

Leader Preparation Guide

One Thing I Know

Movement Two: Creating Space for an Encounter · John 9

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim

Discover, by tracking two lists side by side, that the man born blind grows steeply in what he confesses while his courage runs far ahead of what he can actually report, that he defeats trained experts using the single fact he possesses, and that he is thrown out of the synagogue for a man he could not yet have identified in a crowd.

Catholic Touchstone

Every baptized person shares in Christ's prophetic office and can bear witness by word and by life. Witness is not the same thing as expertise. The Church's own proclamation is testimony to an event before it is an argument about a doctrine.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

The shape of the chapter

John 9 is built in scenes, and it rewards being read as drama: the disciples' question (1-5), the healing (6-7), the neighbors (8-12), the Pharisees' first interrogation (13-17), the parents (18-23), the second interrogation (24-34), Jesus finding him (35-38), and the closing exchange on blindness (39-41).

Notice that Jesus is absent from the middle of his own chapter. From verse 8 to verse 34 the man is on his own, and that is where all the pressure falls. That is also where most of your group lives.

The question Jesus refuses

"Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus refuses the framework: it was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him.

Handle this carefully, because it is easy to over-read in two directions. Jesus is not teaching a general theory that suffering is never connected to anyone's sin; he is refusing the retributive calculus in this case. And he is not saying God blinded a child in order to stage a miracle later. The Catechism is honest that the question of evil has no quick answer (see CCC 309), and it is better to say less here than to resolve it cheaply.

There is a Dig Deeper below on a proposed alternative punctuation of verses 3 and 4. Offer it as a proposal, not a solution.

Clay, and a pool called Sent

He spat on the ground, made clay, anointed the man's eyes, and told him to go and wash in the pool of Siloam. St. John stops the narrative to gloss the name: Siloam means Sent.

That gloss is not decoration. This Gospel calls Jesus the one sent by the Father again and again, dozens of times, and here a blind man is sent to a pool named Sent and comes back seeing. In a study about being sent, notice that the first thing the man ever does in obedience is go somewhere.

The clay has attracted attention since the second century, because Genesis 2:7 has God forming man from the dust of the ground. St. Irenaeus makes the connection explicitly. Offer it as a patristic reading with real weight rather than as something St. John states.

Two lists, running in opposite directions

This is the engine of the session. Have the group build both lists.

What he confesses, rising: "The man called Jesus made clay" (v11). "He is a prophet" (v17). "One thing I know, that though I was blind, now I see" (v25). "If this man were not from God, he could do nothing" (v33). "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him (v38).

What he still cannot report: where Jesus is (v12). Whether Jesus is a sinner (v25). And at v36 he has to ask who the Son of man is, because he has never seen the man's face. Note that his understanding does advance -- v33 is a real inference -- so the point is not that his knowledge is frozen, but that his courage runs far ahead of it.

Put those together and you get the point of the chapter for an evangelization study. He is expelled from the synagogue in verse 34 for a man he cannot identify until verse 37. His courage ran well ahead of his information.

The parents, and the cost

Verses 18 to 23. His parents confirm only what cannot be denied, that he is their son and was born blind, and then hand the question back: "he is of age, ask him." St. John tells us why: they feared being put out of the synagogue.

This is the first hard cost in the study. Confession has a price, and here the price falls on a family. Do not moralize at the parents in front of your group. Some people in that room have parents who did the same thing, and some of them are the parents.

A necessary note. In this chapter the term "the Jews" refers contextually to the hostile authorities of that time and place, not to the Jewish people. That is an exegetical judgment about this chapter; CCC 597 and *Nostra Aetate* 4 make the separate and binding point about collective guilt. Jesus, his mother, the apostles, and the man himself are all Jews. Say this out loud in the session; it is a small sentence that prevents real harm. See CCC 597 and *Nostra Aetate* 4.

The credential attack, and what it accomplishes

In verses 30 to 33 the man actually argues, and he wins: you do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes; God does not listen to sinners; never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind; if this man were not from God, he could do nothing.

They have no answer, so they go after him instead: "You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?" And they cast him out. Note the move, because your group will meet it: when the argument fails, the credentials of the speaker come under attack.

Then verse 35, which is the sentence to end on: "Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said..." Being thrown out is what put him in the path of Christ. He did not lose by losing.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Opening blind eyes is God's work

Isaiah 35:5, Isaiah 42:6-7, Isaiah 29:18, and Psalm 146:8 all treat the opening of blind eyes as something God does, and Isaiah attaches it to the messianic age. This is tonight's live discovery, and the discovery works by what the group fails to find rather than by what they find, so do not preview it.

Clay from the ground

Genesis 2:7: the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. The Fathers read the clay of John 9 against this, so that the healing is the Creator completing his own work rather than repairing someone else's. St. Irenaeus argues it directly. Present it as a patristic reading with real weight, not as something the evangelist says.

Shepherds who drive out the wounded

Ezekiel 34 again, from Session 3. The authorities cast out a man who had just been healed, which is a compelling thematic echo of Ezekiel's indictment of the shepherds of Israel, and prepares for John 10. It is not an accident that John 10, the Good Shepherd discourse, begins in the next breath with no scene change.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | St. Irenaeus on the clay

St. Irenaeus teaches in substance that the same hand which formed man from the dust of the earth at the beginning is the hand that made clay and completed what was missing in this man's eyes, so that the healing shows the Creator finishing his own work rather than mending another's.

His larger argument is aimed at those who said the God of creation and the Father of Jesus Christ were two different Gods. The clay is his evidence: the one who made the eyes is the one who opened them.

St. Irenaeus, Against Heresies 5.15.2. A faithful summary of his argument, not a quotation.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | St. Augustine on a confession that grows

Preaching through this Gospel, St. Augustine teaches in substance that the man's confession climbs by stages, from a man called Jesus, to a prophet, to one who must be from God, to Lord, and that the light came into his heart more slowly than it came into his eyes.

He also dwells on St. John's gloss that Siloam means Sent, and takes it as pointing to Christ himself, the one sent by the Father, in whom the man is washed.

St. Augustine, summarized from his Tractates on the Gospel of John. A faithful summary of his teaching, not a quotation.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | Pope St. Paul VI on witness, and on its limits

Pope St. Paul VI taught that the Gospel must first be proclaimed by witness, by a life that raises unavoidable questions in the people who see it: why are they like this, what or who is it that inspires them.

And then he said the part that is usually left out. Even the finest witness remains insufficient by itself, because the good news must eventually be proclaimed in words, and the name and the teaching and the life

and the promises and the Kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth have to be announced. The man born blind is exactly this: something happened to him, and then he had to open his mouth about it.

Pope St. Paul VI, Evangelii Nuntiandi 21 and 22 (1975).

CATECHISM CONNECTION

The Church treats testimony as a duty of the ordinary baptized, not a specialization, and these paragraphs are where she says so.

- **CCC 905.** Lay people fulfill their prophetic mission by evangelization, that is, by the proclamation of Christ both by the testimony of life and by the spoken word. Both, not one or the other.
- **CCC 2471.** Before Pilate, Christ declares that he came into the world to bear witness to the truth. The Christian is not to be ashamed of testifying to the Lord.
- **CCC 2472.** The duty of Christians is to bear witness to the Gospel in words and deeds, and this witness is a transmission of the faith.
- **CCC 1502.** Israel discovered that illness is mysteriously linked to sin and evil, while also learning that suffering can have a redemptive meaning. The Catechism is careful here, and so should you be at verse 2.
- **CCC 309.** The Catechism states plainly that there is no quick answer to the question of evil. Resist the urge to supply one at verse 3.
- **CCC 597.** Responsibility for the death of Jesus cannot be laid on the Jews of Jerusalem as a whole, still less on Jews of later times and places. Keep this in mind whenever this chapter says "the Jews."
- Applying this chapter to a coworker who asks you a question you cannot answer is our extension of these paragraphs, not their wording.

THREAD WATCH

THREAD WATCH | leader only

Thread A, "With him, and sent." Tonight it inverts and this is the sharpest version yet: the man is sent to the pool before he has ever seen Jesus, and he recognises and believes only at verse 38, after everything has cost him, though Jesus was physically with him back at verses 6 and 7. Do not name it. Let verse 35 do the work.

Thread B, "Whose work is this?" Verse 3, "that the works of God might be made manifest in him," and verse 35, where Jesus is the one who goes and finds him. The man does not find Jesus once in this chapter. Do not resolve; you are one session away.

Thread C, "The room you are afraid of." The interrogation is the thread's most concrete appearance. If someone in your group is genuinely afraid of being asked a question they cannot answer, tonight is built for them, and the answer arrives in Build 4 rather than from you.

Sealed sheet. Three sessions out. Do not mention it tonight, and if someone asks, say only that it is coming.

SESSION GOALS

1. Have the group build the two lists themselves, rising confession against flat knowledge, and see the gap.
2. Establish that the man's strength was staying inside his own competence, and that "I do not know" is a complete and honorable sentence.
3. Have them search the Old Testament for a human being who opened the eyes of someone born blind, find nothing, and realize that this absence is the man's own argument in verse 32.
4. Name the credential attack in verse 34 so they recognize it when it happens to them.
5. Handle "the Jews" in this chapter accurately and out loud.
6. Send everyone home with one sentence: their own "one thing I know."

TIMED PLAN

Minutes	Movement
0:00-0:05	Opening prayer.
0:05-0:12	Field report on rung five, finding the altar.
0:12-0:20	Win questions.
0:20-0:30	Read John 9 aloud with parts. Assign narrator, Jesus, the man, the Pharisees, the parents.
0:30-0:38	Build 1 and 2, the disciples' question and the pool called Sent.
0:38-0:54	Build 3 and 4, the two lists. Give this the time; it is the session.
0:54-1:02	Live discovery: search for a human who opened blind eyes.
1:02-1:12	Build 5 and 6, the parents and the argument he wins.
1:12-1:18	Build 7, the credential attack and verse 35.
1:18-1:26	Build 8, the build-then-press on formation before witness.
1:26-1:30	Send questions, Live It This Week, take-homes, closing prayer.

If you only have 75 minutes, cut these first

- Read only verses 1 to 12 and 24 to 38 aloud, summarizing the first interrogation and the parents yourself. Saves six minutes.
- Drop Build 5 (the parents); the take-home recap already carries it. Saves eight minutes, though it costs the session its one moment of real sympathy for the frightened.
- Run the live discovery as a single assertion with two references. Saves six minutes and costs a lot; try to keep it.
- Do not cut Build 4 or Build 8. Those two are why this session is in the study.

IF IT GOES SIDEWAYS

IF IT GOES SIDEWAYS | leader only

If someone tries to settle the problem of suffering off verse 3, stop it gently and read CCC 309: there is no quick answer. Say that Jesus answers the blame question they asked and declines to supply a general account of suffering, and that this is deliberate. Then move on. This session cannot carry a theodicy and will be ruined by attempting one.

If someone in the group has a disability, or a child with one, verse 2 may land badly no matter how carefully you handle it. Say out loud that Jesus rejects the premise that the blindness was punishment. Do not let the room speculate.

If a well read person starts arguing that the man is a symbol rather than a person, agree that the chapter is deeply symbolic and insist that it is also about a man who lost his synagogue. Both, or the session collapses into allegory and nobody goes home changed.

When "the Jews" appears in the reading, give the note the first time and do not belabor it afterward.

Discussion Guide

One Thing I Know

John 9

OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, you made clay and sent a man who could not see you to go and wash, and he obeyed a voice he had never seen the face of. Give us that obedience. And when we are asked things we cannot answer, keep us honest, keep us inside what we actually know, and do not let us be ashamed of how little that is. Amen.

FIELD REPORT

FIELD REPORT | five minutes, no fixing

Five minutes. Two or three people.

Last week you asked someone what they actually believe, and looked for one true thing you could affirm honestly. Did you find one?

Leader: if someone says they could not find anything true in what their friend believes, do not argue. Ask them one question: what does your friend love? Then move on.

WIN

- ▶ When have you been asked a question about your faith that you could not answer? What did you do?
- ▶ Think of someone with no training who told you something true about their own life, and it landed harder than an expert would have. What made it work?

BUILD

Read John 9 aloud with parts: a narrator, Jesus, the man, the Pharisees, and the parents. It is a play, and it will not work read flat. Ask the group to read it in one sitting.

1. Verses 1 to 3. What framework do the disciples bring to this man, and what does Jesus do with it?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

They bring a closed question with two options: this man sinned, or his parents did. Suffering must be somebody's fault, and the only interesting question is whose.

Jesus rejects both options. "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him."

Be careful with what you do next. He is refusing the retributive calculus in this case. He is not laying

down a general rule that suffering is never connected to anyone's sin, and he is not saying God blinded a child so that a miracle could be staged later. The Catechism says outright that there is no quick answer to the question of evil (CCC 309). Say so, and resist the urge to improve on that.

Notice too that the disciples are looking at a human being and seeing a theological puzzle. Ask the group whether that ever happens to the people on their lists.

2. Verses 6 and 7. What does Jesus make, and what does St. John stop the story to tell us about the pool?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

He spits on the ground, makes clay, anoints the man's eyes, and sends him to wash. And St. John interrupts his own narrative to gloss the name: Siloam means Sent.

That gloss is doing work. This Gospel calls Jesus the one sent by the Father over and over, and here a blind man is sent to a pool called Sent and comes back seeing.

And notice the first act of obedience in the man's life: he goes somewhere, on the word of someone he has never seen, with mud on his face. Ask the group how that would feel walking through a neighborhood that knew him.

3. Now build a list together. Every time the man says something about who Jesus is, write it down in order: verses 11, 17, 25, 33, and 38.

Do this on a whiteboard or a shared sheet. The next question builds the second column, so leave room.

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Verse 11: "The man called Jesus made clay." Verse 17: "He is a prophet." Verse 25: "One thing I know, that though I was blind, now I see." Verse 33: "If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." Verse 38: "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him.

That is a rising line, and every step up happens under interrogation. The pressure did not break his confession; it built it.

Note what verse 25 is doing in the middle of the list. It is not a claim about Jesus at all. It is a report about himself, and it is the strongest thing he says all chapter.

4. Now the second column. Every time the man says he does not know something: verses 12, 25, and 36. What does that column look like next to the first one?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Verse 12: where is he? "I do not know." Verse 25: is he a sinner? "Whether he is a sinner, I do not know." Verse 36: "And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?"

The second column stays thin. He is expelled from the synagogue in verse 34 for a man whose face he has never seen and whom he cannot identify until verse 37. Be precise here: his understanding does climb, and verse 33 is a genuine inference. What stays thin is what he can actually report.

This is the session. His courage ran far ahead of his information. Say that to the person in your room who

is convinced they do not know enough.

And notice the shape of his strength: he stayed inside what he actually knew and refused to be dragged outside it. "Whether he is a sinner, I do not know. One thing I know." The moment you claim more than you have, you can be broken. He never gave them the opening.

LIVE DISCOVERY | let the group find it

This discovery works by coming up empty. Do not warn them.

Read verse 32 aloud: "Never since the world began has it been heard that any one opened the eyes of a man born blind."

Then send them looking. Give them Isaiah 35:5, Isaiah 42:6-7, Isaiah 29:18, and Psalm 146:8, and ask: who opens the eyes of a man born blind in the Old Testament?

Then ask the real question: can you find anywhere in the Old Testament where a human being opens the eyes of a man born blind?

What they should find: nothing that matches. Prophets raise the dead, heal leprosy, multiply oil and meal. Nobody opens the eyes of a man born blind. Two near-misses are worth naming so the group does not think we have cheated: in Tobit 11:7-13 Tobias restores his father's sight, and in 2 Kings 6:18-20 the Arameans are struck blind and then have their sight restored through Elisha. Neither is a man blind from birth. That is the whole force of verse 32, and it is why the man's own wording is careful.

Then land it. That absence is precisely the argument the man makes in verse 32, and he makes it without training, without a scroll in front of him, and without a single credential. He reasoned from the one fact he had, and it was enough to leave the experts with nothing to say.

5. Verses 18 to 23. What do the parents confirm, what do they refuse, and why?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

They confirm only what cannot be denied: he is our son, and he was born blind. Then they hand it back: "he is of age, ask him."

St. John tells us why. They feared the authorities, who had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus as Christ would be put out of the synagogue. Exclusion of this kind could mean severe loss of religious and communal life; the precise institutional scope in this period is debated among historians.

Do not let the room moralize at them. Some people here have parents who did the same thing, and some are the parents. Ask instead: what is the equivalent cost in your world, and who would pay it?

One note to give out loud. In this chapter the term refers to the hostile authorities of that particular place and moment. Jesus, his mother, the apostles, and this man are all Jews. See CCC 597.

6. Verses 30 to 33. He stops answering questions and makes an argument. What is the argument actually built out of?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Out of his own experience together with premises he presents as shared religious knowledge. You do not

know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. God does not listen to sinners, which he offers as something everyone in the room accepts. Nobody has ever opened the eyes of a man born blind. Therefore, if this man were not from God, he could do nothing.

Every premise is either something he personally experienced or something he presents as common religious knowledge. Note that the text does not say his opponents conceded any of it; they revile him and throw him out. He never argues from a text he has not read or a doctrine he does not hold.

And it works. They have no answer. Reasoning carefully from what you actually know is available to anyone in the room, and it is far more durable than repeating an argument you borrowed.

7. Verse 34, and then verse 35. What do they do when the argument fails, and what happens next?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

They attack him instead: "You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?" And they cast him out. When the argument fails, the credentials of the speaker come under attack. Your group will meet this, and it helps enormously to have a name for it in advance.

Then verse 35: "Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said to him..." Jesus goes looking for him. Being thrown out is what put him in the path of Christ.

Say the last part plainly. The man loses his synagogue, and in the same paragraph he gains the one who made him. He did not lose by losing.

8. Someone says: you should not evangelize until you actually know your faith. Half-informed Catholics saying wrong things do real damage. Learn first, speak later. Are they right?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Work the build-then-press below. The objection is half right, and the correct fix is not silence.

DIG DEEPER

A proposed punctuation. The oldest Greek manuscripts carry no punctuation, and some scholars propose reading verses 3 and 4 as: "neither this man sinned nor his parents; but that the works of God might be made manifest in him, we must work the works of him who sent me while it is day." That reading removes the suggestion that the man was blinded in order to stage a display. It is a genuine proposal, held by serious scholars, and it is not the majority rendering in English Bibles. Offer it as a possibility, not a solution.

The clay and the dust. Genesis 2:7 has God forming man from the dust of the ground. The Fathers read John 9 against it, so that the healing is the Creator completing his own work. St. Irenaeus argues this directly. It is a patristic reading with real weight, and St. John does not say it.

Where chapter 10 begins. There is no scene change between the end of chapter 9 and the Good Shepherd discourse. Jesus starts talking about shepherds who do not care for the sheep immediately after the authorities throw a healed man into the street. Read the last verse of 9 and the first verses of 10 together and the connection is unmistakable.

BUILD THEN PRESS

Build the objection at full strength:

Build it at full strength. The person raising this is usually the most serious person in your parish about formation, and they are not wrong about the damage.

St. Peter says to be prepared to make a defense to anyone who calls you to account for your hope (1 Peter 3:15). Prepared is his word. The Church trains catechists, examines them, and requires real formation of those entrusted with OCIA catechesis, because content matters and errors are costly.

And the damage is concrete. A Catholic who says something confused about the Eucharist, or about who can be saved, or about Mary, can set a friend back years, and the friend will remember the wrong thing far longer than any correction.

There is a further problem with using this chapter as a counterexample: the man had a miracle. Most of us do not. It is easy to testify when something undeniable has happened to your body. Building a program on a case that extraordinary is not obviously wise.

Then press, from the text:

Now press, from the text.

First, look again at the second column. He does not know where Jesus is, does not know whether Jesus is a sinner, and does not know who Jesus is even after being expelled for him. If knowledge were the entry requirement, this man does not qualify at any point before verse 37.

Second, look at what he does with what little he has. He reports. "One thing I know." He stays inside his own competence and refuses to be pulled outside it, and that is exactly why they cannot beat him. Overclaiming is what gets people broken in these conversations, not underclaiming.

Third, look at verses 30 to 33. He does argue, and he wins, and every premise is either his own experience or something his opponents already grant. That kind of reasoning does not require a degree. It requires honesty about what you actually have.

So the fix is not silence, and it is not bluffing. It is precision about your own competence. "I do not know, let me find out, and I will come back to you" is a complete and honorable sentence, and this study is going to keep asking your people to say it.

And give the objector their due. Formation matters, which is why serious catechesis exists and why this catalog has two whole books on Catholic apologetics. But formation is not the entry requirement for testimony. It is what testimony grows into. Nobody in this chapter waits to understand before speaking, including the man who ends up on his knees.

SEND

- ▶ What is your "one thing I know"? Not your best argument. What has actually happened to you.
- ▶ Where in your life have you stayed quiet because you were afraid of the second question rather than the first?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

Rung 6 of the ladder. Write your one sentence. This is the first rung where something of yours goes on paper.

- Keep praying for the three by name, daily.
- Write one sentence: "One thing I know..." No theology, no argument, no verse. What has actually happened to you because of Jesus Christ. If it takes more than two lines, it is not finished yet.
- Practice saying it out loud, alone, until it does not sound rehearsed. This is not silly. Most people have never once said such a sentence aloud.
- Then find the honest limits of it. Write down two questions you would not be able to answer if someone pushed back on your sentence. Do not go and research them yet. Just name them.
- Bring the sentence next week. You will not be made to read it out.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, you found a man who had just lost everything for your sake and had never once seen your face. Find us. Give us the courage to say the little we know and the honesty to admit where it runs out. And when we are asked a question we cannot answer, keep us from bluffing and keep us from silence. Amen.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

"One thing I know, that though I was blind, now I see."

John 9:25

SESSION 6 | PART THREE
Leader Reference Card

One Thing I Know

Every passage used in this session, in the order it appears.

Passage	Where and why
John 9	Primary text, read aloud with parts.
John 10:1-16	Dig Deeper. The Good Shepherd discourse, which begins with no scene change.
Genesis 2:7	Old Testament Roots and Voices of the Church. Man formed from the dust of the ground.
Isaiah 35:5	Live discovery. The eyes of the blind opened in the age to come.
Isaiah 42:6-7	Live discovery. The servant given to open the eyes that are blind.
Isaiah 29:18	Live discovery. The eyes of the blind shall see out of gloom and darkness.
Psalms 146:8	Live discovery. The Lord opens the eyes of the blind.
Tobit 11:7-13	Live discovery, near-miss. Tobias restores his father's sight; Tobit was not blind from birth.
2 Kings 6:18-20	Live discovery, near-miss. The Arameans struck blind and restored; not blindness from birth.
Ezekiel 34:1-6	Old Testament Roots. Shepherds who do not seek the lost or bind up the crippled.
1 Peter 3:15	Build 8, the objection at full strength. Be prepared to make a defense.