

Week #3

A Word from Blair Bryan: [Week 3.mp4](#)

TIME IN THE WORD:

READ AND REFLECT ON JOHN CHAPTER 9:10-23

What default patterns of thinking, seeing, and behaving became barriers to the neighbors and religious authorities seeing God at work and truly loving their neighbor? _____

Do you ever fall prey to similar patterns of thinking, seeing, and behaving? Journal about any examples that come to mind.

Preserving the System at All Costs

By now the situation had gotten so confusing the neighbors didn't even trust themselves; they brought the man to the Pharisees to seek help in making sense of it all. The Pharisees were by-the-book people. They were determined to be right. On the day of the blind man's healing the Pharisees had only one concern: the preservation of the religious system (as represented by the issue of sabbath keeping) and their place of power within it. As long as the system remained clearly defined and everyone was functioning according to its rules and expectations, they remained safe and in control. Their strict adherence to this way of evaluating people made them judgmental and uncaring in the way they wielded the power of their position. Not one of them said, "How exciting for you!" No one was the least bit curious about what it was like to be able to see for the first time ever. No one asked to hear the details. The Pharisees used the issue of sabbath keeping as a smoke screen to prevent them from facing the ways that Jesus' presence was messing with their system.

Afraid of the Ramifications

By now the interest of the whole community was piqued. The religious authorities refused to believe that a blind man had actually received sight, so they called in his parents for an "interview." But the parents knew better. They knew this was really an interrogation and that those asking the questions were not really seeking the truth. So when the Pharisees asked, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he see?" they said, "Yes, he is our son. Yes, he was born blind. But how is it that he now sees? We can't answer that on grounds that might incriminate us. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself." They answered this way "because the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue" (Jn 9:22). On a day that should have been one of the happiest of their lives, they were afraid to name and celebrate the work of God in their family. This is how paradigms, systems of thought, rigidly held categories and unquestioning loyalty to systems function. On the one hand, they help make sense of our lives so that we can function. But on the other hand, they have a powerful tendency to filter out any new information—including anything new God might be doing. They can filter out God himself!

WEEK #3 PRACTICE: Solitude & Silence

Solitude is the foundational discipline of the spiritual life; it is time set aside to give God our full and undivided attention. In solitude we withdraw from our lives in the company of others and pull back from our many distractions in order to give God complete access to our souls. Devoid of the normal interruptions, silence deepens the experience of solitude. It enables us to withdraw not only from the noise and distraction of the external world, but also the “noise” of the inner compulsions that drive us. In solitude and silence, we become quiet enough to hear a voice that is not our own. This is the Voice we most need to hear.

We see this pattern in the life of Jesus himself. Jesus would regularly slip away into the *eremos*, a Greek word that can be translated “the desert” or “the deserted place” or “the solitary place” or even “the quiet place.” There he would pray; he would open to his Father and draw on the Holy Spirit for strength, wisdom, direction, and joy. Then he would come back to the world of people to love and serve. Matthew 4 describes how he was driven into the wilderness to struggle with subtle temptations regarding his calling. In Luke 6 we observe Jesus’ choice to spend the night alone in prayer before making his decision about who he would choose as his disciples—certainly one of the most important decisions of his life in ministry. Luke 22 describes another night spent in solitude, when Jesus struggled mightily with his calling to go to the cross; he did not stop until he had wrestled all the way through it and was ready to do the will of God. Since Jesus, who was already so intimate with God, felt the need for solitude relative to discerning and doing God’s will, it is certain that we need it as well.

This back-and-forth rhythm of community and solitude is one we desperately need to reclaim for the modern age. Most of us get intuitively that we *need* relationships with other followers of Jesus to flourish, but many of us are less in touch with our need for intentional times in the quiet to be alone with ourselves and our God. As Henri Nouwen put it, “Without solitude it is virtually impossible to live a spiritual life.” All close friendships require dedicated time alone together.

Here’s a step-by-step exercise to help you practice spending time in silence and solitude with God:

1. Find a quiet place in your home or outside in nature that is *as distraction-free as possible*. Make sure your phone is in another room and settle into a comfortable position.
2. Begin to take long, slow breaths from your belly all the way up through your lungs. Inhale through your nose, exhale through your mouth.
3. With each inhale, prayerfully welcome the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit into the deepest place within you. You may want to repeat a simple prayer like “Come Holy Spirit” or “Lord, have mercy on me” or just “Jesus.” Something to keep your mind focused and to let this be more than just breathing, but prayer.
 - Your mind *will* seize this opportunity to run wild with thoughts, feelings, memories, to-dos, and distractions. That’s okay. Distraction doesn’t mean you’re “bad” at prayer; it means you’re *human*. When you notice your mind starting to wander, just come back to your breathing or your prayer word.
 - In the beginning, just 1-2 minutes of this type of prayer is a win. Ten minutes is a home run.
4. Now that you are centered in your body and in God’s presence, spend a few minutes just resting in God’s love for you. Let the Holy Spirit make his presence known to your whole body. Just soak in his love and peace and joy. Let God love you.

5. After a few minutes, you may want to continue your time in solitude by praying a psalm or reading a story from the Gospels or a passage from Scripture. Or by praying over your life. Or by journaling to God. Follow your heart.
6. Whenever you're done, close your time with a simple prayer of gratitude to God for his presence, love, and goodness in your life.

If you'd prefer to be guided through this exercise, you might find this 10 min. podcast episode helpful: [CLICK HERE](#)

Reflect and journal about your experience with God in solitude and silence. _____

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