

Appealing to the Heart
John 9:1-41; Luke 5:27-32
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I always felt invisible. No one called me by name because I was simply known as the blind beggar. My testimony is recorded in John 9 if you'd like to follow along. I hope you read the whole chapter because I'm just going to give some highlights.

I was born blind and it was clear that no one bothered to see me. I spent my days by the side of the road, hoping people would take pity on me and give me a piece of bread or toss me a shekel. I was used to being ignored and sometimes pushed into the ditch if I got too close to the caravan of people. I was hopeless and helpless and hungry all the time.

Mothers would walk by with their children and say things like: "*Don't look at him. He's sinful and dirty. He wants something but he doesn't deserve it.*"

One day everything changed. I overheard some men ask a traveling teacher a question, "**Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?**" I have an acute sense of hearing and quickly realized their question concerned me. I often wondered the same thing so I leaned forward.

My heart started beating faster when I recognized the voice of Jesus. Stopping his 3-mile-an-hour walk, His answer was so tender: "**It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.**" I realized the explanation for my blindness did not lie in past causes but in future purposes. I no longer felt invisible because Immanuel was looking at me. I couldn't see Him but I knew He could see me.

To the disciples I was just a blind beggar and a theological puzzle. Jesus wasn't interested in the cause of my blindness but instead focused on the purpose of my plight. The disciples saw a problem but Jesus saw a possibility. Hope was beginning to rise within me.

After proclaiming He is the "**light of the world,**" I heard Jesus spit on the ground and figured out He was mixing the dirt with His saliva to make some mud. This made me think of Genesis 2:7, which says God formed us from the dust of the

ground. Then I felt Him gently put the cool mud on my eyes and heard Him say, “***Go, wash in the pool of Siloam.***”

Interestingly, Siloam means, “sent” so He sent me there. I’m sure people were watching me walk in the direction of the pool – they sure noticed me now. I went and washed and came back seeing! I couldn’t believe it! As I was jumping up and down people couldn’t believe I was the blind beggar. My eyes were working but they couldn’t believe their eyes! I kept saying, “*It’s me. It’s me. I’m the guy who was blind!*”

When I was asked how it happened I told the story again and again. Then they wanted to know where Jesus was and I told them I didn’t know. They grabbed me and took me to the Pharisees who asked me how I had received my sight. I sensed they were trying to find evidence against Jesus because He had healed me on the Sabbath so I simply said, “***He put mud on my eyes, and I washed, and now I see.***” [I didn’t tell them that he “made” the mud because that would have been considered work, thus violating the Sabbath prohibitions.]

After I regained my sight, many others refused to believe I was the same person who had been blind. I insisted, “***I am the man.***” Many of you have experienced this. Christ has radically transformed your life and the people who know you well wonder if you’re really the same person. That’s a good thing.

Then the Pharisees started piling on Jesus. They were treating this miracle more like a crime than a wonderful cure. Some called Him a sinner because He broke the Sabbath. Others wondered how Jesus could do something like this.

Unbelievably, they wanted to know what I thought so I gave a four-word answer, “***He is a prophet.***”

Incidentally, the healing of the blind is one of the defining characteristics of the Messiah. The Pharisees should have known this from Isaiah 35:5 but they missed it: “***He will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped.***” When John the Baptist was in prison, he began to wonder if Jesus was really the Messiah so he sent messengers to Him. Jesus answered in Matthew 11:4: “***Go and report to John what you hear and see: the blind receive sight...***”

I could tell the phony Pharisees were getting rattled so they took a different tact. If they could just prove I wasn't the formerly blind beggar then they could discredit the whole thing. They decided to ask my parents, "***Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?***" My parents vouched for my birth and my blindness but bailed on telling them who healed me or how He did it.

I know now they were afraid of losing some social status among their friends. They knew if anyone confessed Jesus to be the Christ, they would be ostracized from the synagogue and turned away from the community. They feared what others would think more than they feared what God thinks. I think they didn't want to ruffle any feathers so they said, "***He is of age; ask him.***"

The Pharisees called me a second time and said, "***Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner.***" I could sense they were trying to get me to change my testimony and to disparage Jesus. They came across so certain and even implied it would give God glory if I would say Jesus was a sinner.

I didn't understand much theology and it was intimidating to figure out how to argue with them when they knew so much. When we give our testimony we don't have to have all the answers. We can simply tell people what happened and say, "*I don't know*" when asked for more information.

Instead of telling them what I didn't know, I decided to glorify God by telling them what I *did* know: "***Whether He is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.***" This may help you as well. When sharing the gospel, keep steering the conversation to Christ.

The leaders, who are now losing ground, made another mistake when they ask how it happened: "***What did He do to you? How did He open your eyes?***" I was feeling a bit spunky at this point so I said, "***I have told you already, and you would not listen.***" I moved from spunky to sarcastic when I added, "***Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?***" I wanted so badly for them to experience what I had.

This lit them up! They started going off on me. They spit out that I was a disciple of Jesus but they were "***disciples of Moses.***" I wish I had been quick enough to quote John 5:46: "***For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me.***" Have you ever wished you could have remembered a verse when talking to someone?

I decided to lean into the conversation: “***You do not know where He comes from, and yet He opened my eyes.***” I could tell this set them back a bit so I summarized: “***If this man were not from God, He could do nothing.***”

They were now livid and told me I was born in “***utter sin.***” After cutting me down, they officially cast me out of the synagogue. A few of you have experienced something similar after you got saved. Maybe your family has kicked you out or your friends have ignored or mocked you.

Even though the Pharisees had cast me out, I remembered a promise of Jesus from John 6:37: “***...whoever comes to me I will never cast out.***”

As I was reeling from all this, Jesus found me (again) and asked me a direct question: “***Do you believe in the Son of Man?***” It’s hard for you to hear but in the original the phrase, “***Do you***” is emphatic. I thought I knew what He was asking but I had to be sure: “***And who is He, sir, that I may believe in Him?***” My heart was racing again when Jesus said, “***You have seen Him, and it is He who is speaking to you.***” This was the first time I had seen Jesus since I had been healed!

I knew I had to make a decision so I boldly declared, “***Lord, I believe.***” Then I “***worshipped Him.***” By calling Him “***Lord***” I was acknowledging His right to rule and reign in my life. By using the word “***I,***” I was personally responding and by saying “***I believe***” I was declaring, by an act of my will, that I was clinging to, relying on, and trusting in Christ. In response to all this, I couldn’t help but surrender by “***worshipping Him.***”

The Testimonial Approach

If you haven’t figured it out yet, the man born blind best illustrates the testimonial approach. We’ve been learning that it takes all kinds of Christians to reach all kinds of non-Christians: *Christians don’t have to witness the same way, but all Christians can witness in some way.*

The first two styles engage the mind while the next two make an appeal to someone’s heart.

Style	Biblical Example	Text
Direct	<i>Peter</i>	Acts 2
Intellectual	<i>Paul</i>	Acts 17
Testimonial	<i>Blind Man</i>	<u>John 9</u>
Interpersonal	<i>Matthew</i>	Luke 5
Serving	<i>Dorcas</i>	Acts 9
Invitational	<i>Samaritan Woman</i>	John 4

While both Peter and Paul utilized arguments and logic, albeit from different starting points and with different audiences in mind, the Blind Man from John 9 took an entirely different approach.

While a small percent of us employ the *confrontational* and *intellectual* approach, every one of us can and should utilize the *testimonial* style. If you're saved, you can say so. If you've been born again, you can tell about your birth. If the Savior has touched you, you can testify about it.

Some of you may be afraid to say anything about the Lord because you think you'll be dragged into a theological argument. Let's learn from the man who was once blind. He didn't worry about what he couldn't answer. He simply testified to what He had seen and knew to be true.

Listen. You are the greatest authority on what has happened to you. As someone has said, "*A man with an experience is never at the mercy of a man with only an argument.*" When you stand on your testimony no one can deny what the Lord has done in your life. You are a positive, powerful witness for Christ.

Here are some common traits of those who use the testimonial approach:

- Good listener
- Willing to be open and vulnerable
- Overwhelmed by grace

Here are some cautions to keep in mind:

- Relate your experience to the listener's life
- Keep Christ and the Gospel message central – Don't just tell your story; tell His story

- Avoid getting lost in details related to dates, times and places
- Be kind because people are blind

We're learning that *Christians don't have to witness the same way, but all Christians can witness in some way.*

The Interpersonal Approach

Another approach we can use is the interpersonal approach. Please turn in your Bibles to Luke 5 for an example of this style. Sitting in a tollbooth was a man named Levi, also known as Matthew, which means "gift of God." This gift of God had become one of the hated tax collectors.

He was a Jew hired by the Roman government. Tax collectors were also called "*publicans*," or public servants, and were considered to be on the lowest rung of the social ladder because of their shady dealings. Levi's job was to estimate the worth of goods which flowed through the city in order to levy a tax.

Unfortunately, this estimated tax was usually much higher than the goods were worth. As a result, these agents were known as extortionists. They operated on a commission system and the commission was whatever they could get away with.

Levi was considered a thief and a traitor, because he was working for a foreign government. Tax collectors were greatly despised because they served as a constant reminder to the people that they were not free. To make matters worse, they were hated by their Roman employers as well. Their only friends were fellow tax collectors and others on the same social scale like thieves and prostitutes.

According to the Rabbis, there was no hope for a man like Levi. He was excluded from all religious fellowship and couldn't even go into a synagogue. As a customs agent, Levi had a very secure and prosperous job. His tax booth was a picture of his physical, emotional and spiritual life. Isolated by the Romans and Jews alike, he was materially rich, but spiritually bankrupt. In verse 27 we read, "***After this he went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth. And he said to him, 'Follow me.'***"

This probably wasn't the first encounter he ever had with Jesus. No doubt he had heard him speak before. His tax office was next to the Sea of Galilee where Jesus had often taught large groups of people. Maybe Matthew had stood at the edge of one of those crowds and listened. Now, it was time for a divine encounter, when

Jesus said, “*Gift of God, today is the day I’d like for you to make the decision to get up and leave all this and attach yourself to me.*”

Verse 28 gives us Levi’s response: “***And leaving everything, he rose and followed him.***” This is amazing. Levi left everything even *before* he got up and went with Jesus! He decided in his heart to leave and then left. He left a troubled job, a distracting lifestyle, and a stable income because Jesus was now his boss. He couldn’t follow Him and stay at the tax collector’s table.

We read in Mark 1:18 that the fishermen left their nets. In Mark 10:50, Blind Bart threw off his cloak, “***sprang up and came to Jesus.***” Here’s a question. What have you left behind to follow Jesus? Is there something you’re still holding on to? One pastor said it like this: “*The freest people are those who’ve learned to leave things behind.*” Jim Elliot is famous for saying: “*He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to gain that which he cannot lose.*” Jesus said in Luke 9:62: “***No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.***”

As Matthew follows Jesus and hears Him speak about the necessity of being a witness, I picture him brainstorming and asking himself, “*What do I do well? Let’s start there.*” An idea comes to mind but he blows it off. “*I throw great parties but I’m a Christ-follower now. I probably shouldn’t be doing that anymore.*”

But he can’t shake the idea and finally it hits him: “*What if I threw a party with a purpose? What if all my IRS buddies who love to party came and what if I invited Jesus and the guys? What if they all showed up and hung out at the punch bowl together? What if Jesus rubbed shoulders with my friends and what if some spiritual conversations took place? That would be cool.*”

If you had asked Matthew at this point if he thought Jesus could use him as an evangelist, he would have laughed. And yet, God does use him in a mighty way. Look at verse 29: “***And Levi made him a great feast in his house, and there was a large company of tax collectors and others reclining at table with them.***” This was no small snack but rather a “mega meal.” The word “***feast***” was used of a banquet or reception.

Note there was a “***large company of tax collectors and others***” who came. The word “***large***” has the idea of multitude. We know from other passages that the “***others***” included “***sinners.***” His guest list was huge. I wonder if the invitation read something like this, “*If you’re a sinner, please come to dinner.*”

The word “**recline**” refers to the practice of lying on your side, leaning on your elbow, with your head by the table. It’s the posture that people took when they settled in for a long and relaxed meal.

The phrase “**at table**” is a term of identification and friendship. In that culture when you had a meal with someone you were saying, “*I accept you and identify with you.*” To eat from the same loaf of bread was to join yourself to the person you’re eating with.

As he looks around the room, he sees Peter talking to two publicans. *Bring it on, Pete!* And there’s John over there – *Go for it, John!* When he sees Jesus with a whole crowd of people around Him calling more to follow Him, Levi was so happy he almost LOL’d.

We don’t know how many of Matthew’s friends became followers at this supper for sinners. Maybe some did. Maybe none did. But that’s not really the issue. What’s important is something happened to Matthew. Do you see it? *Matthew is living on mission*, in a way that is appropriate to his personality and situation. He became a witness for God.

He had a heart for his lost friends and the guts to try to reach them. *Christians don’t have to witness the same way, but all Christians can witness in some way.*

Some of the most effective evangelists are brand new Christians. They still have lots of “sinners” in their lives and they can’t stop talking about what Jesus has done for them. Over time, zeal can evaporate, and connections with non-Christians are replaced with new friendships with Christians. In one sense, this is good and healthy and some of us do need to sever unhealthy relationships. But on the other hand, we need to make sure we don’t insulate ourselves from the very people Jesus wants us to reach. This is why we talk so much about neighboring. God put us where we live on purpose for His purposes.

This is a good word for us. Look at your social calendar. Do you only hang out with holy people? Think of just one person who doesn’t know Jesus. What one thing can you do this week to spend time with him or her? Maybe you can have supper with a sinner. When Jesus prayed for His followers in John 17:15, He said, “***I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.***”

Family, there was nothing special about Matthew. He was a lot like us. He was an average, ordinary 9-5 working guy. All he really had was a positive personal experience with Christ, a heart for his lost friends and the intentionality to reach them. That allowed God to use him in an extraordinary way...just as God will use ordinary people like us...if we'll let Him.

Matthew didn't boldly confront people like Peter or engage in a logical argument like Paul. Nor is there any mention he told his story like the blind man. Instead, he relied on the relationships he had cultivated over the years and simply invited "sinners" to one of his dinners. Those with the *interpersonal* style of evangelism specialize in building relationships with others. If this describes you, why don't you throw a purposeful party, maybe a block party?

Here are some qualities those with the interpersonal approach exhibit:

- Conversational
- Compassionate and sensitive
- Friendship-oriented
- Non-judgmental

As we've been discussing, each style has some blind spots. Here are some cautions to keep in mind:

- Don't value friendship over truth. The gospel must be communicated through our life *and* our lips.
- Don't be overwhelmed by needs.
- Be patient with the process.
- Expect things to get messy and awkward.

Notice in John 9:4 Jesus includes us in the work He is doing: "***We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work.***" We're called to be intentionally evangelistic by engaging the mind and appealing to the heart. Jesus said we "***must,***" which is a word of divine necessity. And because "***night is coming,***" it's an urgent imperative, not a sentimental suggestion for something to do in our spare time. The question is not one of *if* but *how*. No one can do everything but everyone can do something. *If we walk with Him, we will worship Him and will witness for Him!*

It takes all kinds of Christians to reach all kinds of non-Christians. *Christians don't have to witness the same way, but all Christians can witness in some way.*

A story is told that on the day Jesus ascended to heaven, he happened to see Gabriel and they had a talk. Gabriel asked, “*How did it go?*” The Lord said, “*It went just as planned.*”

“*Did they make you king?*” “No.”

“*Did they make you prince?*” “No.”

“*Did they worship you?*” “*Most of them didn't.*”

“*Well, what happened?*” “*They crucified me.*”

“*Then they worshipped you, right?*” “No.”

“*So, what happened?*” “*I left my people down there.*”

Then Gabriel said, “*Well, what if they fail, do you have another plan?*” Jesus replied, “*There is no other plan.*”

They didn't fail. We're here today because they didn't drop the ball 2000 years ago. What God provided for them, He provides for us as well. We have the same commission, the same Holy Spirit, and the same gospel message.

Action Steps

1. Pray for opportunities. Colossians 4:2-4: “*Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison – that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.*”

2. Slow down and be intentional. Ephesians 5:15-16: “*Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.*”

3. Gather resources. As we learned two weeks ago from 1 Peter 3:15, we're to “*always be prepared to give the reason for the hope within us.*” One Edgewood member told her Growth Group she now keeps an *Anchor for the Soul* in her purse so she's always ready to give one out. Ruth McAnally picked up 9 copies of *Anchor for the Soul* in Spanish to give to the guys who are putting a new roof on

their house. I keep copies of *Soul Satisfaction* in my wallet so I'm always prepared. Stop by the counter in the back if you need some of these tools.

4. Follow God's promptings. Colossians 4:5-6: "*Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.*"

I received an email from a neighbor Wednesday around 6:00 pm, asking me to help with a computer issue. Frankly, I didn't really want to help because I was lying on the couch and our Growth Group was set to begin in 30 minutes.

I decided to follow the prompting of God and got up. When I went across the street I found out that another neighbor was helping her get a bookcase out of another neighbor's house. I went over to help. As we were lifting it up, he looked up to heaven and said "*We're all going up eventually, right?*" I said, "*It depends on whether we're trusting in what Jesus did for us.*" He replied, "*Well, we have to do some work, too.*" I said, "*Actually, it's all been done for us.*"

As we carried the bookcase across the yard to our neighbor's house, he told me his young son is talking about being born again. While navigating the bookcase up the stairs, I told him that's very exciting because Jesus said you have to be born again to go to heaven. He started to wave me off and said he doesn't believe that and wants his son to figure it out on his own. I asked if his son had a children's Bible and he said he didn't. I offered to get him one and he said he'd get back to me.

Here's the deal. I was so close to missing these opportunities! I'm glad God prompted me but I've been reminded how easy it is to get off track.

- Ten little Christians, standing in a line, one disliked the preacher, then there were nine.
- Nine little Christians stayed up very late, one slept in, then there were eight.
- Eight little Christians on their way to heaven, one went astray, then there were seven.
- Seven little Christians chirping like some chicks, one disliked the songs, then there were six.
- Six little Christians seemed very much alive, but one lost his interest then there were five.

- Five little Christians pulling for heaven's shore, but one stopped to rest, then there were four.
- Four little Christians, busy as a bee, one got her feelings hurt, then there were three.
- Three little Christians knew not what to do, one couldn't forgive another, then there were two.
- Two little Christians, our rhyme is nearly done, quarreled over petty stuff, then there was only one.
- One little Christian, can't do much 'tis true; brought his friend to church – then there were two.
- Two earnest Christians, each won one more, that doubled the number, then there were four.
- Four sincere Christians worked early and worked late, each won another, then there were eight.
- Eight splendid Christians, if they doubled as before, in just a few short weeks, we'd have 1,024.

The key is to be faithful and serve in a manner that matches who God made us to be. Let's reaffirm our commitment to follow, just like the Blind Man and Matthew did, as we sing, "I Will Follow."

Closing Song: I Will Follow