



# Small Group Tools: FaithWalk

August 28-29, 2010  
John 9:1-12; Psalm 112

## Community

### TODAY'S THEME

Jesus is the light of the world, but to the man born blind the world was simply darkness. There are plenty of dark places in our world and in each of our lives. Jesus is able to open our eyes and shine his light into any situation or circumstance we might face.

### WHAT DO WE WANT OUR SMALL GROUP TO KNOW?

We'd like our small group participants to consider the various kinds of blindness we struggle with. What keeps us from seeing the light? Here are three possibilities:

- Bad theology. Why do we assume there's a connection between suffering and sin?
- Self help (legalism). Do we simply work harder to make ourselves whole, or do we rely on the power of God to make us whole?
- Limiting God. Why couldn't the Pharisees imagine God healing on the Sabbath? What boxes do we stuff God into?

### WHAT DO WE WANT OUR SMALL GROUP TO DO?

We want to have open eyes to see the people all around us who smile but, beneath the surface, are living in guilt, shame and fear of the angry gods. We want to be able to speak through our mouth and through our life the truth of God's love.

### INTRODUCTION

Print this *Star Tribune* article on "there's an app for that" and share it with the group as a starting point: [http://www.startribune.com/lifestyle/faith/97713059.html?elr=KArksLckD8EQDUoaEyqyP4O:DW3ckUiD3aPc:\\_Yyc:aUUZIntroduction](http://www.startribune.com/lifestyle/faith/97713059.html?elr=KArksLckD8EQDUoaEyqyP4O:DW3ckUiD3aPc:_Yyc:aUUZIntroduction).

### ICEBREAKER

Do you think this kind of app sharing is helpful or hurtful? Have you ever had someone try to argue you into faith in Christ?

### PRAY TOGETHER

God, all around us, every day, we encounter people who smile but, beneath the surface, are living in guilt, shame and fear of the angry gods. Open our eyes to see you with a new vision. Open our lips to speak your truth. Open our hearts to live in a whole new world in which love really does conquer and heal all things. Amen.

## Content

Today's text is part of a larger narrative which takes place during the Feast of Booths, or Tabernacles. This festival was held in late autumn and celebrated both the harvest of orchard and vineyard and the autumnal equinox, as the days became shorter. The cel-

ebration included water ceremonies and light ceremonies, both of which drew their theology from Zechariah 14 (In the Day of the Lord living waters will flow into Jerusalem and it will be continuous day ... symbolizing the gracious presence of God.)

During the festival, 16 golden bowls were filled with oil and lighted. The rabbis said that when these bowls were lit at night they illuminated all of Jerusalem. In a culture without electricity and public lighting it would have been quite a sight. It is against this backdrop that Jesus first speaks his second "I am" statement: "I am the light of the world" (8:12). Today's text is a case study of the meaning of this saying.

As is so often true in John, this text operates on multiple levels. Physical healing becomes symbolic of spiritual healing, and physical blindness is replaced with spiritual blindness. There is also the level of reversal. A man living in darkness all of his life sees the light, but those who are supposed to illuminate spiritual truth to the people (the Pharisees) are lost in darkness. They cannot perceive the light. In addition, Jesus shows himself to be the fulfillment of the tabernacle lights. (*Read John 9:1-12.*)

The text begins with Jesus encountering a blind man. Blindness was much more common in the ancient world, with no cures available. This fact, along with its symbolic nature, explains the sheer number of Biblical stories about blindness. This particular man, John tells us, has been blind from birth, which leads the disciples into a theological discussion about the origin of the man's suffering. They assume that there must be a connection between this man's suffering and either his own sin or the sin of his parents.

**DISCUSSION** Do you believe suffering is caused by sin? How do you think you came to believe this?

Jesus utterly rejects this line of questioning. Jesus' response (9:3) is puzzling to many. The way most English translations state the verse implies that God caused the man to be born blind so that Jesus, in this moment, might heal him and show God's glory. Not only is this a bad translation, it's bad theology. While we affirm God's sovereignty, it is hard to reconcile the cruelty of such an act with the abundant grace of God seen in Jesus. The "purpose clause" in verse three is better translated this way: "But so that the work of God might be displayed in his life, we must do the work of him who sent me while it is still day." In other words, Jesus must work so that God's work may be displayed in this man's life. God had not made the man blind in order to show his glory. God has sent Jesus to do works of healing in order to show his glory.

**DISCUSSION** Is it hard to believe that God would not cause this man to be blind? Why? What do you think God causes? Allows?

Jesus makes a mud plaster from his saliva and soil and applies it to the man's eyes. In the ancient world, spittle was thought to have

medicinal power, so this would not have been an unusual act. Because the man is blind, we might even see this act as a gift of kindness: using something tactile to engage the man's senses in the healing.

**DISCUSSION** What are other examples of Jesus using something tactile to capture the imagination of those he's teaching or healing?

Jesus then sends the man to the Pool of Siloam to wash, and John lets us know that the word Siloam means "sent." This pool is at the south end of the city of Jerusalem, and is an important detail in the story for two reasons. First, this pool is the source of water in the Feast of Tabernacles water ceremony. This is the pool built after Hezekiah redirected the Gihon Spring by tunneling west under Jerusalem. It is the only source of spring water in the city, and thus has religious and ceremonial value. If Jesus is the source of the Feast of Tabernacles' water (7:37-39), this man has now experienced such living water in a profound way.

Second, the name of the pool bears symbolic meaning. More than 20 times in John's Gospel, Jesus is described as the one who has been "sent" by God. The blind man is being told to go wash in the pool called "sent" by the one who was "sent" by God. Jesus, then, is the source of this healing, not the pool.

**DISCUSSION** When do you place faith in an object or thing for healing, instead of placing faith in Jesus? In your opinion, where is the line between superstition and faith?

### GOING DEEPER: THE DEBATES

This healing story is followed by four debates or interrogations. Our text only includes part of one, but all four unveil something unique about God's divine power.

**The neighbors** (John 9:8-13). They are primarily concerned with verifying the miracle and wanting to know how it happened. They naturally take the healed man to the theological interpreters of their day for further explanation.

**DISCUSSION** What is a modern-day example of this behavior? Have you ever witnessed a healing? Describe it.

**The Pharisees** (John 9:14-17). They are most concerned with the fact that Jesus performed this healing on the Sabbath.

**DISCUSSION** In what way are the Pharisees missing the point? In what ways do we often miss the point?

**The man's parents** (John 9:18-23). They are interrogated by the Pharisees, who want to know if there is some kind of conspiracy at work. The parents, fearful of the repercussions of this healing, deflect the Pharisees' questions back to their son.

**DISCUSSION** Do you ever feel like the sins of a past generation are still impacting you? How can these cycles be broken?

**The formerly blind man** (John 9:24-29). The encounter between the formerly blind man and the Pharisees is both meaningful and hilarious. The formerly blind man sees far more light than those whose eyes have been physically open all their lives. To translate the formerly blind man's bottom line, "What part of 'I was blind but now I see, and Jesus did it' don't you people get?!"

**DISCUSSION** What are some things we don't see? Prefer not to see? Are unwilling to see?

Verses 35-41 summarize and bring to conclusion this unit of material. Notice that Jesus heals this man before he has faith. Now Jesus truly opens his eyes, and reveals himself as the Son of Man. True vision, according to John, is when we "see" Jesus for who he is, and believe and worship him.

**DISCUSSION** How can we more clearly see Jesus?

## Application

### DISCUSSION: AVOIDING THE THREE TRAPS

Discuss the three traps from the "what do we want our small group to do" section on the previous page. This week, on a daily basis, check yourself against these three pitfalls.

### PRAY TOGETHER

You are the God who gave yourself away for the sake of the world. You healed the sick, exorcised the demon-possessed, strengthened the legs of the lame and restored sight to the blind. In your greatest act of love, you willingly died on a cross and rose from death to resurrection life. Make us your disciples who long to take up our cross and follow you, with lives that are called and empowered to be living proclamations of your love, in a world that still fears the gods are angry. Amen.

### ADDITIONAL CONVERSATION AND REFLECTION

## *Giving What You Have*

### JOHN 6:1-15

Providing lunch for over 5,000 people? That would be a challenge for even the biggest caterers, let alone for a few unprepared disciples. Faced with such a monumental task the disciples turned to a most unlikely accomplice – a young boy with a few small loaves and fish. What difference could so little do in the face of so much hunger? In Jesus' hands, it made all the difference! What a great lesson for us. Faced with so many needs all around us – hunger, unemployment, abuse, injustice, disease – it would be so easy to throw up our hands and just give up. What difference could I possibly make in the face of such monumental issues? This story encourages us to give what we have – our selves, our time, our skills and our money – and to trust that in Jesus' hands it'll make all the difference.