

Scriptures

1 Samuel 16:1-13

John 9:1-11, 35-38

Eyes Open to Jesus

session essentials

**Jesus heals our spiritual blindness.**

- ◆ In today's gospel, Jesus heals a man born blind. We tell this story, but focus on God's choice of David the shepherd boy who will be King of God's people.
- ◆ Today's story is one of several biblical stories that affirm the importance of young people in God's sight, a welcome image for older children.
- ◆ Today's session continues our exploration of Lent through stories of the Old Testament and gospel.

Core Session

- ◆ Getting Started
- ◆ Old Testament Bible Study
- ◆ Leader Ads
- ◆ Praying Together

Enrichment

- ◆ Explore the Good News
- ◆ Info: Reading Aloud
- ◆ Today's Gospel
- ◆ Choral Poem: Hughes's "Walkers with the Dawn" (*audio recording device*)
- ◆ Lenten Challenges
- ◆ Art
- ◆ Info: Where You'll Find Everything Else

Helps for Leaders

- ◆ More about Today's Scriptures
- ◆ Reflection
- ◆ The World of the Bible: Gospel of John

✓ Getting Started (5-15 minutes)

Activity Soundtrack: Play Smetana's "The Moldau."
(Open your Spring-A Seasonal Resources folder, then click on *Companion Music* for options on obtaining this music.)

Invite participants to imagine:

- ◆ Our group has been chosen to colonize another planet. Our space vehicle departs next week.
 - Where would we like to go?
 - What do you think we will find?
- ◆ Our journey into space needs a leader. That leader will be chosen from among our friends.
 - How could we go about picking a leader?
 - What kind of person do we want for a leader?

Invite participants to brainstorm a list of the qualities they want most in their leader. List these ideas on a board or newsprint, for example, *friendliness, age, looks, brains, strength or popularity*. Ask participants to explain why each quality is important to them. Ask them to focus on these qualities, *not* on individual names. Then invite members to hear how God chose a leader.

✓ Old Testament Bible Study

(10-15 minutes)

Help participants find **1 Samuel 16:1-13** in their Bibles. Explain:

- ◆ We will read a story from the first book of Samuel, written many years before Jesus was born. This book tells stories about the history of Israel.
- ◆ Judges were the leaders of Israel before Israel had kings. Israel had 15 judges.
- ◆ Judges heard court cases, led the army in battle and were in charge of making some decisions for God's people.
- ◆ Samuel was the last judge, or leader, of Israel before Israel had kings.
- ◆ God helped Samuel choose the first two kings of Israel. The first king, Saul, did not obey God.

Read aloud 1 Samuel 16:1-13. Discuss:

- ◆ Whom does Samuel think God will choose? Why does Samuel think that?
- ◆ Why do you think God does *not* choose the best-looking? the oldest?
- ◆ Whom does God choose? What does this story tell us about David?

- ◆ Why do you think God chooses David? (*List ideas on the board or newsprint; invite participants to compare this list with the list made in Getting Started.*)
- ◆ How does Samuel know whom to anoint?
- ◆ How does David know that he has been chosen?
- ◆ Have you ever felt that God wanted you to do something? Why did you think so? How did you feel?

✓ Leader Ads (10-40 minutes)

Ask group members to think about leaders God might want today. What work might God want done in the world? What people might God want us to help? What ways might God want us to care for animals or the natural world around us? What ways might God want us to change the way things are done now? List all ideas on the board or newsprint.

Divide group members into groups of 2-3 participants each. Ask each group to write a "help wanted" ad for a leader to do one or more of the jobs brainstormed. Ask each group to include in its ad:

- ◆ a good description of the job that needs to be done
- ◆ a list of what kind of abilities the job will need

✓ Praying Together (5 minutes)

Invite participants to continue experimenting with using scripture verses as prayer. Help participants memorize these words from John 8:12: *I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me... will never walk in darkness.*

Memorize the verse together by saying it together slowly and rhythmically several times. Then pause and say:

- ◆ Think about something in your life that feels like darkness.
- ◆ Silently ask Jesus to bring his light into your darkness.

Pause, then slowly repeat once more the scripture verse above. Close by praying:

- ◆ Lord Jesus, show us your light. *Amen.*

Note: Distribute this week's *At Home with the Good News* to group members (or e-mail it to families).

□ Explore the Good News

(5-15 minutes)

On page 1 of today's *Explore the Good News* group members will find a Star of David puzzle that will introduce them to facts about David, first King of Israel. Ask participants to complete this activity in pairs or trios.

On page 2 group members will find an activity called Travel through the Old Testament. This ongoing activity is designed to help older children understand the continuity of the Old Testament with the New Testament. Jesus lived and taught the Jewish heritage into which he was born. Today's paper focuses on David and the function of judges and kings in ancient Israel.



Reading Aloud

In general, we recommend that you let intermediate group members take the lead in activities. However, we seldom suggest that intermediate participants read scripture passages intended for meditation or discussion aloud. Some older children read smoothly and with confidence, but many others are struggling with reading skills. Even "simple" scripture translations present problems of vocabulary and pacing for these older readers.

Further, many intermediate participants feel embarrassed if asked to read in front of their peers. To avoid these problems and to increase comprehension, we encourage leaders to read aloud the scriptures. For other activities, such as *Explore the Good News*, feel free to invite volunteers to take turns reading aloud.

□ Today's Gospel (15-30 minutes)

Participants make up interviews based on **John 9:1-11, 35-38**.

Help participants find John 9:1-11. Ask participants to follow along as you read the passage aloud. Then recruit volunteers to take the parts of *Jesus*, one or more *disciples*, the *healed man* and one or more *neighbors*.

Invite the other participants to interview these volunteers. Sample questions:

- ◆ Healed man, how will your life change now that you can see?
- ◆ Jesus, what do you want the healed man to do next?

- ◆ Disciple, did you think Jesus would be able to cure the blind man?
- ◆ Neighbor, what do you believe about Jesus?

After 5-10 minutes of interviews, ask participants to follow along as you read John 9:35-38. Discuss:

- ◆ What does Jesus ask the healed man to do?
- ◆ What does the healed man believe about Jesus?
- ◆ What do we believe about Jesus? Why?

□ Choral Poem (15 minutes)

Hughes's "Walkers with the Dawn"

Note: In this discussion, be careful not to promote condescension toward the visually impaired. Blind people have walked the Appalachian trail, written books, created works of art and gone skiing on the weekend! Stress new possibilities, not old incapacities.

Reread aloud **John 9:1-11**, the first portion of today's gospel reading. Then read aloud (at least twice) Langston Hughes's poem "Walkers with the Dawn," printed here:

Being walkers with the dawn and morning,
Walkers with the sun and morning,
We are not afraid of night,
Nor days of gloom,
Nor darkness—
Being walkers with the sun and morning.

Discuss:

- ◆ The man in today's gospel—blind since birth—is now a "walker with the dawn and morning."
- ◆ What fears might now be gone for this man?
- ◆ What new things might he want to see or do?

Invite group members to prepare a choral reading of this poem. They can:

- ◆ intersperse lines from today's gospel with the poem
- ◆ vary the pitch, volume and pace on different lines
- ◆ assign words or lines to individuals, pairs, trios or groups
- ◆ repeat the poem more than once

If possible record the group's finished reading.

Note: Learn more about Langston Hughes and read more of his poems at <http://www.poemhunter.com/langston-hughes/>.

□ Lenten Challenges (10-20 minutes)

Participants review the Lenten challenges from a poster made in the session for the 1st Sunday in Lent.

As necessary, review with group members that we are now in the season of Lent. Lent, which lasts 40 days, prepares us for the feast of Easter. The Church asks us to pick one or more ways to change our lives so that we become more like Jesus. Some ways that people use are prayer, doing without food or something else we're used to, giving money to the poor, reading the Bible, changing a habit or making peace.

Gather group members around the poster. Discuss:

- ◆ What ideas did we try this week? (*Accept that participants may not have tried any.*) What difference *did* our ideas make? What difference *could* our ideas make?
- ◆ What could you do for just one day to make a difference with a neighbor?
- ◆ What's one brand-new way we could pray one day this week?

We tie this discussion to the Art activity below.

□ Art (15-30 minutes)

Participants make paper symbols with Lenten resolutions.

Ask participants to reread **John 9:5**: *While I am in the world, I am the light for the world.* Ask participants to compare this verse with John 8:12b: *"I am the light of the world," he said. "Whoever follows me will have the light of life and will never walk in darkness."*

Discuss:

- ◆ How is Jesus like a light?
- ◆ How is Jesus *not* like a light?
- ◆ What kind of darkness do you think Jesus was talking about?
- ◆ What kind of darkness do you think Jesus might see in our world today?
- ◆ What ideas have we tried from our poster? (*See the Lenten Challenges activity above.*)
- ◆ How could our ideas bring light to the world?

Ask each participant to choose another idea to try during the coming week. Ask participants to cut symbols of light, such as flashlights, candles, light bulbs, etc., from construction paper. Participants can add cut-paper or drawn details.

Ask each participant to write his or her Lenten idea onto the light shape. Encourage participants to take home the light shapes as reminders of their Lenten plans for the week.

INFO Where You'll Find Everything Else

- ◆ Attached to this Session Plan you will find:
 - Backgrounds and reflections for today's readings, titled *More about Today's Scriptures*.
 - An optional (and ongoing) *Faith Skills* activity exploring the Church.
 - A printable copy of *The Apostles' Creed*, to use in the optional Faith Skills activity.
 - A helpful article looking at *Older Children and the Lectionary*.
 - A family paper, *At Home with the Good News*, to print and distribute *or* to e-mail to families for use at home.
- ◆ Open your Spring-A *Seasonal Resources* folder, then click on *Seasonal Articles* to find:
 - Information on Spring-A's *Models of the Faith*.
 - A printable article exploring traditional *Lenten Disciplines* in the lives of believers.
 - A printable article examining *Using the Arts to Bring Different Age Groups Together*.
 - The *Introduction for Intermediate* for **Living the Good News**.

More about Today's Scriptures

In today's readings, we explore another image of Jesus: light for the world, dispelling spiritual darkness. In the first reading, Samuel sees beyond outward appearances to choose the least likely son of Jesse as king. Paul explains to the Ephesians that the Christian's life must be characterized by the light of holiness. In today's gospel, a blind man gains sight and worships Jesus.

1 Samuel 16:1-13

Prior to today's reading, God had already rejected Saul as king because of his disobedience and had indicated that another had been chosen. In grief and fear, Samuel refuses to see Saul again.

Unlike Saul, Samuel waits for God's instructions and follows them precisely. These instructions seem to run contrary even to what Samuel might have expected. God teaches him that human wisdom does not penetrate the depths that God's wisdom does.

Public acknowledgment of David's anointing would come only after years of trouble and persecution. The story, however, indicates that, despite all the scheming of David's rise to power, God had raised him up and made his victories possible. David, unlike his predecessor, Saul, had found the secret of life: doing God's will.

Ephesians 5:8-14

Today's reading comes from a section urging members of the Christian community to live out the reality of their new baptismal life, imitating God as known to them through Christ—forgiving, loving and offering themselves. Gentile converts may have believed that physical actions were irrelevant to spiritual existence. Paul affirms that both words and deeds give evidence of new life.

The old and the new ways of life are contrasted as “once...darkness, now...light” (v. 8). The baptized receive enlightenment and now live as light to others.

John 9:1-41

John uses a healing story as a commentary on 8:12, an enactment of the triumph of light over darkness. The belief in a causal relationship between sin and suffering was widespread, but Jesus turns the attention from cause to purpose—the manifestation of God's works through Jesus' ministry.

The interrogations that the healed man and his parents undergo become, in effect, a trial of Jesus. The increasing insight of the man is contrasted with the hardening blindness of the Pharisees. The man, who is not afraid to confess his ignorance, progresses from seeing Jesus as a man to seeing him as a prophet, then asserting that Jesus must be from God, and finally worshipping him as the Son of Man, through whom God would usher in the final era of judgment and salvation (v. 39).

The Pharisees are at first divided. Some are open but others, by applying the test of Deuteronomy 13:1-5, see Jesus as a sabbath-breaker, either for healing a non-life-threatening illness and/or for kneading the clay and anointing on the sabbath.

For the man born blind, however, his healing is more than sight regained. It is a new creation, a gift of light in order to see Jesus and believe in him.

Reflection

“One thing I do know,” says the blind man (John 9:25). According to William Countryman, “This moment of enlightenment is the great turning point of John's Gospel” (*The Mystical Way in the Fourth Gospel*, p. 74).

Why are five words so pivotal? Consider the source: because of his blindness since birth, the man has not read the *Torah*, and doesn't know the laws in which the authorities try to entangle him. He draws purely and simply from his own dramatic experience. As Countryman says, “He looks to Jesus now as the one reliable point of access between God and humanity, as the touchstone of everything in human life” (p. 74).

Then he trusts Jesus completely. The title *Son of Man* (John 9:35) may be meaningless, but he's so indebted to Jesus he'll believe anything he says, and does him reverence.

In contrast, the Pharisees desperately cling to the past, boasting, "we are disciples of Moses" (John 9:28). Their tenacious clinging to tradition prevents them from seeing God's splendid action in the present.

And we? Are we so caught up in custom that we fail to see the stunning realities of our own lives? What is the "one thing"—the experience of God—on which we base our belief?

The World of the Bible

The Gospel of John

During Lent this year, many of the gospel readings are taken from the Gospel of John. The fourth gospel is much different in tone and style from the other three, which, because of their interdependence, present a somewhat similar account of Jesus' life and teaching. John's gospel seems to be based on an independent source of traditions about Jesus. In contrast to the other gospels, John reports no parables or exorcisms and puts a greater emphasis on Jesus' divinity.

Authorship in biblical times was not limited to actually writing down the text. Often a designated author was simply the authority for the book, the source of the teachings and memories. According to tradition, the authorship of the fourth gospel is attributed to the apostle John, son of Zebedee. However most scholars today find this unlikely and consider that the author was not one of the twelve but may have been one of the wider group of disciples. He is idealized as the mysterious "beloved disciple" figure that appears in the gospel story.

The Gospel of John is carefully organized and shows deep theological reflection both on the significance of the things Jesus said and did and on who Jesus was—the incarnate revelation of God. He is "Word made flesh" (John 1:14) and Son of God who has been sent for our salvation. More than any other gospel, John stresses the parent/child relationship of God and Jesus.

John portrays Jesus both as fully human (he became tired and thirsty, wept, suffered and died), and as the Christ in whom dwelt the fullness of God. John often uses the phrase "eternal life" where the other gospels use the kingdom of God. Life eternal has burst into human life in the person of Christ Jesus.

John's gospel reflects a movement away from eager anticipation of the imminent return of Christ toward a more spiritual understanding of what it means to be a Christian in the world. Later In the 2nd century, some heretics appealed to John's gospel to support their beliefs about a spiritual life seemingly unrelated to flesh-and-blood reality.

However, there is little evidence that John's words were meant to have such a connotation. John's language, especially the images of light and darkness so central to John's development, has close parallels to the language in scrolls found at Qumran, dated before 68 CE.

John states that his purpose for writing the gospel is to strengthen the faith of the believer and so lead to full life with God:

"These [signs] are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name" (20:31).