

What Do You Seek?

Deep-Dive: Rise, He Is Calling You (Bartimaeus)

A standalone session: any group, any order

Part One: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim: The group discovers a blind beggar who out-shouts the crowd that tells him to be quiet, abandons his one possession before he is healed, and receives from Jesus the dignity of a question rather than an assumption: what do you want me to do for you?

Catholic Touchstone: The cry of the blind beggar, Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me, was taken up by the Church's tradition of prayer and never put down (CCC 2616, 2667).

The Knock in This Encounter (leader only)

Bartimaeus cries out first, but track the sequence: Jesus' reputation reached the Jericho road before Jesus did; the beggar is answering news that arrived ahead of the asking. And the hinge of the scene is a summons: "Rise, he is calling you" (Mk 10:49). **Spoiler discipline:** if your group has not finished the six core sessions, keep this framing leader-only. Note also the resonance for groups that have: in a study named for one question of Jesus, this session contains His other great question, aimed at a seeker: what do you want me to do for you?

What You Need to Know

Jericho again, at the gate, on the road up to Jerusalem: Jesus is days from the cross, and Mark gives the road's last healing to a blind beggar with a name. That detail matters: Mark names almost none of the healed, but this man is "Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus" (Mk 10:46). Some scholars, most prominently Richard Bauckham, propose that named figures in the Gospels function the way citations did in ancient biography: this man was known in the community; you could ask him. Offer it as one serious but debated scholarly proposal, not a consensus and not a proof.

The crowd's role is uncomfortable and important: when the beggar cries "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me," Mark says only that "many" in the procession "rebuked him, telling him to be silent" (10:48). The text does not identify them further, but they are people traveling with Jesus, and the resonance is worth surfacing as a reflection: those nearest the Lord can end up shushing the seeker. He cries out the more, and Jesus stops the entire Jerusalem-bound procession for him and overrules the crowd with three words: "Call him." The same crowd instantly changes tune: "Take heart; rise, he is calling you" (10:49). Let seekers see both halves: religious people sometimes block the road, and Jesus does not.

Verse 50 hides the session's costliest act: "throwing off his mantle he sprang up." A blind beggar's cloak may have been far more than clothing; many commentators suggest it was spread before him to catch coins, perhaps the nearest thing he had to property and security. Offer this as a likely picture, not a certainty. He abandons it, before any healing has happened, to get to Jesus faster. The rich young man, earlier in this same chapter, could not release his possessions with his eyes wide open; the blind man throws his one possession in the dust on the strength of a summons.

Then the question, and it is astonishing that Jesus asks it: “What do you want me to do for you?” (10:51). The need looks obvious; Jesus declines to assume it. He gives a beggar, whom everyone else has managed and shushed and stepped around, the dignity of stating his own desire. “Master, let me receive my sight.” The healing is immediate, the dismissal is freedom itself, “Go your way,” and the man’s first act with working eyes is to ignore the dismissal in the best way: “he followed him on the way” (10:52), the road that goes up to Jerusalem and the cross. One more note: “Son of David” is a messianic title, and this is the first time in Mark that Jesus accepts it shouted in public without silencing anyone; the secret is ending as the Passion begins.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Isaiah 35:5-6. The prophets’ checklist for the age of God’s coming: “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened.” When John the Baptist later sends messengers asking if Jesus is the one, Jesus answers by pointing to this cluster of Isaianic signs, the opening of blind eyes among them. The group finds it live.

Psalms 146:8. “The LORD opens the eyes of the blind.” In Israel’s hymnal, this is God’s own job description; no prophet in the Old Testament ever performs it. Leader background, and quietly enormous.

Voices of the Church

St. John Chrysostom *Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew (summary)*

Preaching on the blind men of Jericho in Matthew’s account, Chrysostom holds up their persistence as the model: rebuked by the crowd, they cried out the more, and Christ rewarded the very boldness the bystanders tried to suppress. Calling the crowd’s hushing the seeker’s final exam is this guide’s phrase, not his; the substance is Chrysostom’s. Note that he treats Matthew’s two unnamed blind men, the parallel to Mark’s named Bartimaeus. A summary, not a quotation.

St. Bede the Venerable *Commentary on Mark (summary)*

Bede, following the Fathers, reads the abandoned mantle allegorically: the old life and its securities thrown off so that nothing slows the run toward Christ. The comparison with the rich young man, and the picture of the cloak as the beggar’s whole apparatus of survival, are this guide’s application, not Bede’s own wording. A summary of the tradition’s reading.

The Jesus Prayer *the Church’s ancient tradition of prayer*

“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” The prayer of the Eastern Church, repeated for centuries as the heartbeat of Christian prayer, draws on this cry from the Jericho road; the Catechism notes that it joins the hymn of Philippians 2:6-11 with the cry of the publican and of the blind men begging for light (CCC 2667). The beggars’ shout became part of the whole Church’s breathing.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 2616:** prayer to Jesus during His ministry, with the blind men’s cry, Son of David, have mercy, among its models: urgent faith answered.
- **CCC 2667:** the invocation of the holy name in the Jesus Prayer, a tradition that grew in part from this cry.
- **CCC 1505:** Christ did not heal all the sick; His healings were signs of the coming Kingdom, announcing a more radical healing, the victory over sin and death through His Passover.

Hosting Your Seeker Friend

This Week's Coaching

Two cares tonight. First, the shushed friend: many seekers have a story of asking their honest question in a religious setting and being told, in effect, to be silent; this session names that experience in the text itself, and shows Jesus overruling it. Say the headline plainly: the crowd told him to be quiet, and Jesus stopped the whole procession. Second, a dignity note: Bartimaeus is a blind man before he is a symbol, and if anyone in your group lives with disability, keep the discussion from treating blindness as merely a metaphor. Jesus' own approach is the model: He asks the man what he wants instead of assuming it, and the session should extend the same courtesy.

Standalone Notes

- No dependencies: run before, during, or after the core, or alone.
- Same chapter of Mark as the rich young man deep-dive; run them together and the mantle-versus-possession contrast preaches itself.
- Matthew's parallel (Mt 20:29-34) reports two blind men; Mark focuses on the named one. If a sharp reader raises it, answer honestly: the two Evangelists present the same event with differing narrative focus, and Mark preserves the name; a difference in emphasis and detail is not a contradiction in substance.

Session Goals

1. Establish the scene: the named beggar, the gate, the road to Jerusalem.
2. Land the crowd's shushing and Jesus' overrule: gatekeepers block; He calls.
3. Weigh the mantle: security abandoned before healing, on the strength of a summons.
4. Land the dignity of the question and the live discovery in Isaiah 35.
5. Close on verse 52: freed to go his way, he chooses the Way.

Time Note

75 minutes of content in a 90-minute evening. If long: cut the Dig Deeper first, then merge Build questions 1 and 2. Never cut the question of verse 51; it is the session's namesake and its heart.

Part Two: Discussion Guide

Opening

Leader prays alone, briefly. State the two rules if new faces are present: nobody gets called on; nobody's answer gets graded.

"God, some of us have been told to keep our voices down. Tonight's story says shout. Amen."

Win

1. Have you ever been told, directly or by atmosphere, that your question or your need was inconvenient: by a family, a workplace, a church? What did you do with the question?
2. What is the difference between someone helping you on their terms and someone first asking what you actually want?

Build

Read Mark 10:46-49 aloud.

1. Mark names almost nobody he reports healed, but this man gets a name and a father's name. What might that suggest about how this story reached us?
2. Look hard at verse 48: who exactly tells the beggar to be silent, and what does he do about it? Then verse 49: what does Jesus do to the crowd's verdict?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

"Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus" reads like a reference: some scholars, notably Richard Bauckham, propose that named figures in the Gospels function the way citations did in ancient biography; the community knew this man, and you could go ask him. Offered as one debated scholarly proposal, not a proof. Then the uncomfortable verse: it is many in the crowd traveling with Jesus who shush the seeker, and his response is the session's first lesson: "he cried out all the more." And Jesus stops a procession bound for Jerusalem and the cross, for a beggar, and overrules the gatekeepers in three words: "Call him." Watch the crowd flip instantly to "Take heart; rise, he is calling you." Crowds follow whoever is actually in charge.

Read Mark 10:50-52 aloud.

3. Verse 50: a blind beggar's mantle may well have been his coin-catcher and his security, perhaps the only property he had. He throws it off, before any healing, to get there faster. Earlier in this same chapter, another man was asked to part with his possessions. Compare the two.
4. "What do you want me to do for you?" The need looks obvious. Why does Jesus ask instead of assume, and what does the question give the man that a healing alone would not?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The rich young man, sighted and secure, could not release what he had; the blind man flings his cloak in the dust on the strength of a summons. Mark records only the act, but the gesture invites the thought that he does not expect to need a beggar's cloak on the way back; offer that as reflection, not as the text's own claim. And the question is dignity itself: everyone else in Jericho has managed this man, stepped around him, spoken for him; Jesus makes him the author of his own request. Desire, stated out loud, is part of how God deals with free people. "Master, let me receive my sight." Then note the ending's freedom: "Go your way" unties him completely, and his first act with working eyes is to choose: "he followed him on the way," the road up to Jerusalem. The healed man's eyes and his feet agree.

5. "The eyes of the blind shall be opened" was on the prophets' checklist for the coming of God Himself. Let's find it.

Live discovery: *have the group find Isaiah 35:5-6 and read it aloud.*

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Isaiah 35 describes the day God comes to save: then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, the ears of the deaf unstopped, the lame leap, the dumb sing. In the whole Old Testament, no prophet ever opens blind eyes; Psalm 146 assigns that act to the LORD alone. So when Bartimaeus walks seeing, Isaiah's checklist has a line crossed off, and the title he was shouting, Son of David, is accepted in public for the first time in Mark. The healing is not a wonder for its own sake; it is an identification.

Where the Skeptic Is Strongest (steelman)

Full strength: "Miracle stories are anecdotes from a credulous age. Blindness does not reverse on command, and no ancient report can be checked." Grant what must be granted: nobody can re-examine a first-century patient, and a single story compels no one. Then weigh what can be weighed. The account carries a name and a patronymic in a Gospel that names almost no one healed: a checkable source in its own day, on one serious scholarly proposal. Its texture is all restraint: no technique, no incantation, no fee, no staging; a question, a sentence, and a road. And the claim being made is not that optimism repairs optic nerves, which would be absurd; it is that this particular man had authority over what He had made, a claim that stands or falls with the larger question of who He is. That larger question is exactly what a study like this exists to investigate; this session's honest contribution is one named witness, at one city gate, whose neighbors could be asked.

Dig Deeper (optional)

One beggar's shout had a long afterlife. The Eastern Church wove her most repeated prayer in part from it, joining it with the hymn of Philippians 2 and the publican's plea (CCC 2667): Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner, prayed slowly, with the breath, thousands of times, for many centuries, and commended by the Catechism (CCC 2667). It is sometimes called the prayer for people who do not know how to pray, which is to say, for everyone. If anyone at the table wants a first prayer that requires no vocabulary and no standing, hand them Bartimaeus's sentence; it has an excellent record of stopping processions.

Send

3. "What do you want me to do for you?" Suppose the question were put to you tonight, with the same seriousness. What is your honest answer? You do not have to say it aloud.
4. The crowd's shushing was the seeker's final exam. What voice, outside you or inside you, tells you to keep your seeking quiet, and what would crying out all the more look like?

Live It This Week

1. Write your answer to verse 51's question somewhere private. Stating a desire is not weakness; Jesus solicited it.
2. Try Bartimaeus's sentence once, as a prayer, exactly as he said it. It requires no belief you do not have; it is a shout in the direction of the footsteps.
3. If someone once shushed your honest question, ask it again this week, to someone safe.

Closing

Leader alone, briefly: “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on us. Every one of us is somewhere on the roadside. Stop for us. Amen.”

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

“And Jesus said to him, What do you want me to do for you? And the blind man said to him, Master, let me receive my sight.” **Mark 10:51**

Part Three: Leader Reference Card

Every Passage in This Session

Primary Text

- Mark 10:46-52, the cry, the shushing, the summons, the mantle, the question, the road

Live Discovery Text

- Isaiah 35:5-6, the eyes of the blind shall be opened

Supporting Texts

- Psalm 146:8, the LORD opens the eyes of the blind (leader background)
- Mark 10:17-31, the rich young man: the mantle contrast (same chapter)
- Matthew 20:29-34, the parallel account (Standalone Notes)

Catechism

- CCC 2616, 2667, 1505

Memory Verse

- Mark 10:51