John 9:1-12 Commentary
New International Version

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Study Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** will help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the *International Bible Study Commentary* website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. You can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the *International Bible Study Forum*.

(John 9:1) As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth.

John does not tell us if Jesus saw the blind man immediately after He left the temple at the end of John chapter 8, or later. But in John's gospel we see the marked contrast between spiritual blindness and physical blindness. Jesus came to heal both types of blindness, but spiritual blindness can only be healed when a person believes in Jesus Christ and does what Jesus says. As the other gospels report, Jesus had healed other blind men previously, but this is the only written record of Jesus

healing a man blind from birth. As we learned in John chapter 5, when Jesus healed a man who had been ill for 38 years, the man's illness was most probably the consequence of his sins, for Jesus told him later, "do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you" (John 5:14). As we study chapter 9, notice the different responses of the men Jesus healed in John chapter 5 and John chapter 9. By his behavior after Jesus talked to him, it seems the man Jesus healed in John chapter 5 remained spiritually blind. John does not tell us the rest of his story, and he probably never learned whether the man returned to his sins or turned to God after Jesus healed him. In John chapter 9, we see how Jesus healed the man born blind man physically and spiritually.

(John 9:2) His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

Perhaps for thousands of years, up to and including today, many have assigned sin as the cause of every sickness and misfortune. Some have assigned God as the cause of all sickness and misfortune, while saying God does not commit sin when He causes sickness and misfortune. But Jesus' disciples wanted to know how sin played a part in this blind man having, as we would call it today, an obvious genetic disorder from birth. In this fallen world, every person is born with some type of genetic disorder—some obvious and debilitating and some not so obvious. Some Jews in Jesus' day thought birth disorders were the

result of the parents' sins. Other Jews thought a baby could sin while in the womb. Some religions account for the cause of genetic disorders by saying the person sinned in a previous life and deserves to be sick and have other misfortunes. Some people think that everyone is born a sinner before they ever commit a sin.

(John 9:3) "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him.

Jesus answered His disciples' question by denying sin was the cause of the man's genetic disorder—his blindness from birth. Jesus refused to assign the cause of the man's blindness to sin. The man had not sinned before his birth. Though all have sinned, Jesus said that this man's blindness was not the result of his parents having sinned. In 1 John 3:4, the Bible carefully defined sin: "Everyone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness." Or, as the King James Version reads, "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law." No one can transgress the law of God or be guilty of lawlessness in the womb or before they are born. Jesus' teaching and example here may teach us not go beyond what the Bible clearly teaches and speculate about such matters or make an effort to assign sin to people before they are born or to parents who have a child born with a disability. The scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' day built their religious teachings on efforts to know and describe the unknowable, Jesus did

not. Our many temptations are enough to explain why everyone will eventually sin. Jesus has commanded us not to sin, and Jesus does not give people any excuse for committing sin, such as, “I was born a sinner” or “The devil made me do it.” The Bible truthfully describes our marvelous formation as children in the womb. Read Psalm 139:13-17, about how God works in everyone’s creation in the womb. Especially consider these words in Psalm 139:13-15, “For it was you (the LORD) who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth.” Jesus’ reply to His disciples corresponds to Psalm 139. God creates every person in His image so His works might be revealed in them. When we hold a newborn baby, we should rejoice that God created every baby and God created them that “God’s works might be revealed in them.” As Christians, as Christian parents, we should do all we can, the Lord Jesus being our Helper, so God’s works might be revealed in every person, including newborn babies: that’s the work Jesus did when He conducted His ministry as the light of the world, and that is what He has called Christians to do.

(John 9:4) As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work.

No matter what our situation, God's good works can be revealed in us, in our loved ones, and in others we meet. Jesus expects us to intentionally work the good works of God the Father and Him. People can passively reveal the works of God, as the healed man began to do after Jesus healed him. Then, he actively revealed God's works when people questioned him. Christians need to concentrate their efforts on praying and learning from God in the Bible, so they can intentionally and actively do works that will reveal the works of God in their lives and the lives of others. Christians must be open to God working through them by His Spirit, so their works are truly His works through them and not their works done in the flesh.

(John 9:5) While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

There are special times when God gives us special opportunities to do special works for Him. These times come and go, along with their special opportunities. We will go some places only once. We will see some people only once. The disciples only saw Jesus everyday face-to-face, but only for three years. There will also be times when no one can work, other than by doing the work of prayer, because a situation has changed. Jesus is the light of the world. The religious leaders that John described in chapter 8 rejected Jesus as the light and life of the world. They rejected the truths Jesus taught, and there would come a time when they would look for Him and not be able to find Him (as Jesus foretold them). After Jesus' death of

the cross, His light was only temporarily put out. After Jesus rose from the dead three days later, His light and life came back into the world. Today, His light and life show forth in His followers. In Matthew 5:14, Jesus explained to His disciples, “You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid.” Immediately after Jesus’ crucifixion, other than pray, no one could do the works of God in the world. After Jesus ascended into heaven, on the Day of Pentecost Jesus gave His Spirit to His disciples so they (and all who believe in Him) could serve as His faithful witnesses and do His works.

(John 9:6) After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man’s eyes.

Through Jesus, the Word made flesh, God created humans in His image from the dust of the ground. To do the work of God, Jesus took dust from the ground and with His saliva He made mud to heal the man born blind. Jesus healed the blind man without the man knowing who Jesus was. Similarly, Jesus healed the sick man at pool in John chapter 5, without the man knowing who He was. Their healings ultimately depended on Jesus, not on their faith, but each in their own way responded to Jesus in faith. When Jesus made the mud, Jesus made a medicine for the man’s eyes. Until Jesus comes again, through faith, with and without using medicines depending on the illness, Christians now do the works of God on earth in the power of the Holy Spirit as Jesus commanded.

(John 9:7) "Go," he told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam" (this word means "Sent"). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.

Jesus began a work of God when He applied medicine to the man's eyes. If the blind man wanted to see, he had to believe Jesus, believe Jesus' medicine would be effective, obey Jesus' command to go to a pool, do as Jesus instructed, and wash in the pool of Siloam. As John explained to his Gentile readers, the name "Siloam" means "Sent." The name "Sent" may come from the fact that water was "sent" through a tunnel to provide water to the pool. The tunnel was especially dug so water "sent" to the pool would meet the needs of the people of Jerusalem during a siege, if necessary. Notice, the Father "sent" Jesus to do His works. Jesus intentionally and specifically "sent" the man to the pool to wash so he could see. The medicine of the Great Physician worked as Jesus intended after the man obeyed as Jesus intended.

(John 9:8) His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, "Isn't this the same man who used to sit and beg?"

Typically, in Judea, blind people had to beg to survive. After the man returned home, his neighbors (who knew him well) called him "a beggar." The man was so transformed with the ability to see that they could hardly believe he was the same man. After Jesus gave him vision, no doubt he wanted to stop begging and find meaningful

work. He could not stop rejoicing because he was seeing for the first time in his life. No one had ever heard of a man born blind gaining the ability to see. It could only be explained as a work of God. So his neighbors wanted to learn how it happened.

(John 9:9) Some claimed that he was. Others said, "No, he only looks like him." But he himself insisted, "I am the man."

Some believed and some disbelieved that the man who could see was the same man as the one they knew who had been born blind. No matter how much evidence some people are given they simply refuse to believe in God or believe in Jesus as the Bible reveals the Father and His Son. The man kept repeating, "I am the man." He testified that a work of God had been done in him. Similarly, no matter how many works of God Jesus did, the religious leaders and others would not believe in Him as the One sent from God. Their sinful choices blinded them to the truth many saw in Jesus.

(John 9:10) "How then were your eyes opened?" they asked.

Some with and without belief asked the man repeatedly how his eyes were opened. Because it was so extraordinary, the miracle was apparently beyond belief. As with all miracles, some rejoiced to hear the man retell his story repeatedly. No matter how often they heard his story, others simply would not believe that he was the

same man, even as some would not believe in Jesus no matter what He did—such was the case of the religious leaders in John chapter 8 and later chapters in John's gospel. No matter what they see and hear, some choose to remain spiritually blind.

(John 9:11) He replied, "The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see."

As a good and faithful witness to the works of Jesus Christ, the man told them exactly how he came to see. Jesus put mud on his eyes and obeying Jesus, he went, he washed, and he saw. He only knew the name of Jesus and called Him a "man." Though he knew little about Jesus, he had enough faith in Jesus to do what Jesus commanded. Jesus inspired faith within him, and in faith the man obeyed Jesus and completed his healing. The man indicated that after he obeyed Jesus' command he was healed. He left no doubt that after he did what Jesus said, Jesus healed him completely. Though he had washed as Jesus said, he gave Jesus all the glory for his healing.

(John 9:12) "Where is this man?" they asked him. "I don't know," he said.

The man obviously did not know what Jesus looked like and he had no idea where Jesus went. Notice, Jesus did not wait for the man to come back to Him so He could receive glory from the man He healed. Seven days a week,

Jesus went on to do the works of God whenever God gave Him the opportunity. Jesus did not wait around to be thanked by those He helped; rather, Jesus went on looking for more ways to do the works of God. Jesus continues to be an example for all His followers who seek to do the works of Jesus and His Father as Jesus commanded.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. Who sinned that the man was born blind?

2. In what special way did Jesus look upon the man who was born blind? How do you look upon people who have a genetic disorder?

3. How did Jesus explain our responsibility to do the works of God?

4. What did Jesus do to heal the man? Why do you think Jesus healed him this way?

5. What did the man do to receive his sight? If he had disobeyed Jesus, do you think he would have been able to see?

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