

Week #2

A WORD FROM BLAIR

BRYAN: <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/shvd9n3mb0b72h0twai47/Week-2-Video.mp4?rlkey=ik2brhurljwjqae70behdy6b&st=i0vhed6h&dl=0>

TIME IN THE WORD:

READ AND REFLECT ON JOHN CHAPTER 9:1-9

Notice each of the questions and comments from the disciples and the neighbors. What do you notice about their efforts and motivations to discern what was unfolding? _____

How similar or different might your respond when confronted with situations where God is at work? _____

Asking the Wrong Question

The story begins with really good news: Jesus saw the blind man, and being seen by Jesus opens up tremendous potential for healing. However, the story goes rapidly downhill from there because those who should have been seeing spiritual reality most clearly were the most blind and undiscerning. Sadly, those who were most “spiritual” were the ones who were most out of touch with God’s heart for this situation.

The disciples who were with Jesus saw the blind man too, but they used this man’s misfortune as an opportunity for theological and philosophical discussion. “Who sinned, this man or his parents?” They turned him into an object lesson, reducing him to a specimen in order to satiate their own intellectual curiosity. Instead of seeing this as an occasion to care for another human being and to wonder about the spiritual possibilities present in the situation, they added insult to injury by asking the blame question: Whose fault is it that this happened?

The right question, according to Jesus, was, “What is God doing in this situation?”, and “How can I get on board with it?” Now that is a much better question.

Stuck in Old Paradigms

The blind man’s neighbors were the next group of people given the opportunity to recognize the work of God in their midst. They had seen the blind man every day and were intimate with the situation. They had pretty strong ideas about what the situation was and were stuck in their paradigms. A blind man who could now see—particularly this blind man, whom they knew so well—just did not fit what they were accustomed to seeing, so they couldn’t “see” it.

The neighbors’ predicament points out another difficulty we have with seeing: we only see what we are ready to see, expect to see and even desire to see. And we’re even more stuck when we are with others who share the same paradigms. How desperately we need practices, experiences and questions that help us get outside our paradigms so that we can see old realities in new ways!

WEEK #2 PRACTICE: *Engaging the scriptures for spiritual transformation* (lectio divina)

As we cease striving in times of solitude, we realize that there is a difference between reading the Scriptures for utilitarian purposes—such as gaining information, preparing a sermon or proving a point—and engaging the Scriptures for spiritual transformation. There is a difference between knowing the biblical stories and finding ourselves in the story in a way that helps us make sense of our lives and know God’s guidance for our next steps.

One approach to Scripture that fosters this kind of openness and receptivity is lectio divina. In this approach, we read a short passage of Scripture (typically six to eight verses at a time) multiple times very slowly; for each consecutive reading there is a simple question designed to take us deeper and deeper into the layers of meaning. Reading Scripture this way helps the Word bypass the cognitive filters we often have in place that can cause us to disregard words or challenging messages that we might want to avoid or are not aware that we need.

The steps of lectio divina: First, take some time in silence (five to ten minutes) to prepare yourself—to quiet your heart and invite God to speak. You may want to pray the prayer Samuel prayed when he was first learning how to recognize God’s voice: “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening” (1 Sam 3:9). You will read the chosen passage (John 9:1-9) four times with time to reflect in silence following each reading.

In the **first reading**, you are invited to simply absorb the overarching story. Pause and reflect

In the **second reading**, listen for the word or phrase that strikes you. This word or phrase might come across as “louder” than the others, or it might resonate with other experiences you’ve had with the same word. Pause and reflect.

In the **third reading**, you are invited to listen for the way in which your life is touched by this word. In the silence that follows, listen to the questions, QUESTION: What in my life needs to hear this word today? Pause and reflect.

In the **fourth reading**, you are invited to listen for God’s invitation to you. QUESTIONS: Is there an invitation—something that God is inviting you to do or to be—contained within his word to you? What is your response? Pause and reflect.

In the silence that follows, rest in God’s ability to bring about whatever it is he is inviting you to do or be.

How did your time with God in reflection on this scripture bless you this week?

* Content excerpted from: Barton, Ruth Haley. Pursuing God's Will Together: A Discernment Practice for Leadership Groups (Transforming Resources) (Chapters 1-2).