

## **Sept 19 – Leader’s Guide - John 9 “The Light Brings Sight to the Blind, and Blindness to the Sighted”**

1. One of our most common responses to suffering is to ask an agonizing question. Why? Why is this happening to me – to us? Why do you think we ask such a question? What are some of the answers we give in response to that question?

*It’s a question we ask because suffering makes us feel completely out of control. However, if we can find an answer to that why suddenly suffering has meaning and purpose. Also, if we can find the cause we just might uncover a solution.*

*One of the answers to that question why, as old as humanity, is the moralistic response. Why am I, why are we suffering? It’s because the gods or a god is punishing us. We’ll do a moral / religious inventory – “is there something I’ve done, not done, that could have caused?” If we find it, a pathway to reverse our fortunes materializes.*

*Now the ancient philosophers didn’t think much of such a response. They went their own way, finding new answers to the why. Answers we continue to hold onto.*

*The stoics believed everything was predetermined. You can’t change it, so just learn to except it. Develop a British stiff upper lip – “keep calm - carry on”.*

*The Epicurians believed everything’s random. You can’t do anything about it, so just make yourself as comfortable as possible.*

*In the midst of the pandemic Anglican theologian N.T. Wright has observed that here in the west we are as whole implicitly epicurean. Stuff happens, life is pain, lets make the most of it – scramble for comfort – keep yourself entertained – what’s on Netflix?*

### **Read John 9**

2. (2) From their question it appears that the disciples are operating out of a moralistic response to the question why. When suffering hits it is punishment for sin. What is Jesus’ response to this mindset and why is it important that we hear him?

*Jesus pushes such a mindset right off the table, discarding it without a second thought. This should not even enter your mind let alone pass your lips when you encounter suffering is the sense of his response.*

*It is important that we hear him because this mindset seems to be hardwired into us, the thinking that we get what we deserve. When we apply it to our own suffering or to that of others it is incredibly destructive and harmful.*

*We have a picture of this in the book of Job. Job is facing disastrous suffering in every aspect of life but his friends are not. With this moralistic grid they determine, life is good for us, so we must be good but Job is suffering, so Job must not be so good (Pride and blindness) With cold callous self-righteousness they offer Job what in their mind is loving comfort – you're suffering because you are a sinner so repent and all will be well. Life is bad, it's your fault, so fix it! It is no wonder God calls them miserable comforters*

3. (3-4) Instead of trying to find an answer to the question why what does Jesus invite his disciples (us) to consider when we encounter suffering?

*Jesus is saying that in this man's situation the works of God will be displayed. These are works that he invites all of us to participate in. When we encounter suffering then we should primarily be focused upon the works of God that we are invited to participate in?*

4. As you reflect on the story what are the works of God that are displayed in the blind man?

*There is certainly the healing itself. The return of his sight. With this return of sight the entire trajectory of his life is transformed. It would have impact in every area of life...*

*There is the trajectory of his belief. Who is Jesus? Some guy to a prophet to from God to the Son of Man worthy of worship. From spiritual blindness to sign, he has grabbed a hold of fullness of life in Jesus through belief.*

*There is his being welcomed into a new community. As the Pharisees excommunicate him from the synagogue he would have been cut off from the social, economic, and political life of his community. Jesus seeks him out in the midst of his isolation and welcomes him with compassion into a new community centered around Jesus' identity and love.*

### **Read Isaiah 35**

5. In the feast of shelters the high priest would take water from the pool of Siloam and pour it out over the altar. This would point to the messianic promise that when messiah comes a river of living water would flow out from the temple bringing new life wherever it flowed. The healing of the man born blind is illustrative of the fullness of the work of God reflected on in this text. How does Isaiah 35 fill out what the works of God are?

*The imagery of the prophet is rich and in it you can see a number of different themes.*

*There is the transformation of material creation. The deserts erupt in life and beauty.*

*There is the healing of every physical ailment, the lame leap, the blind see, the deaf hear.*

*There is judgement – all that is wrong with the world is put right again.*

*The earth is covered with justice and righteousness.*

*By this prophecy we are to see an utter renewal of the material creation – this is the work of God. The healing of the blind man is simply a pointer to this reality. Jesus anticipates that when we encounter suffering we should think of his work in Jesus to make everything new.*

6. The way that Jesus heals the man born blind flagrantly violates the pharisaical customs around Sabbath, stirring them up to hot anger. This has the effect of exposing the darkness of their way of being as they rule keep over people keep, honour religious practice over mercy, and use their power for their own sake rather than those they serve. What do we learn here about the darkness of this way of being? How is shining light into darkness also a work of God?

*These Pharisees are the leaders of their local synagogue. They would have seen this man grow up, beheld the agony of his parents, the destitution his blindness wrought. They were tasked with the care of the community of which they were a part. Now here he is before them whole, the trajectory of his life changed in a moment. You would you expect (if they had half a heart) the natural reaction to such a moment would be. Would it not be that they would be filled with joy, celebration, thankfulness, wonder and awe?*

*Any yet... They terrorize his parents as they cower in fear in the face of their threats of excommunication. They grill the man mercilessly, demeaning and insulting him. When he gives an answer they can't stomach they throw him out of the synagogue. In a sense this would make his life far worse than it was before for now he is cut off from the social, economic, political life of his community without the blindness that supported his begging.*

*Exposing the darkness is the work of God, a work of love and grace. For only when we see the darkness are we brought to repent, to turn away. This would have impact not only on the Pharisees but the community around them.*

7. How would it change us if in the midst of suffering instead of searching for an answer to the why we instead primarily considered – what is the work of God here in this situation, and how can we participate in it?

*It would keep our focus and yearning on what God's desire is for our world.*

*It would animate hope. For the resurrection says that this shalom, this full flourishing in every aspect of life, is the future that God is bringing by the power of the Spirit.*

*It would bring us to step into the suffering rather than either running from it, distracting ourselves from it, or numbing ourselves to its impact.*