

1-1-2011

## Healed to Know, Believe and Serve

Liesl Huhn  
lhuhn33@hotmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/leaven>



Part of the [Biblical Studies Commons](#), [Christianity Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Huhn, Liesl (2011) "Healed to Know, Believe and Serve," *Leaven*: Vol. 19: Iss. 1, Article 7.  
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/leaven/vol19/iss1/7>

This Sermon is brought to you for free and open access by the Religion at Pepperdine Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Leaven by an authorized editor of Pepperdine Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [bailey.berry@pepperdine.edu](mailto:bailey.berry@pepperdine.edu).

# Healed to Know, Believe and Serve

LIESL HUHNS

---

Today's text, Mark 8.22–26, shows Jesus giving sight to a blind man. Poor vision is an inconvenience, but blindness is a debilitating handicap. Although we have many tools to help the physically blind in our society, most blind people in today's world don't have it much better off than those in the first century. To be blind is to be not fully functional, not perfect: broken. Blindness is one of the many symptoms of the broken world we live in.

Blindness prevents an individual from venturing into new places, makes it difficult for a person to work an ordinary job and makes it very hard for a person to live independently. To be blind is to be marginalized, and this was only too true during Jesus' earthly ministry.

In his society, the blind man of Bethsaida would have had no way of supporting himself financially, except by begging. He was probably very low in the pecking order of this town. Yet, he evidently has very loving companions who take the time to bring him to Jesus and ask for healing on his behalf.

We see that the blind man doesn't ask for his own healing. We're not told why. Maybe as a marginalized member of society he didn't feel worthy to approach the Healer himself; maybe he had gotten so used to his life in the village that he didn't feel he needed to see. Maybe he had just given up hope that things would ever be different. Here we see Jesus' compassion, as well as one of the characteristics of God: he desires for people to be whole, even if they themselves don't ask for healing.

Jesus takes the man by the hand, leading him out of the village—where the man probably knew the exact number of steps from place to place—leading him out of his comfort zone to begin the healing process. Outside the village, the man will acquire a new way of interacting with the people around him and will receive a new paradigm for his life. The label of "blind man" will be removed and a whole new realm of possibilities will be open to him.

The method Jesus used to heal this man was different from any other healing miracle recorded in the Gospels. Instead of being healed instantly, the man was healed by degrees. Why did Jesus do this? The text doesn't tell us specifically, but it wasn't because the situation was too difficult, because Jesus had already raised a girl from death—the ultimate physical ailment—in chapter five. I feel Jesus healed the man in stages as an object lesson, primarily for his disciples, and as a lesson to the man, as well.

In Mark's Gospel, Jesus is often shown as a teacher. Sometimes he teaches with parables, sometimes with explanations and many times by his actions. When Jesus was working among crowds, he often told parables. These stories were designed to teach in a subtle, veiled way. When Jesus was away from the crowds, with his disciples, he tried to explain to them the meaning behind many of the things they had heard him say and had seen him do. And when Jesus was among hurting people, he acted in a way often unexpected in that society: he had compassion on individuals and treated them with respect, giving them hope for the future.

If we step back and look at the context of this miracle at Bethsaida, we note that this event occurs after



the feeding of the 4000, and before Peter's assertion that no matter what the crowds thought, he *knew* Jesus was the Christ. The placement of these stories in quick succession was important to Mark, and therefore must also be important to us as we study them.

Before visiting Bethsaida, the disciples had witnessed great miracles of Jesus as he fed thousands of people with just a serving or two of food. Yet after all they had seen, the disciples still didn't understand the nature or mission of Jesus.

Here in Mark, chapter eight, Jesus clearly equates blindness with lack of understanding in his questions to the disciples.

"Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don't you remember [the feedings of the 4000 and 5000]?" In the few verses preceding the encounter with the blind man, Jesus painstakingly took the disciples through the events of their recent past, but the disciples just couldn't "get it." One more time, the teacher Jesus asks, "Do you still not understand?" and then puts down the chalk, setting the lesson aside for the time being.

After Jesus and the disciples left Bethsaida, Peter rightly professes that Jesus is the Christ, but then rebukes Jesus for teaching about his coming death and resurrection. Again, we see that Peter, and probably the other disciples along with him, didn't understand the nature or mission of Jesus. They were catching on to the idea of him as the Messiah—the Anointed One—but their expectations concerning the Messiah were inaccurate. They were looking for a triumphant leader who would bring about the political and physical restoration of Israel that Isaiah had pictured. They didn't realize their Messiah had come to restore the spiritual relationship between God and his creation by taking on the sin of the world. The disciples were in just as much need of healing from their lack of understanding as this blind man was in need of sight.

Sandwiching the story of this miracle between two bouts of incomprehension on the part of the disciples is Mark's way of underscoring their lack of understanding. In the account of the blind man, as in the ancient world, blindness signifies more than the lack of physical sight. The Greeks used "blindness" as a codeword for ignorance. In the Old Testament, Isaiah and Jeremiah used blindness to mean impenitence and obstinacy. In the New Testament blindness is often equated with darkness. These metaphors would have been clearer to early readers of this Gospel than they are to us now.

By means of the two-step healing process, the blind man was able to appreciate the value of perfect vision. The disciples needed this illustration to know the difference between seeing the vague shape of things and comprehending the details—a lesson they did not truly learn until Christ's resurrection. Jesus is fully God, yet fully man, bridging the gap between the Creator and the created, reconciling humanity and removing sin.

In the first stage of healing, the blind man gets a glimpse of what is to come. He could have walked away after that first step, but he stuck with Jesus and allowed him to complete the healing.

Like the blind man, I am handicapped. I desperately need reconciliation with God. My spiritual blindness prevents me from experiencing God's mercy and grace, and inhibits my daily interaction with the people in my life. Like the disciples, I'm prevented from seeing the nature and mission of Jesus.

But there is hope. I can rejoice, as Peter did after the resurrection, that Jesus has called me out of darkness and into his marvelous light! Jesus is the one who has given me an opportunity to glimpse the possibility of a life with him. The label "sinner" has been removed, and he has turned possibility to reality by his own death and resurrection, opening the way for spiritual wholeness.

So what about the formerly blind man? When Jesus was finished with the second stage of healing, the man opened his eyes wide, gazing intently, probably first at Jesus and then around his world, seeing everything clearly. Jesus sent the man home, instructing him not to enter the village. He is given a new life with new routines. No longer will he need to beg, because he is now able to work to support his family. His wholeness allows him to fulfill his purpose.

And so, God sends me back into relationship with my family, and the people around me, yet he desires

to keep me out of my old routines. As challenging as it may seem, here on the outside of my comfort zone is where I willingly, desperately fix my gaze on Christ—the author and perfecter of my faith—and on what he has done for me. When the familiar is stripped away, I take a deep breath, turn to God and allow him to lead me to a new way of interacting with my environment.

This is where I can have the most fulfilling relationship with him. This is where he can continue to work on my blindness, giving me wholeness so that I may fulfill my purpose in Christ.

**LIESL HUH**N IS A STUDENT AT EMMANUEL SCHOOL OF RELIGION IN JOHNSON CITY, TENNESSEE.

