

TRANSFORMING PRESENCE

Group Leader's Guide

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This guide is to be used in conjunction with *Transforming Presence: How Being with Jesus Changes Everything* by David Drury (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2016).

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CONTENTS

About This Study	4
Week 1. Exhausted	5
Week 2. Unsatisfied	7
Week 3. Trapped	9
Week 4. Powerless	11
Week 5. Stuck	13
Week 6. Overwhelmed	15
Week 7. Afraid	17
Week 8. Guilty	19
Week 9. Marginalized	21
Week 10. Grieved	23



ABOUT THIS STUDY

Transforming Presence by David Drury forms the basis for this interactive group Bible study. *Transforming Presence* shows us the beauty of the gospel of John through the stories of those who encountered Jesus and were dramatically changed by his presence. Join David as he takes you on a journey through the life of Jesus seen through the eyes of those who needed him most.



Week 1

EXHAUSTED

John 2:1–11

TO THE FACILITATOR

Perhaps not everyone in your group knows everyone else, so ask everyone to introduce themselves. Assure everyone that you want this series of group sessions to be informal. Tell the group that every question of response will be treated respectfully.

FOCUS ON GOD'S WORD

John 2:1–11 takes us to a wedding in Cana in Galilee, a town near Jesus' hometown of Nazareth. But this was no ordinary wedding because Jesus' mother was there and so were Jesus and his disciples (v. 1). It should have been a joyful occasion, but a problem arose. The supply of wine was exhausted. Jesus' mother reported this problem to Jesus (v. 3).

Someday Jesus would manifest his messianic identity, but he informed Mary that the wedding was not the right time (v. 4).

Still retaining the confidence and hope that Jesus would solve the problem, Mary advised the servants to do whatever Jesus told them to do (v. 5). And Jesus did not disappoint his mother or the wedding guests. He instructed the servants to fill each of the six nearby jars with water (vv. 6–7). Each jar would hold twenty to thirty gallons.

When each jar was almost overflowing, Jesus told the servants to “draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet,” the person responsible for the seating arrangement for the wedding and for tasting what the guests would eat and drink (v. 8). The master of the banquet tasted what had been drawn from the water jars. The water had become wine. Not knowing the source of the wine, he called the bridegroom aside and commented that the bridegroom had kept the best wine until last (vv. 9–10).

John, who organized his gospel around miracles Jesus performed to elicit faith in him as the Messiah, the Son of God (20:30–31), identified the turning of water into wine as Jesus' first miraculous sign (2:11). This miracle revealed Jesus' glory, and his disciples put their faith in him.

FOCUS ON LIFE

1. What, if anything, might cause you to think a key participant in the wedding was related to Mary?
2. It has been said that man's extremity is God's opportunity. How does the miracle at the wedding demonstrate this statement's truth?

3. Why do you agree or disagree that the wine Jesus produced was fermented?
4. How do you think the servants must have felt when they saw the water turn to wine?
5. How has the Lord provided for you when your resources—physical, emotional, or spiritual—were exhausted?
6. Why is it wise to invite Jesus to a wedding?
7. Do you think it is ever too late to invite Jesus into a marriage? Why or why not?
8. How might a Christian wedding differ from a non-Christian wedding?
9. Read John 2:11. Do you think Mary had ever seen Jesus perform a miracle? Why or why not?
10. How might the Old Testament law compare to the wedding's exhausted supply of wine? How might the new wine illustrate the New Testament's gospel?

WRAP-UP

Have members of the group analyze their own marriage or marriage in general and tell how Jesus' presence would improve it.



Week 2

JESUS SHOWS UP

James 1:1–11

TO THE FACILITATOR

Tell the group that it is possible to be very religious but feel unsatisfied. This session features such a person.

FOCUS ON GOD'S WORD

As David Drury points out in his book *Transforming Presence*, numerous false messiahs had appeared in Israel:

Nicodemus had seen messiahs come and go. He'd seen his fair share of parable-weaving rabbis teaching enthralled crowds in the countryside. A few even came from Galilee. For a people craving freedom from their oppressors, for those with apocalyptic visions and whose favorite book of the Bible was Isaiah, the time was always ripe for a new messiah to rise up and gather a following. Yet these messianic campaigns always ended, though perhaps not always in the same way. Some ended in violence, sparking a riot to be put down by the authorities and the execution of the recently rumored messiah. Some ended in a flash—suddenly gone, to other, unknown places. Some ended in the slow, pitiful decline of followers, until everyone could see what Nicodemus already knew: They were not the real deal. These so-called messiahs were pale imitations of the Immanuel of Isaiah 7. They were not the “lamb [led] to the slaughter in Isaiah 53:7. They were shadow messiahs, bleating like prideful goats. (pp. 34–35)

Was Jesus any different from the false messiahs? He had aroused Nicodemus's curiosity. Nicodemus knew by Jesus' miracles that he had come from God (John 3:2), but was he the Messiah?

Nicodemus “was a member of the Jewish ruling council,” the seventy-member Sanhedrin that had jurisdiction over the Jews' religious life (v. 1). Yet he was not sure Jesus was the Messiah. So he sneaked away from home under the cover of darkness to visit Jesus (v. 2). Perhaps he did not want his fellow rulers to know he was interested in Jesus, so nighttime would be the best time for a visit. Or he might have wanted a private meeting. During the day, Jesus would be surrounded by throngs of needy people.

Jesus told Nicodemus he must be born again (v. 3), but Nicodemus, the learned religious leader, had no idea what that meant. He asked how a man could enter his mother's womb a second time and be born (v. 4).

Jesus told Nicodemus he should not be surprised at the saying, “You must be born again.” Just as everyone has a physical birth, so everyone needs a spiritual birth. He explained that the Spirit gives the new birth (vv. 5–7). But Nicodemus was mystified, even though he was a ruler in Israel and should have known about the new birth (v. 9).

John 3:16 tells us God loved the world so much that he gave Jesus and by believing in Jesus we receive eternal life. This message is not only for irreligious sinners but for religious sinners too. Nicodemus was very religious and knowledgeable about Old Testament law, but he needed to receive Jesus as the Savior and thereby be born again.

Verse 15 compares Jesus’ crucifixion to Moses’ raising of a brass snake on a pole in the desert. The nation had sinned and was judged with bites by poisonous snakes, but God provided the remedy (Num. 21). By looking at the raised brass snake, one would receive healing—life instead of death. So life comes to anyone who looks in faith to Jesus who was lifted on a cross to die in our place.

FOCUS ON LIFE

1. Read John 19:38–42. Why do you agree or disagree that Nicodemus became born again?
2. What might have been Nicodemus’s reason for seeking Jesus at night?
3. How would you define “kingdom of God” (John 3:3)?
4. The word *you* in verse 7 is plural. Who, in addition to Nicodemus, do you believe Jesus had in mind? Why?
5. How does the wind serve as a good symbol of the Holy Spirit?
6. What do you think it means to be born of water (John 3:5)? Defend your answer.
7. Read Ezekiel 37:1–10. Why do you agree or disagree that what happens according to this passage illustrates new birth?
8. Do you think it is possible to be deeply religious but not born again? Why or why not?
9. How would explain the new birth to an unbelieving friend?
10. Read Titus 2:11—3:5. According to this passage, what differences should the new birth make in a believer’s life?

WRAP-UP

Ask at least two people this week if they have been born again. If necessary, tell them what new birth is.



Week 3

TRAPPED

John 4:1–42

TO THE FACILITATOR

Have the group identify a few bad situations in which people feel trapped. Explain that this session focuses on a woman who felt trapped. Her life was in shambles and she couldn't escape—until Jesus stepped forward to help.

FOCUS ON GOD'S WORD

The Pharisees' resentment of Jesus was building, so Jesus left Judea and headed for Galilee. Samaria lay between Judea and Galilee, so traveling Jews skirted Samaria by going east across the Jordan River and then north until they bypassed Samaria. But Jesus' travel plans were different; he purposely journeyed through Samaria (John 4:1–4). While in Samaria, he stopped outside Sychar, and sat down at a well. It was noon, and he was tired (v. 6).

Jesus asked a Samaritan woman who arrived at the well. “Will you give me a drink?” (v. 7). During the conversation that followed, it became obvious that the woman was trapped in a desperate situation. She was living with a man and hoping that someday the Messiah would come to save her from her sad situation (vv. 8–25).

It seems the women of Sychar mocked her, because she came to the well alone during the hottest time of day, when none of the women would be there (v. 6). But Jesus did not mock or condemn her. Instead, he offered her “living water” (v. 10)—salvation and a new life.

When Jesus identified himself as the Messiah the woman had hoped for (vv. 25–26), she left her water jar, hurried into the city, and invited the people to visit Jesus. “Could this be the Messiah?” she asked (v. 29). She no longer felt trapped by her shame!

What about the disciples? They were too concerned about feeding an appetite than caring for souls. Jesus told them his food was to God's will and to finish his work (vv. 31–34). He urged them to focus on the fields that were ripe for harvest (v. 35).

Perhaps, as he spoke these words, the people of Sychar were approaching. Many of them believed in Jesus and invited him to stay with them. He accepted the invitation and stayed in Sychar two days (vv. 39–40).

Jesus had freed the Samaritan woman from her hopelessness, and she helped many of her neighbors find freedom in him (v. 42).

FOCUS ON LIFE

1. What do you think was Jesus' reason for going through Samaria?
2. How would you describe Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman?
3. What do you learn about Jesus' attitude toward racism from John 4?
4. How would you describe Jesus' disciples from what you see of them in John 4?
5. Do you see a development of the Samaritan woman's faith as she conversed with Jesus? If so, what was her initial opinion of Jesus? What was her final opinion of him?
6. How has Jesus satisfied your thirst?
7. How important is the place of worship? Why? How important is the way we worship? Why?
8. Has your concern for food ever been replaced by a spiritual concern? Describe the occasion.
9. Why do you agree or disagree that many Christians place a higher value on creature comforts than on God's will?

WRAP-UP

Brainstorm ways your group members might minister to society's rejected, trapped people.



Week 4

POWERLESS

John 4:43–54

TO THE FACILITATOR

Tell the group that this week’s session focuses on two women who experienced God’s real mercy and how one of them, a Gentile, became an ancestor of Jesus the Messiah.

FOCUS ON GOD’S WORD

No one is immune from heartache, pain, and adversity. A royal official in Capernaum had authority, rank, and wealth, but tragedy struck him. His son was very sick—close to death (John 4:46). In *Transforming Presence*, David Drury comments on the resources of the royal official:

The royal official of John 4 had it good before he had it bad. He was a big shot. To the bystander, a royal official in the service of the ruler of Israel would have had everything going for him. He had the right connections and the right education. He had the power to make decisions that would impact hundreds, if not thousands, of lives. And where he didn’t have political power, he had money. Financial means are another source of power, one that seems to influence everyone. He could buy what he wanted and, in a tight spot, bribe his way out of trouble. (p. 69)

Undoubtedly the official’s son meant a great deal to him, because he went to Jesus and begged him to go to his house and heal his son (v. 47). Here was a high-ranking official beseeching Jesus to do what no one else had been able to do. He had faith in Jesus. He was also obedient. Jesus told the official to go, stating that his son would live (v. 50). He took Jesus at his word, and while he was going home, his servants met him with the good news that his son was alive (v. 51).

When did the son recover? When the father asked that question, the servants replied, “Yesterday, at one in the afternoon, the fever left him” (v. 52). Realizing that was precisely the time Jesus had said, “Your son will live,” the official and his household believed (v. 53).

Verse 54 mentions this miracle was the second miraculous sign Jesus performed “after coming from Judea to Galilee.” Once again, a miracle clearly affirmed that Jesus is the Christ, and the miracle caused faith to arise in those who witnessed it.

FOCUS ON LIFE

1. How can you use tragedy to strengthen your faith?
2. Why do you agree or disagree that the miracle of changing water into wine had a positive effect on the royal official?
3. Have you ever begged Jesus for something? What were the circumstances? What were the results?
4. What evidence of genuine faith did the official manifest?
5. Why do you think the official went in person to Jesus?
6. Why does it make good sense to take Jesus at his word?
7. Why do you think some people require a sign before they believe?
8. What reason might Jesus have had for not going to the official's home?
9. In what situations do you feel powerless?
10. Why do you think bad things happen to believers?

WRAP-UP

Suggest that when a group member learns of tragedy in a famous person's life he or she pray for that person.



Week 5

STUCK

John 5:1-5

TO THE FACILITATOR

This session focuses on a man who was stuck in a horrible situation for thirty-eight years until Jesus freed him.

FOCUS ON GOD'S WORD

Jesus went to Jerusalem to observe a feast (John 5:1). A disabled man was lying in the portico amid many blind, lame, and paralyzed people (vv. 2-5). All of them hoped to reach the nearby pool and be healed when its waters swirled. However, the disabled man had no one to help him reach the water. When Jesus asked, “Do you want to get well?” (v. 6), the disabled man politely replied that he no one to help him, and someone always reached the water before him (v. 7).

Jesus commanded the helpless man to get up, pick up his mat, and walk (v. 8). Immediately the man obeyed and walked (v. 9).

The healing of the disabled man did not miss the attention of the religious rulers. They were furious when they saw the healed man walking and carrying his mat. They told him, “It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat” (v. 10).

David Drury comments in *Transforming Presence*:

So here we are, back to the Sabbath law. Jesus did a no-no, having compassion on someone on the Sabbath. The Jewish leaders missed the point. They continued to do so even after the man clarified that this “violation” came about as a result of a healing. The disabled man replied, “The man who made me well said to me, ‘Pick up your mat and walk.’” So the Jewish leaders asked, “‘Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?’ the man who was healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there” (vv. 11-13). (p. 89)

Later Jesus found the disabled man at the temple and told him to stop sinning or something worse might happen to him (v. 14). The healed man promptly told the Jews it was Jesus who had made him well (v. 15).

FOCUS ON LIFE

1. For thirty-eight years the disabled man had been stuck in his helpless condition. How might people today be stuck in helpless conditions?
2. How might someone get in the way of a person who is trying to escape a helpless situation?
3. Why do you agree or disagree that the stirring of the water brought real healing?
4. How is it that Jesus “learned” the disabled man had been stuck in his condition for a long time?
5. Why do you agree or disagree that Jesus’ question, “Do you want to get well?” was unnecessary?
6. Have you ever been stuck in a bad situation but received help from Jesus? Describe the event.
7. Why do you agree or disagree that Christians sometimes get in the way of people who want to escape a bad situation? Defend your answer.
8. Which is more important: adherence to a religious law or tradition or helping a person escape a desperate situation? Defend your answer.
9. Why do you think Jesus slipped away from the crowd?
10. Read John 5:14. Why do you agree or disagree that the disabled man’s sinning had brought about his stuck condition.

WRAP-UP

Conclude this session by having the group read or sing “Make Me a Blessing.”



Week 6

OVERWHELMED

John 6:1–15

TO THE FACILITATOR

Ask how many group members have experienced intense hunger with no place to obtain food. Explain that a huge crowd experienced this kind of hunger until Jesus remedied the situation.

FOCUS ON GOD'S WORD

A large crowd followed Jesus because of the signs he performed. John 6:1–2 tells us the crowd followed him even to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee.

Jesus had gone up to a mountainside where he sat down with his disciples (v. 3). Perhaps he wanted to instruct them in the Passover Feast that was near (v. 4). But when he saw the large crowd, he asked Philip where they could buy bread to feed the crowd (v. 6). The question was designed to test Philip. Jesus knew already what he would do.

Philip assessed the need and came up with a negative answer: “It would take more than half a year’s wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite” (v. 7). In *Transforming Presence*, David Drury offers an interesting comment on Philip’s response:

Every committee has a Philip on it. A Philip is someone who breaks out the calculator during the debate and dismantles the entire proposition before the brainstorming begins. The world is full of Philips who point out what won’t work. Philip always cast things negatively. He could have said, “If we committed nine months’ wages to this problem it might be enough.” But no, Philip was a pessimist. He overestimated the need and underestimated the provision. Life is easier for pessimists, because when things don’t work out they take consolation in the fact that they saw it coming, which is somehow reassuring to a Philip. (p. 96)

But Andrew was an optimist. He reported that a boy in the crowd had brought a lunch of five small barley loaves and two small fish. But he asked how far they would go among so many people (v. 9). He was overwhelmed by the statistics.

Jesus’ answer was a show and tell he told Andrew to have the people sit down (v. 10). They numbered five thousand.

After blessing the small lunch, Jesus distributed the loaves and fish to the crowd, “as much as they wanted” (v. 11).

After everyone had their fill, Jesus told his disciples to gather the leftovers (v. 12). They obeyed and found there were enough leftovers to fill twelve baskets (v. 13). Had Jesus intentionally provided one basket of food for each of the twelve disciples? He rewards obedient service!

The miracle convinced the crowd that Jesus was the predicted prophet (v. 14). Knowing they intended to make Jesus king, he withdrew to a mountain (v. 15).

FOCUS ON LIFE

1. What reason might Jesus have had for going to a mountainside with his disciples?
2. Why do you agree or disagree that Jesus is interested in our physical needs?
3. Was the crowd wrong to follow Jesus because they saw his miraculous signs? Why or why not?
4. Why is it significant in verse that the Jewish Passover Feast was near?
5. How was Jesus' question to Philip in John 6:5 a personal test?
6. What do you learn about Andrew's character that you would like to see in your own character?
7. Jesus gave thanks for the loaves and fish. What is your opinion of the practice of praying for a meal in a restaurant?
8. Why do you agree or disagree that the boy in John 6 exercised faith?
9. Why do you agree or disagree that it is sinful to throw away leftovers?
10. What do you think was the crowd's motive in wanting to make Jesus king?

WRAP-UP

Have the group make plans to distribute food this week to the needy, perhaps to a homeless shelter, rescue mission, or to individuals.



Week 7

AFRAID

John 6:16–21

TO THE FACILITATOR

This session addresses the fear factor. Many situations produce fear, but Jesus has the same message for all of them: “It is I; don’t be afraid” (John 6:20).

FOCUS ON GOD’S WORD

One evening Jesus’ disciples entered a boat and set off for Capernaum at the north end of the Sea of Galilee (vv. 16–17). Conditions for sailing were not good. It became dark and windy. Jesus was still praying on the mountain (v. 15), but he was keeping his eye on his men (see Mark 6:45–48). The wind was so severe that it produced rough waves (John 6:18).

After hard rowing, the disciples reached the middle of the sea (v. 19). In that terrifying moment, the disciples saw Jesus. He was approaching the boat, walking on the water.

In *Transforming Presence*, David Drury comments, “The wording in the original language is more potent than our English phrase ‘a strong wind was blowing.’ The wind was a ‘violent, tempestuous’ wind.¹ It was a *megas* wind, and you probably don’t need a Greek dictionary to realize that *megas* means ‘great’ or ‘huge.’ You can’t know how much fear you’ll feel in the unexpected mega-storm until you’re in it. The presence of Jesus for those struggling in the storm changes the way they see the storm, themselves, and even Jesus himself” (p. 112).

Matthew 14 adds that the disciples were terrified when they saw Jesus walking on the waves, because they thought they were seeing a ghost. Fear can cause us to imagine all kinds of things and even give us a wrong perception of Jesus. Nevertheless, the disciples finally welcomed Jesus into the boat (John 6:21), and that’s when the storm ceased and the boat reached land (see Matt. 14:32).

David Drury comments on Jesus’ words, “It is I; don’t be afraid”:

Jesus told us not to fear. On what basis? In verse 20, we see that he didn’t just say, “Don’t be afraid.” He preceded that by saying, “It is I.” Or, more accurately, “I AM; don’t be afraid.”

This statement rests on the identity of Jesus. He doesn’t just tell us not to fear; he reminds us we don’t need to fear because of *who he is*. Jesus told the disciples his true identity while walking on the Sea of Galilee (as if walking on the water itself didn’t answer the identity question already). When he said, “I AM” in the original language, this was a reference to all kinds of interesting history about the identity of God. What’s more, to the

original hearers—the men in the boat tossed about by the storm—this was understood as a claim by Jesus of his divinity. (*Transforming Presence*, p. 119)

FOCUS ON LIFE

1. Complete this sentence: “Life’s worst fear is . . .” Why did you answer as you did?
2. What fear has Jesus helped you overcome? How does it feel to be free of that fear?
3. Why do you agree or disagree that Jesus intentionally stayed on land long enough to cause the disciples to experience the raging storm?
4. When did you last find yourself helpless in one of life’s raging storms? How did you react?
5. What glimpse of Jesus have you had in a storm?
6. How does “I AM” identify Jesus as divine?
7. How would you respond to someone who feels that Jesus doesn’t care about our fears?
8. Why do you agree or disagree that fear doesn’t always indicate a lack of faith?
9. Why is it significant that when Jesus entered the boat, it reached its destination immediately?
10. Do you think it is right or wrong to consult a psychologist or psychiatrist about a fear? Defend your answer.

WRAP-UP

Instruct the group members to find several commands in the Bible to not fear and apply each one to his or her life.

NOTE

1. “Greek Lexicon: G417 (KJV),” Blue Letter Bible, accessed June 16, 2014, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?strongs=G417>.



Week 8

GUILTY

John 8:1–11

TO THE FACILITATOR

This session zeroes-in on a woman who was guilty of adultery but received forgiveness from Jesus.

FOCUS ON GOD'S WORD

At dawn Jesus was teaching a throng of people in the temple courts when the teachers of the law and the Pharisees interrupted him. They made a woman taken in the act of adultery stand in front of the crowd and asked Jesus whether the woman should be stoned as the law of Moses commanded (John 8:1–5). They were actually trying to trap Jesus so they might accuse him of disobeying the law (v. 6).

Would Jesus pronounce her guilty or not? Would he consent to the stoning?

He did what the accusers did not expect. He bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger while the Pharisees kept on questioning him (v. 6). When he arose, he said, “Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her” (v. 7). Again, he bent down and wrote on the ground (v. 8).

The first five books of the Bible include 613 laws, and the Pharisees added many more to the number. It was impossible, even for a Pharisee, to keep all those laws, so each of the woman’s accusers was guilty of lawbreaking. In *Transforming Presence*, David Drury comments:

We all have guilt. We don’t do the things we want to do, and we do the things we wish we could avoid (see Rom. 7:15–20). We may look at the sin in our lives and wonder how long it can last. We wonder if we can sustain things at their current trajectory, or if even our little sins will catch up to us too. So the question of this chapter, and of our lives, is this: What do we do about our sin? The presence of Jesus transforms the way we see sin in our lives and offers hope for change. (p. 132)

Feeling uncomfortable because of Jesus’ action, one by one the woman’s accusers left until only Jesus and the woman remained (John 8:9). He asked her where her accusers were and “has no one condemned you?” She responded, “No one, sir.” “Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus answered. But he added, “Go now and leave your life of sin” (vv. 10–11).

Jesus does not condone sin; he condemns it, but he forgives and frees the sinner.

FOCUS ON LIFE

1. Why do you think the Pharisees did not bring the adulterous man to Jesus?
2. Why do you agree or disagree that God views every sin as equally grievous?
3. Why do you agree or disagree that God views every sin as carrying an equal amount of guilt?
4. What do you think are the three most frequently committed sins by unbelievers in our culture?
5. What do you think are the three most frequently committed sins by believers in our culture?
6. How should a church discipline an adulterous member? How should a church discipline an adulterous member of the pastoral staff? If the disciplinary action differs, what reason accounts for the difference?
7. Why should forgiveness inspire changed behavior?

WRAP-UP

Challenge each group member to be slow to condemn but quick to forgive.



Week 9

MARGINALIZED

John 9:1–34

TO THE FACILITATOR

Our task should be to reach those who are on the margins of society.

FOCUS ON GOD'S WORD

When Jesus and his disciples encountered a man who was born blind, the disciples assumed sin was the cause. But whose sin had caused the blindness, they wanted to know (John 9:2). Was it the man's sin or his parents'?

"Neither this man nor his parents sinned," Jesus answered (v. 3). The blindness happened so God could display his work in the man's life, Jesus explained. Then, Jesus healed the blind man. He mixed saliva and mud, put it on the man's eyes, and commanded him to wash in the Pool of Siloam (vv. 6–7). The blind man obeyed and returned from the pool with sight (v. 7).

David Drury draws a practical lesson for us from the healing of the blind man. In *Transforming Presence*, he writes, "When we find the marginalized, whom everyone assumes got themselves into the mess they're in, let's choose to see them as human beings God wants his works to be displayed in. Then perhaps God will display his works through us as well" (p. 151).

The miracle of healing was astounding, so much so that some people denied it (vv. 8–9). But the healed man assured them he was indeed the man born blind, and then he related what Jesus had done to give him his sight (vv. 10–11).

The Pharisees interrogated the former blind man (vv. 13–15). Some of them said flat out that Jesus was not from God. They called him a Sabbath breaker (v. 16). Others wondered how a sinner could do such miraculous signs. So the Pharisees were divided in their opinion of Jesus. They asked the healed man what he had to say about Jesus, and they received the answer, "He is a prophet" (v. 17).

The interrogation moved to the healed man's parents. They verified that the man was indeed their son, but they could not explain how he was able to see (vv. 18–20). They told the Pharisees to ask their son, because he was of age (v. 21). The parents were afraid they would be excommunicated if they identified Jesus as the healer—the Messiah (v. 22).

A second time, the Pharisees called for the former blind man, and told him Jesus was a sinner (v. 24). They received an ironclad reply: "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!" (v. 25). And then the healed man asked the Pharisees a pertinent question: "Do you want to become his disciples too?" (v. 27). The Pharisees responded angrily. They insulted the healed man and threw him out of their presence (vv. 33–34).

Later, Jesus found the former blind man and led him to faith in him as the Messiah (vv. 35–38). Some Pharisees overheard the conversation and received Jesus’ rebuke that their “guilt remains” (v. 41).

FOCUS ON LIFE

1. Why do you agree or disagree that spiritual blindness is worse than physical blindness?
2. How would you characterize the blind man’s parents?
3. How would you respond to someone who believes all disabilities result from sinning?
4. How do you account for the different opinions about the healed man’s identity?
5. What kinds of reactions do you get when you tell people Jesus cured your spiritual blindness?
6. Why do you agree or disagree that the Pharisees who rejected the former blind man’s testimony refused to believe in Jesus because they did not want to believe the truth?
7. How do you explain the fact that some religious individuals oppose Jesus?
8. Were the Pharisees truly disciples of Moses? Why or why not?
9. Read John 9:34. How did the Pharisees show their spiritual pride?
10. How would you answer someone who argues that Jesus never claimed to be God?

WRAP-UP

Have the group close this session by reading or singing “Amazing Grace.” Or invite testimonies about how Jesus turned spiritual blindness into spiritual sight.



Week 10

GRIEVED

John 11:1–44

TO THE FACILITATOR

Death awaits every human being as an act of judgment for our sin. The judgment was announced in the garden of Eden, and it is evidenced daily in countless obituaries. Fortunately, as we will see in this session, Jesus holds the power over death.

FOCUS ON GOD'S WORD

Siblings Mary, Martha, and Lazarus all became Jesus' close friends. They often entertained Jesus in their home in Bethany. One day while Jesus was far from Bethany, he received word from Mary and Martha that their brother Lazarus was sick (John 11:1–3). Knowing the sickness would lead to God's glory (v. 4), Jesus remained two more days where he was (vv. 4–6), then he told his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea" (v. 7). The disciples feared for Jesus' safety in Judea, but Jesus insisted on going. He told his disciples that Lazarus had died, but he would "wake him up" (v. 11). Jesus must have known that Lazarus would not have died if Jesus was present. No one ever died in Jesus' presence. Perhaps Martha and Mary understood this truth (vv. 21, 32).

At Bethany Jesus went with Mary, Martha, and a group of mourners to Lazarus's tomb. Outside the tomb, "Jesus wept" (v. 35). David Drury comments, "'Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. 'Take away the stone,' he said' (John 11:38–39). Ever the conscientious one, Martha resisted, saying it had been four days since Lazarus was buried, so the odor of the body would be very strong" (*Transforming Presence*, p. 172).

Jesus prayed. He thanked the Father for hearing him and for making it possible for the mourners to believe in him (v. 41). After praying, Jesus shouted, "Lazarus, come out!" (v. 43). In response to the call of the One who has authority over death, Lazarus came out of the tomb. Grave clothes covered him until Jesus commanded, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go" (v. 44).

FOCUS ON LIFE

1. What might Mary and Martha have thought when Jesus did not quickly respond to their message that Lazarus was sick? When have you wondered why Jesus did not show up when you needed him?

2. Why do you agree or disagree with Martha and Mary's comment: "Lord . . . if you had been here, my brother would not have died" (John 11:21, 32)?

3. The disciples warned Jesus about making a trip to Galilee. Do you think they feared for Jesus, for themselves, or for Jesus and themselves? Defend your answer.
4. What evidence of Jesus' deity do you find in the story of Jesus and Lazarus?
5. What evidence of Jesus' humanity do you find in this story?
6. Why do you think Mary stayed home when Jesus was arriving?
7. How are you encouraged by the fact that Jesus is the resurrection and the life?
8. In what sense will a believer never die?
9. Why do you think Jesus summoned Lazarus by name from the tomb?
10. Why do you agree or disagree that the removal of Lazarus's grave clothes pictures your Christian liberty?

WRAP-UP

Encourage each group member to send a note of comfort to someone who is mourning the loss of a loved one.