a “me” mentality. For example, one possible landing statement might be, “I have a greater sense of purpose knowing that God created me in His image.” Leave the students with a clear sense of what all of you should do with what you’ve heard.
BOTTOM LINE: At some point in your life, you were invisible—but Jesus saw you.

INTRODUCTION
A. Today, I want to talk with you about something that is very personal. It’s not something I’ve talked about before. In fact, it’s something that I haven’t really told anyone about. I am . . . a superhero. Yes, I said it. I want to throw up a little bit now, but it’s out there. I have an ability that makes me, well, special. I know, I look like just your average guy, but I’m like one of those guys on Heroes; I have “abilities.” Well, one ability actually. I can become invisible.

B. Some of you are laughing right now, you’re even considering ways you can mock me on Facebook or your blog. And that’s okay. I can become invisible and mess up your computers. No, seriously, that’s not how my powers work. But I have the ability to be completely unseen.

I discovered this ability when I was in high school. I could walk the halls and no one would ever notice I was there. I could say “hi” to people, and they wouldn’t even look my way. Wait a minute! Maybe I have the ability to not be heard as well. I’ll have to test that one out.

And that ability has continued for years—in college, here in youth group, in my house with my kids, at parties. There have even been times when I’ve been in the room talking, trying to connect with people, and they look right through me. They act like they see me, but they don’t see me at all.

C. Sometimes it really hurts. Sometimes I want people to notice I’m there. But you know, I think that just comes with the territory. Every hero has to have some angst, right? So I’ll just live with it. I’m thinking about getting a cape, but I’m not sure I can pull that off. So for now, I’ll use my invisibility wisely.

D. I’d like to think I’m unique, but I know there are other people around me who go unseen. I know I am not the only one this way. I sometimes run into these people who are just like me. There are people everywhere I go who just want someone to notice they are there. Some of you in this room right now know what I’m talking about, and you wonder if you have this ability as well.

TENSION
A. Some of you walked into this room today, and no one noticed you. No one said a word to you or acknowledged your presence. You slipped in, hung around the back, became part of the background, and now you’re sitting there both wishing someone would notice you and kind of fearful that someone might.

B. Some of you have felt this way before—even if you don’t feel that way now. You remember a time when you felt invisible. Maybe you were the new guy or the new girl at school, or in youth group, or in your neighborhood. You felt what it was like to be on the outside looking in. Even if it was temporary, you experienced what it was like to be around a group of people who knew nothing about you and didn’t seem to care. You felt what it was like to be in a place where no one really cared about what was going on below the surface. And if you came from a place where you were known, the pain of being invisible was probably that much more difficult to deal with.

C. It could be that for some of you, you’ve always existed in this nice, warm, comfortable place. Life has never been awkward for you. You’ve lived in the same place, grown up with the same group of people, been at this church forever—you’ve never experienced a time when you felt invisible. So you don’t really get this. You don’t really see why it’s a big deal. But a part of you knows this nice, cozy place won’t last forever. And whatever is next—the unknown after high
school—makes you cringe a little bit because at that point you might not be as comfortable or as “known” as you are now.

D. The reality is that at some point in our lives, each one of us will experience what it’s like to be invisible. It can happen when we walk into a new place or when we’re hanging out with people we thought were friends. It can even happen in our own homes. There are endless places where we can feel invisible. And even though we know this is true, and know it is even pretty normal, we still hold on to this desire to be seen, this need for someone not only to notice who we really are but also to care about what they may discover when they do see us. Because when you’re invisible and someone sees you—really sees who you are, where you are, what’s right and what’s hurt—it’s like you come alive.

TRUTH

A. The Gospels—the New Testament books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John—record many amazing, supernatural things that Jesus did. He turned water into wine. He healed sick people. He brought some dead people back to life. But I think the one thing that amazes me most about Jesus is His ability to see people. He noticed people—and not always the type of people you might expect Him to notice. He didn’t just notice the rich, the powerful and the elite. He noticed those others would have never taken note of. And He not only noticed them, He saw them. He saw who they really were—beyond the exterior, beyond the circumstance—to what they really needed.

(Note for Communicator: There is a session video available that can be used in place of points “B” through “I” to illustrate the Bible story. For more information, see the “creating the environment” or “middle school adaptations” pages in this document.)

B. John 5 records one of those moments. Jesus is in Jerusalem to observe a Jewish holiday. While in the city, He comes to a pool called Bethesda. Now, you may need to rethink your idea of what a pool is like because this wasn’t your typical neighborhood pool—no high dive, no water slide, no kiddie area with the mushroom toys. This was an entirely different kind of pool. Rather than having sunbathers and lifeguards around the perimeter, it was surrounded by people who were crippled and diseased. See, the story goes that every once in a while, an angel of the Lord would come down to the pool and stir the waters. The first person in the pool after the angel did this would be healed. So crowds of the sick would gather at the pool in hopes of being the first ones in when the time was right. Sort of gives new meaning to “All Swim,” doesn’t it?

C. Can you imagine the scene? People would come and make their way to this pool, and most were struck with some sort of physical ailment. Some were blind; some were paralyzed; others were crippled. But they all saw this pool as the ticket to being healed. So when the angel would come (and I am not exactly sure how this works), you can imagine the commotion the event would create. Blind people, paralyzed people, crippled people doing everything they could to touch the water first. Maybe some of them had family that would keep them company while they waited, or maybe some people had friends who would wait with them to help them get in the pool faster than anyone else. But it seems like most people at the pool, most of the ones there in hopes of getting healed, were there alone. They were overlooked by their friends and abandoned by their families. They saw this pool, this place where healing was rumored to take place, as the key to a new life.

D. And this is where Jesus is. He isn’t teaching on the side of mountain. He isn’t enjoying a nice meal at the home of a disciple or devout follower. He isn’t relaxing and taking a little vacation while in town for the holiday. Jesus heads to Bethesda. He goes where the outcasts are. He moves to where the abandoned are. He sets out for where the invisibles are. And when He gets there, His eyes land on a man who has been an invalid for 38 years. That is twice as long as most of you have been alive! And this man has been paralyzed that entire time.

E. The Bible doesn’t say how long the man has been at the pool. It doesn’t tell us the specifics of
his family or if he even had one, or the circumstances that led to him being paralyzed in the first place. When we hear of how long he has been the way he is, we get the idea that he has gotten pretty used to his status. Thirty-eight years of not being able to do anything on your own, and you start to get the feeling you’re just not meant for good things, that you’re invisible. And if you have been at Bethesda for very long and haven’t gotten to the pool fast enough to be healed, then chances are, you are feeling forgotten. Feeling overlooked. Feeling invisible. Feeling like even in the midst of other crippled, sick and disabled people, you still aren’t noticeable.

F. But the book of John tells us that Jesus sees this man lying there and learns how long he has been in this condition. Maybe Jesus asks. Maybe someone tells Him. But Jesus takes notice. This man is no longer overlooked. This man is sought out and singled out. And Jesus asks him something: “Do you want to get well?” (John 5:6 NIV).

G. It seems like an obvious question and an even more obvious answer. Does he want to get well? Of course he does! Didn’t You hear him? For 38 years this guy has been unable to move on his own; this is a no-brainer! But maybe the point of Jesus’ question isn’t so much to get information or a clear answer. Maybe the point is to have contact—to make a connection—to communicate to the man more than just, “You’re in the way; you’re helpless; you’re a bother”—and communicate instead, “I see you. I notice you. You are not invisible to Me. I know you want to get well. I know you want healing. But I also want you to know that I care enough to engage with you, to talk with you, to do more than just fix you, but to connect with you too.”

“Oh, the invalid replied, “I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.” Then Jesus said to him: “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked (John 5:7-9 NIV).

H. The man knows Jesus is after more than just a “yes” or “no” answer. He also knows that Jesus cares more about him than just his inability to walk. So the man tells Jesus, “I have no one.” In other words, “All this time, all these years, I haven’t had anyone care about me, notice me, actually see me.” But Jesus is the exception. Jesus stops. Jesus takes notice. And at the sound of His command, the man, following nearly four decades of paralysis, is able to pick up his mat, and walk. Healed. After 38 years.

I. Jesus saw those others overlooked. He paid attention to those others thought invisible. He stopped. He took notice. And then He did something. He made a connection. He listened. He heard their stories and made them personal. Jesus made people matter—even people no one gave a second thought to.

APPLICATION

A. For a lot of us, this feeling of being invisible isn’t something new. It is something we have almost gotten used to. I can even remember feeling that way as a kid. When I was in elementary school, there was this really cool youth museum in town. The museum was set up differently from your normal museum. The building consisted of six different rooms, and each room had a different scene from some point in history. I know, it sounds kind of boring. But the cool thing was that before you went into the next room, the museum guides pulled two or three kids from the class to go put on costumes and become part of the scenery. As you can imagine, when they asked for volunteers the first time, only one or two people timidly raised their hands. But by the time we all were clued in to what was going on, every hand was raised. And I wanted to be picked. I wanted to be a part of the story so badly. But I wasn’t. I was overlooked every time. There were even a couple of kids who got to go twice, but not me. And I raised my hand fervently. I did my best “pick me” hand-raising and voice-screaming to get noticed. But the museum guide didn’t pick me. She didn’t notice me.

She’s not the only one. Over the years, there have been many invisible moments. There have been many times when I was overlooked or ignored. I’m not whining. This isn’t a pity party. It’s
just the truth. I was there, but I was just part of the background. I wasn’t the main attraction. I wasn’t the center of attention. So when I hear stories like the one about the man at the pool in Bethesda. I get how he feels. I relate to how great it is that Jesus notices. But Jesus does more than just notice, He picks me. He sees me.

B. Some of you feel forgotten, and you are waiting for someone to ask you about what’s going on in your life. All Jesus had to do was look at the paralyzed man and ask, “Do you want to get well?” for the man to realize that to Jesus, he was not nameless and he was not faceless. He mattered. And Jesus cared enough about him to stop, to notice him, to slow down and to do something about his pain. That one question was all it took for the man to confess, “I have no one.”

C. Maybe you’re sitting here today and you just don’t get it. You’ve never been someone who gets overlooked. Everyone knows who you are. Everyone sees you. And you feel pity for this person who felt so invisible, but it’s just not something you can relate to. But I’m going to tell you something that may come as a surprise to you—everyone of us has actually been the man at the pool.

What do I mean? Before Jesus came on the scene and initiated relationship with us, the reality is that each one of us had nothing going for us, we had nothing to offer. The Bible says in Romans 5:6: *When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners* (NLT). Did you catch that? While we were utterly helpless—as in a lost cause, with nothing going for us at all. That’s not how you feel? Well, it’s the reality. There was nothing you could do. Just like the man at the pool, maybe you can see where you want to go, what you want to do, how good you think you can be, how much you want to connect with God, but you just can’t get there on your own, no matter how much you want to. You needed help. I needed help. Every one of us needed help. From the person who seems like the “best person in the world” to the person who feels like the worst. We’ve all been in the same place.

And just like the man at the pool—we are without hope, without strength, without assistance—until Jesus took notice of us. Jesus saw us. He offered us a chance, and He did it when we needed it the most.

D. He offered us what we needed spiritually. He provided a way for the broken relationship between God and humanity to be mended, to be repaired, to be bridged. He offered a reconciled relationship. He met a need we had no way of meeting on our own. We were separated from a perfect and holy God because of our sin. But God didn’t ignore us. He sent His Son to die for us. When we had no one, God sent Jesus so we could have Someone. The arrival of Jesus proved that God saw us. We have all been in that place before. At some point, whether we realize it or not, we have been invisible, until God took notice of us.

E. We may as well have been in the crowd the day Jesus went to the pool at Bethesda—our condition of sin was hopeless. But Jesus paid attention to us. Jesus showed us He cared. Jesus made sure we knew we weren’t forgotten. We were looked out for. And He knows our story.

Before Christ, we didn’t stand a chance. But now, because He was willing to make a connection with us, to accept us in our state of sin when we had nothing to offer, things are different. Jesus made us count; Jesus made us matter. When it came to the man at Bethesda and when it came to our own pitiful condition, Jesus paused long enough to be aware of someone needing Him, of needing a connection, and then He made that connection.

F. And whether you know that because you’ve experienced it, or whether that’s something new that you desperately need to hear, Jesus sees the invisibles. He sees us when we’re so desperate and we so want to be seen. And He sees us when we’re completely unaware of how impossible and hopeless our situation is.
Jesus not only saw the invisibles then, He sees the invisibles now.

He sees the hurt that you hide because of what’s going on at home—stuff you don’t even really know how to talk about. And you’re not even sure you have a safe place to process through it; you’re not even sure the people around you would understand. You feel invisible—but Jesus sees you.

He sees how even when you’re in a room full of friends, you still feel alone. How you feel isolated because everyone you know is content to just know you on a very superficial level. You never have any real conversations. You don’t have a place where you ever talk about stuff that’s really going on. You feel invisible—but Jesus sees you.

He sees how you hurt when you’re around that guy or that girl—the one who used to be a friend and isn’t anymore, or was a first love that you didn’t want to let go of, even when they chose to walk away, or the one who you wish would just notice you, but treats you like you don’t even exist. You may feel invisible—but Jesus sees you.

Even those of you who are in a good place right now—those of you who have good friends and feel connected—there will be a time when life will change, when you’re at a new place instead of one that is so comfortable. Maybe it will be a new job, a new school or even a new town. But there will be a time when you feel invisible, like no one sees you or knows you. And when that happens, remember that Jesus sees you.

G. Jesus sees. Jesus not only sees you, He sees you beyond what anyone else sees. You are not invisible to Him. He enters into your story, into your life. He takes the step beyond just noticing you to walking through life with you. He is a participant in the unfolding of your future. He’s not only aware of you, the you that others may look past, He sees your purpose—how He wants to restore you, heal you, help you. He not only sees, He moves. He acts. He enters.

LANDING
A. Everyone has something to tell—if someone would only give them the chance. Everyone has something that has hurt them—if only someone offered an opportunity to heal them. Everyone could use a connection—if only someone would stop long enough to reach out. Christ did it for us. While we were powerless. While we were helpless. While we were sick and sorry and appeared like a lost cause, Christ died for us—reached out to us.

B. Some of you walked in here today and no one saw you. You blended in. You wanted someone to notice, but you have spent so much of your life overlooked, a part of you just wants to slip under the radar. But Jesus sees you.

For some of you, it’s been a while, but there was a time when Jesus noticed you. You were invisible, and He saw you. And you’ve felt “seen” for a long time now. In fact, it’s been so long that you’ve forgotten what it’s like not to be known. Today, try to remember. Remember that time when Jesus saw you. Remember what it felt like not to be invisible anymore.

C. Jesus sees the invisibles, and every one of us at some point has been invisible. Everyone has blended in. Everyone has been unseen or unnoticed. But Jesus sees us. It’s why He came. It’s why He reminded us that to God, we’re not invisible. And because of Jesus’ love, because of His actions, we never have to be invisible again.