



Week 11: A Man Born Blind John 9:1-41

GOAL: To explore ways in which we may be spiritually blind to who God is and what he is doing around us, thus gaining the ability to collaborate with him in his work.

CHECKLIST

- Invest in your own spiritual life by participating in the daily Growth Guide readings. (This will also prepare you to lead the question about it in your group again this week.)
- Reach out individually to anyone who did not attend last week. Let them know that you missed them and would love to see them this week.
- Prepare for your group meeting by praying for yourself and your group (feel free to use the prayer below) and reading through this Leader's Guide.
- If you haven't already, plan your Grow Group Pair-Up by connecting with the leaders of your paired group.
- Take attendance in Planning Center, including guests/new members (please include their names and contact info in the meeting notes section). Help new members register for your group using the QR code in your room or at vrbc.net/grow.

PREPARING THROUGH PRAYER:

Father, I remember the hymn that says, "I once was . . . blind but now I see." Yet I'm discovering that even as your child and disciple, I still have spiritual blind spots that prevent me from seeing you clearly. They also prevent me from seeing clearly what you are doing in and around me. Show me what causes my spiritual blindness and empower me to live as one who notices what you are up to, so that I may join you in your life-giving work. Amen.

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:24-25

CONNECT & COORDINATE

We will maintain the same rhythm each week this semester:

1. Welcome your group. Repeat introductions if there are any new people.
2. Coordinate any logistics (group socials, snacks, Grow Group Pair-Up, etc).
3. Check in with your group and gather prayer requests. Consider using the following questions:
 - Where did you see God at work this week?
 - Where do you need God in the week ahead?
4. Pray for the requests shared and for God to lead your time together today.

DISCUSS

Read John 9:1-7.

- What stands out to you about this miracle of Jesus compared to the others we have studied? What was Jesus' part? What was the blind man's part? What does this teach us?

Leader's Note: *It's interesting that this encounter occurred as Jesus "went along." But the text explicitly says Jesus SAW a man born blind. Jesus' sight was crystal clear. It gives me (Deirdre) hope to think about Jesus seeing me in all my brokenness and messiness.*

After answering his disciples, Jesus went to work in an unusual way. He used saliva and dirt! Then he put this on the man's eyes. The word "mud" here is the same word used in Genesis when God created Adam (Gen. 2:7). I wonder why Jesus did this? He probably didn't need to use mud. But then he told the man to "go wash" in a local pool of water. I assume this required two things of the blind man: trust and obedience. Do we trust Jesus enough to obey him?

- What does the disciples' question reveal about their view of sin and suffering? What does Pastor John say is their "blind spot?" Do you ever find yourself needing to blame someone for your suffering? What can you do instead?

Leader's Note: *It is interesting to note the disciples' response to the suffering of the blind man. First, they don't even seem to consider that Jesus might do something about his situation. John's narrative doesn't describe them as compassionate at all. Instead, they view him as a specimen in a theological case study. They want to get clear on who is to blame, for surely someone is to blame for this situation. My imagination wants the disciples to inquire, "What can we do for him, Jesus? Will you heal him? Show off your power and let people know who's Messiah around here!" But no. They want the cosmological reason for how things work. Their culture assumed someone was to blame for misfortune. The suffering have only themselves to blame. This worldview is still prevalent today. We might not be as obvious about it. But instead of looking for what God is up to, even in suffering, we can tend to believe that we did something wrong and now God is punishing us.*

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:24-25

It's natural to ask, "Why?" Especially when it concerns suffering. We need to make sense of it. If we can make sense of it, we can somehow manage to live with it. Does Jesus' answer bother you? I admit that his answer has bothered me. He sets us straight on the idea that suffering is not always caused by sin. There is no one to blame in this situation. But then he says, "...this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him." That answer doesn't seem very compassionate either, but of course, Jesus knew what was coming next. This teaches me that sometimes the better question is not "Why?" but "What might God be up to?"

Read John 9:8-12.

- Why do you think the neighbors couldn't believe their very eyes and so looked for another explanation? Is your view of God too small? What would enlarge it?

Leader's Note: *Before I'm too hard on the neighbors, I need to admit that I probably would be prone to their response too. A man that I've known all my life suddenly healed? My brain would be looking for another explanation too! Yet here, too, we see people not primarily thinking about the human person who's just had a life-changing experience. They were curious at best, and they did ask about Jesus. But the sign before them was not something on their radar. They couldn't comprehend it. They also seem a little suspicious. That would be me, too.*

Is our God too small? Are we open to the possibility that God can do "immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine?" (Eph. 3:20) Do we limit God? Are we unable to see what he is doing because God is only supposed to act in certain ways? Our view of God is enlarged when we stay in his Word that reminds us who he is. Our view is enlarged when we learn the habit of "noticing" God in the small things as well as the big things. Our view of God is enlarged when we seek regular community with others and get to know them well enough that we are privy to the work of God in their daily lives. I also think our view of God is enlarged when we ask him to help us know him better. Have you prayed that prayer lately?

Read John 9:13-18; 24-34.

- Name all the ways the Pharisees exhibit blindness in this interaction with the blind man himself. What causes such blindness according to Pastor John? Do you find yourself so distracted by less important things that you cannot see what God is doing?

Leader's Note: *OK, where do we start? First of all, the Pharisees look right past the man who has been given an incredible, life-changing gift! If anyone should have been able to notice a "God thing" when they saw it, it should have been the leaders of the faith! I envision lots of high-fives and singing and dancing and spontaneous worship leading! But no, they only notice that one of their precious rules has been broken. Somebody is out of line.*

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:24-25

WEEK 11

Second, they are blind to who the Messiah is supposed to be even though they are supposedly scholars of God's story in their history. They say, "This man is not from God." Why? He has broken the Sabbath. This puts him in the category of "sinner." Period. There's nothing else to see about this Jesus. Their pride and their stubbornness were on display in a ridiculous way and it was BLINDING.

You have to admit the no-longer-blind man had some guts! He calls the Pharisees on the carpet for their hypocrisy and lack of understanding. "If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." (see v.30-33) The Pharisees were blind to what the Messiah would be like. They couldn't comprehend him being anything more or better than themselves. Their need to protect their system (the law) blinds them to the real deal right in front of them. Jesus was (and is) LORD of the Sabbath and he is without sin. But their vision was so distorted, they didn't even understand God's law.

What systems, preferences, and prejudices keep us from seeing what God wants to do? Are we focused on the non-essentials with such zeal that we wouldn't recognize Jesus if he walked right into our church building? Does our zeal cause us to look past people and not see or care about what God is obviously doing in them? Do we have such stubborn holds on our own interpretations of scripture that they prevent us from seeing God and others as he intends?

Read John 9:18-23.

- What is especially disappointing about the parents' response to the situation? What were the consequences of their fear? Does fear keep you from seeing who God is and what he may be up to? What are the consequences?

Leader's Note: *OK, if no one else was going to do cartwheels about this amazing miracle, you would think the parents would be deliriously celebrating this amazing gift, not just to their son, but to their whole family. John paints them as incredibly detached. It wasn't as if they didn't know if this was their son or not. It wasn't that they denied a miracle had happened. They KNEW it had. But the dysfunction of their spiritual leaders had a crippling effect on the whole community, including this family. (Lord, have mercy on us all!) Such dysfunction caused them to believe their only option was to circle the wagons and leave their son to his own demise. Huh? Crazy! But that is what FEAR does. They feared losing their community, their status in the synagogue, which would affect everything else too, perhaps even their livelihood. So they missed out. They missed out on an amazing, bonding experience with their son. They missed out on meeting Jesus. They missed out on a community celebration where their son was no longer shunned but accepted, where they were no longer under suspicion but given acceptance. They missed out on giving glory to the One who gave such a gift.*

Fear is blinding! I think, perhaps more than any of the others, this blindness – FEAR – will make us do so many things we regret. When fear keeps us from seeing God, others and ourselves with truth and love, we can drive past the curb and over the edge into destructive behavior. We hurt people, we hurt ourselves. We severely limit what God wants to give us and what he wants to do through us. Yet it is not easy to let go of fear. We need God's help. We need to know what is true. We need to recognize the adversary's lies. Satan's main gig is deception. We need God's intimacy, we need God's Word, and we need God's people.

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:24-25

Read John 9:35-41.

- What lessons can we learn from the blind man himself as he encountered healing and the Healer? What do you observe about his own journey to spiritual sight?

Leader's Note: *It is reasonable to say that the blind man is a remarkable and courageous person. For someone who had been physically blind all of his life, he saw the important things with simple clarity.*

- *V. 7b – “So he went and washed, and came home seeing.” First, he trusted Jesus enough to do what was asked of him. This is inspiring to me. Simple, immediate obedience. How much misery would we avoid if we got better at this?*
 - *V. 11 – “The man they call Jesus . . . and then I could see.” This guy could have hidden. He could have kept his mouth shut. But he simply tells his experience of Jesus. He doesn't spin it. He doesn't edit anything. He lets Jesus' actions speak for themselves in his life. What if we did that more?*
 - *Vs. 17b, 25, 30-33 – The no-longer-blind man stood his ground, and you could say “spoke truth to power.” He incurred their anger, but he did it anyway. He may not have been clear at first on exactly who Jesus was, but he knew what was true about his own experience. Jesus changed his life. That was his story and he stuck to it in the face of opposition.*
 - *Vs. 35-41 – This is a beautiful conversation that highlights his openness to God. He moves from seeing Jesus as a healer, to calling him a prophet, to calling him Lord and worshipping him. Simple, honest, and unwavering. He didn't need a theological argument. He didn't need to hedge his bets in case he got flack for it. He called Jesus by his true name and became his follower.*
- Which characters in this story do you relate to the most? Once we are aware of our blind spots concerning who God is and what he is doing, what can we do about them?

Leader's Note: *I strongly encourage you to get to these last two questions. Allow your folks to see themselves in the story and gain sight for their blindness (pun intended). Give them a minute or two to think. Silence is OK. Then ask if anyone wants to share.*

This diagnostic work is important because it then helps us know how to respond to God. The second question gives us an action plan. It helps us discern what is God's part and what is our part in getting rid of our blind spots. Let the group wrestle with this a little and come to some practical steps.

PRAY

- Spend some time in silent prayer, inviting God to bring light to your blind spots. Confess the things you know of that keep you from recognizing God and what he is doing. Ask him to give you the courage to gain clear sight of himself and his ways so that you can join him and be a part of his purposes.
- Pray for our church staff and lay leaders, that their spiritual sight will increase in clarity and equip us to see what God is doing and join him.

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:24-25