

## Week #1

### TIME IN THE WORD:

A Word from Blair Bryan: [Week 1 - A Word From Blair.mp4](#)

### READ JOHN CHAPTER 9

One of the miracles Jesus most commonly performed while he was on this earth was the healing of blind people. The reason this particular miracle was so common might have to do with the fact that it is a metaphor for the spiritual journey itself—the movement from spiritual blindness to spiritual sight. In fact, the spiritual journey can be understood as the movement from seeing God nowhere, or seeing God only where we expect to see him, to seeing God everywhere, especially where we least expect him.

Discernment is an ever-increasing capacity to “see” or discern the works of God in the midst of the human situation so that we can align ourselves with whatever it is that God is doing. Every Christian is called to this kind of discernment (Rom 12:2). It is a mark of Christian maturity (1 Jn 4:1), and it is also a spiritual gift with which some individuals in the body of Christ are particularly graced (1 Cor 12:10). Discernment together as leaders takes us beyond the personal to an increasing capacity to “see” what God is up to in the place we are called to lead.

There is a great deal of biblical precedent for discernment together as leaders. Acts 6:1-7 records a situation in which the apostles needed to discern God’s heart and mind regarding the complaints of a minority. Acts 15:19-20 describes a major decision involving doctrine and practice that needed to be discerned. Acts 21:10-14 records a situation in which an individual in the group (Paul) was contemplating a personal decision that would affect the leadership group he was a part of, and so he opened up that decision to a shared discernment process. All these passages recount situations in which believers in the New Testament church, through the presence of the Holy Spirit, discerned God’s will regarding important decisions; this, however, is not always as easy as it sounds.

John 9 records the account of a group of very religious people who were unable to recognize the work of God in their midst and thus missed the opportunity to be a part of what God was doing.

The integration of spiritual transformation, community and discernment is based in part on Romans 12:2, in which Paul establishes a strong cause-and-effect relationship between spiritual transformation and the ability to discern and do the will of God in the context of the new community of believers gathered in Rome: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect”.

### **QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:**

In what ways does the lack of discernment, community, and/or spiritual transformation prevent the family, friends, and neighbors in John 9 from recognizing and responding to the presence and activity of God in their midst?

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How similar or different might this be for you today?

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**WEEK #1 PRACTICE: PRAYER** - *As you reflect on John 9 this week, consider incorporating the following three approaches to prayer into your conversation with God.*

Cultivating patterns of listening to God in Scripture alone and together is essential to the fabric of spiritual leadership. Discernment takes place in the context of friendship with God as it is cultivated through prayer. Prayer encompasses all the ways we communicate and commune with God. The further we travel on the spiritual journey, the more we discover that all of life is prayer and holds the potential for deepening our intimacy with God. That said, there are three kinds of prayer that are particularly pertinent to discernment.

The first is the **prayer of quiet trust** described in Psalm 131. In this silent prayer we acknowledge our utter dependence on God and trust in God when things are “too great and too marvelous for me.” This is the kind of quiet trust that we might observe in a young child who is content to just be with his or her mother after weaning. It is only as we learn the prayer of quiet trust in the face of our own personal questions and complexities that we can enter into this kind of prayer in a leadership setting.

Another kind of prayer that is associated specifically with discernment is the **prayer for indifference**. In this prayer we ask God to work in our hearts to make us indifferent to anything but the will of God. This kind of indifference and willingness was Mary’s response when the angel came to her and told her that she would give birth to the Messiah. “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word” (Lk 1:38). It was Jesus’ prayer after he had struggled in the garden of Gethsemane: “Not my will but yours be done” (Lk 22:42).

When we have come to a place of indifference, we are ready for the **prayer for wisdom**: “If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you” (Jas 1:5). We often pray for wisdom while we are already attached to some outcome

we think is best! Indifference is an important prerequisite to the prayer for wisdom precisely because the wisdom of God is the foolishness of the world.

How did your prayerful conversations with God bless you this week? Which of the three types of prayer did you benefit from the most and why?

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