

## Week #4

### A Word from Stephen

Jones: <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/wz2qyubwqqoe7rwt8rimq/Week-4-Leader-Video.mp4?rlkey=f0315qtvuljge79abtxzri0pa&st=nm4w5p8q&dl=0>

### TIME IN THE WORD:

**READ AND REFLECT ON JOHN CHAPTER 9: *Pay particular attention to the evolution of perspectives about Jesus held by the man who was born blind.***

How did the man's perspective about Jesus evolve and how does this compare to the others around him? What was different about their journeys? \_\_\_\_\_

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In what situations might you face the greatest temptation to fall into the trap of groupthink or prioritizing belonging to the group over belonging to God? Journal and pray about this.

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### ***A Tale of Two Journeys***

The healed man was having his own experience. He was on a journey from blindness to sight on multiple levels. The healing of his physical sight happened in a moment, but the real journey—the journey from spiritual blindness to spiritual sight—gradually unfolded in the story. While everyone around him was asking all the wrong questions, arguing, posturing, maneuvering and trying to trip each other up, the healed man was on a journey of increasing spiritual insight into who Jesus really is.

The light of the world was dawning in the man's heart: Early in the story he calls Jesus a "man" (v. 11). Then he calls him a "prophet" (v. 17). Then a "man . . . from God" (v. 33). Then Jesus calls himself the Son of Man (v. 35) and the blind man makes a full confession of faith, saying "'Lord, I believe.' And he worshiped him" (v. 38). Now that's a good journey!

The only problem is that it gets him thrown out of the religious community because the religious leaders were not on the same journey; they were moving in the opposite direction, descending further and further into spiritual darkness. They neither recognized nor were ready to welcome the light of the world shining in their midst.

Because of our place in the system, we can shut someone down or drive a person out without even being conscious of what we are doing or why we are doing it. We can even surround ourselves with those who are blind in the same ways we are, so we get caught up in the power of groupthink and cannot see things differently. When groupthink takes over in a leadership setting, we all miss the work of God. But since we have done it together, we have no idea that we missed it and might even congratulate ourselves on our excellent leadership!

The healed man in this story, however, stays quietly faithful to his own spiritual journey. He is learning that there is a powerful difference between belonging to a group and belonging to God. It is easier to try to fit in with the group than to be true to what you know. When we have encountered Christ's healing presence in ways that do not fit existing paradigms, we might find ourselves on the outside.

**WEEK #4 PRACTICE:** *Self-knowledge & Self-examination*

Parker Palmer makes this very sobering statement about leadership: "A leader is a person who must take special responsibility for what's going on inside him/herself, inside his or her consciousness, lest the act of leadership create more harm than good." [4] This statement explains, at least in part, Paul's confession in Romans 7 that "when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand." Certainly no one understood the dangers of unexamined leadership better than Paul. After all, as Saul he was zealously committed to doing what was wrong while believing he was doing what was right. Some of us are like that! If we are not growing in self-awareness through honest self-knowledge and self-examination, there is every possibility that our leadership may in the end do harm where we had hoped to do good.

Palmer observes that people rise to leadership in our society based on their extroversion, which means they have a tendency to ignore what is going on inside themselves. These leaders rise to power by operating very competently and effectively in the external world, sometimes at the cost of internal awareness. He says, "I have met many leaders whose confidence in the external world is so high that they regard the inner life as illusory, as a waste of time, as a magical fantasy trip into a region that doesn't even exist. But the link between leadership and spirituality calls us to re-examine that denial of the inner life." [5]

While there is no question that great wisdom can be gained from experience in commerce, if spiritual preparedness is seen as secondary to skill, there will almost certainly come a time when that person's lack of self-knowledge and spiritual depth becomes a limiting (and even a debilitating) factor in his or her ability to provide spiritual leadership. The destructive results of a lack of self-knowledge may not become evident until the person has been in leadership long enough for the public persona to fray around the edges when the pressure is on.

When they become part of a spiritual community in which individuals are expected to be able to take responsibility for their mistakes, face their own character issues and confess their sin one to another in a way that fosters deeper levels of transformation, they honestly don't have the skills or spiritual capacity to do it. When spiritual leadership requires them to move beyond mere professionalism to "the more excellent way," they are not able to make the adjustment. They may even dismiss the call to grapple with issues of love, trust and transformation in a ministry setting as a lack of professionalism rather than seeing it as part of our calling to lead in ways that are distinctly Christian.

**Reflect on these questions and take time to journal about your reflections:**

- How do you practice self-examination these days?
- What is God revealing as you invite him to "search me and know me," as David did in Psalm 139?

- What is your awareness of the sin patterns, motivations or character issues that might affect your leadership if they are not dealt with?

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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).