

## ***Nearsighted: From Confusion to Clarity***

### ***Spiritual Blindness***

#### **Scripture:**

Read Mark 8:22-30 as a group.

#### **Introduction:**

We find ourselves in a significant season within the life of the church called Lent. Lent is traditionally considered a sober season of reflection upon our spiritual condition, our sin, and the grand provision for it all in the cross and resurrection of Jesus. As we journey toward Good Friday and Easter over the next few weeks, we'll be doing so through the eye-witness account of the Apostle Peter. Peter was one of the 12 disciples, one of Jesus' closest friends, and was, in general, a passionate and compelling human being. Like the rest of us, though, Peter's spiritual journey was truly one "from confusion to clarity." It wasn't until the events of the cross and the empty tomb that Peter was able to understand the nature and impact of his best friend Jesus.

In this section of Mark 8, we are skillfully exposed to the juxtaposition of two *seemingly* unrelated stories. In the first, a blind man from Bethsaida is brought to Jesus for healing. The townspeople take this man outside of their village and beg Jesus for help – for the restoration of this man's sight. In this particular case, Jesus responds somewhat uniquely. He spits on the man's eyes and lays his hands on him. Jesus then proceeds to ask the man if he can see – to which the man responds, "I see men, but they look like trees walking." At first glance, you might wonder what happened! Did Jesus make a mistake or underestimate what it would take to heal this man's blindness? The short answer is *no*; Jesus did not make a mistake. He was revealing something very important about the journey from confusion to clarity, namely that spiritual insight is often a multi-step process. It frequently takes time, patience, and a desire to truly see for spiritual blindness to be remedied.

This part of the story prepares us to better understand part two and Jesus' conversation with Peter and the disciples. As they leave Bethsaida, Jesus asks his disciples a question: "Who do people say that I am?" They update Jesus on the latest gossip and local conjectures. But then Jesus ups the ante by making the question more personal: "Who do *you* say that I am?" Peter immediately responds, "You are the Christ." *And Peter was right.* But his understanding of what sort of Messiah Jesus came to be was grossly misaligned. He couldn't see clearly yet. He was confused by his own presuppositions and assumptions about what type of king the Messiah would be. And like the blind man before him, it would be a multi-step process toward clarity and true spiritual insight for Peter.

**Reflection:** Take personal inventory of your life, heart, and spiritual journey. Use these prompts as a way to prepare for group discussions, or for personal times of prayer.

1. Reflect on your spiritual journey to this point. What are the major benchmarks in your personal story of faith?
2. Spiritual blindness is part of the human condition, universally shared. The frightening part of blindness, in this case, is that we're often unaware of our condition--*we can't see*. In what ways do you / could you check your personal blind spots?

#### **Discuss:**

1. What about the sermon stood out or impacted you the most? Do you have any follow-up questions about the sermon?
2. Re-read Mark 8:22-26. What are your observations? Pay close attention to the multi-step healing that ultimately results in restored vision. Jesus always links a physical lesson to a spiritual one. What are the implications for your own story and / or your understanding of spiritual blindness?
3. Re-read Mark 8:27-30. What are your observations? Notice how Jesus asks open-ended questions, looking to dialogue with his disciples. And notice how he doesn't leave the conversation generic but personalizes it, asking each man (and each of us) to give an answer to his question, "*Who do you say that I am?*" Discuss the importance of this question within our journey from confusion to clarity.
4. **Missional Living:** Everyone is on a spiritual journey. From the hardened skeptic to the seasoned Christian, we're all in progress, each of us searching for greater understanding. What could it look like to strike up a spiritual conversation with someone who believes differently than you do? You can play a part in someone's journey toward clarity!

#### **Apply:**

Spiritual blindness can be difficult to diagnose – but in the hands of capable and caring friends, the journey from confusion to clarity can become a personal reality. Consider sitting with a member of your community group and discussing the areas of spiritual growth you hope to tackle this year. Invite this person to give their own insight and to ask tough questions. Everyone must begin from a position of humility and trust. Start with prayer and invite the Holy Spirit to work through this friend to empower the "next steps" of following Jesus.