CENTRAL PENINSULA CHURCH

...to make and mature followers of Christ

Seeing Isn't Always Believing

John 9

Sandy Hughes

October 18, 2026

I Am: The Gospel of John

Years ago, I traveled to Israel with a team of our pastors and elders, and we visited Hezekiah's Tunnel. The tunnel was carved beneath Jerusalem more than 2,700 years ago to bring water from the Gihon Spring into the city. It's about a third of a mile long, cut through solid rock, with water still running through it today.

And here's something you need to understand about Hezekiah's Tunnel. It's narrow. Really narrow. In some places, it's barely wide enough for one person to walk through. The rock walls are right there on either side, and in some sections, you have to duck to keep moving forward. Part of our team decided to walk through it.

As we entered Hezekiah's Tunnel, we used flashlights and cell phones to help us navigate. Believe me, we needed them! The tunnel was narrow, the rock walls were close, and water ran beneath our feet sometimes thigh high. At different points along the way, our guide would ask us to turn off our flashlights and cell phones so we could experience complete darkness. It was dark. I don't mean dim; it was pitch black.

I recall one specific time when our guide had us turn off all our lights and just stand there, waiting for our eyes to adjust. You know how, after a few moments in the dark, your eyes start to pick up a little light? You start to notice shapes and outlines? Not in there. There was absolutely no light. I remember putting my hand right in front of my face and not being able to see it. No matter how long we stayed there, our eyes did not adjust. Because there was no light to adjust to.

We can wait for our eyes to adjust, but we cannot manufacture light. We need a light source outside ourselves. Eventually, our guide let us turn our flashlights back on, and we continued through the tunnel, feeling the rock around us, hearing the water beneath our feet, and listening to the voices around us.

Then, as we approached the end of the tunnel, we began to see something different. Natural light. At first it was just a little light ahead. Then more until, eventually, we stepped out of the tunnel into the bright Jerusalem sun. After experiencing that complete darkness, the sunlight was almost overwhelming. Our eyes had to adjust all over again.

As we exited the tunnel, we passed by the Pool of Siloam. I don't think I understood just how much I would remember that experience. There's something very different about knowing what darkness is and actually experiencing a darkness where you cannot see your own hand in front of your face. There's something very different about knowing what light is and then entering it after you've experienced complete darkness. Which brings us to John 9.

Jesus and his disciples encounter a man who doesn't have to imagine what it is like to live in darkness. He has never seen the light. Being born blind, he had never seen a sunrise or even his own hand. Yet Jesus saw him. And by the end of this story, the man everyone calls blind will recognize Jesus, while some who claim to see will reveal their spiritual blindness.

John 9 is a story about darkness and light, what we see and what we don't, and what happens when Jesus opens our eyes. Most importantly, it's a story about a man who discovers that Jesus sees him and helps him see.

> **As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this manor his parents, that he was born blind?" "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world." After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. "Go," he told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam" (this word means "Sent"). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing. John 9:1-7**

Jesus Sees What Others Miss.

To understand this encounter, remember what was taught in the previous chapters. In John 7, Jesus is in Jerusalem for the Festival of Tabernacles, when Israel remembered God's provision during the wilderness years. Two images stood out: water and light.

During the festival, priests carried water from the Pool of Siloam to the Temple, recalling God's provision and anticipating his promised renewal. Against that backdrop, Jesus cried out, *"Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink" (John 7:37).* The festival also featured great lights in the Temple courts, recalling God's guidance through the wilderness. *Then Jesus declared, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12).*

Water and light. Jesus has claimed to be the source of both. In John 9, he shows us what his words mean. Verse 1 says, *"As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth."* Jesus sees him. That

detail is important because, as the story unfolds, nearly everyone has an opinion about this man, but few seem to see him as a person.

The disciples ask, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Notice something about their question. They aren't asking why this man is suffering. They think they already know the answer. In their minds, suffering like this must result from someone's sin. What they want to know is who's responsible—the man or his parents. They aren't asking how to help him. They want to know who is to blame.

I wonder how often we do something similar. We see someone's circumstances or struggle and begin making assumptions before we know their story. Sometimes we even use theology to explain suffering instead of meeting it with compassion. While the disciples are looking for someone to blame, Jesus sees someone to love.

Jesus rejects their assumption: *"Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him" (v. 3)*. He isn't saying they were sinless or giving a neat explanation for every experience of suffering. He refuses to connect this man's blindness to a particular sin and instead directs attention to what God is about to do.

While we might not ask the question exactly as the disciples did, I think we all wrestle with another question when suffering enters our lives, why. Why did this happen? Why did God allow it? Why did that diagnosis come back the way it did? Why did someone I love die? Why didn't God intervene when I prayed? Sometimes, underneath all those questions, there's an even deeper one. God, where are you in all of this?

I've been in ministry long enough to sit with people in some incredibly painful circumstances. I've walked with people through grief, disappointment, and loss. And I've asked those same questions in my own life. Here's something I've had to come to terms with. I don't always have an answer. Sometimes I don't have any answer at all because I'm not God. I don't see everything he sees. I don't understand everything he understands, and I certainly don't know why he allows some things to happen and intervenes in others.

I recently listened to a conversation on the Carey Nieuwhof Leadership Podcast with several guests, including John Ortberg, about trusting God when life doesn't make sense. John shared something Dallas Willard said to him during one of the darkest seasons of his life: "This will be a test of your joyful confidence in God."

I've been thinking about that. When life is painful, when things don't go the way we expect, our confidence in God can be challenged. Ortberg went on to quote Dallas saying: "Pain is what we experience when we run into reality."

We all have assumptions about how life and God should work. We think if we're faithful, if we pray, if we do the right things, life should turn out a certain way. But what happens when it doesn't? When we pray and the healing doesn't come? When obedience actually makes life harder? Sometimes our assumptions about God need to be challenged. And that's exactly what Jesus does with his disciples. He doesn't explain why this man was born blind. Instead, he challenges their assumptions and points them toward what God is about to do.

Now, that doesn't mean God causes every painful experience to teach us something, or that enough faith guarantees the outcome we want. John 9 doesn't promise that. It does remind us that even when we don't understand our circumstances, God hasn't abandoned us. What would it look like to have a joyful confidence in God, not because life is going the way we expected, but because we trust the character of the One we're following? Joyful confidence doesn't mean pretending everything is okay. It doesn't mean we don't grieve, are not sad or angry, don't struggle, or ask hard questions. It means that even in the middle of those questions, we can keep trusting who God is.

The disciples want an explanation. Jesus sees a person. They're trying to make sense of this man's suffering, and Jesus moves toward him with compassion. Sometimes, when we're sitting with someone who's hurting, the most faithful thing we can do isn't to offer an explanation. It's to be present, to listen, to love, to remind them, through our presence, that they haven't been forgotten. While I may not be able to explain why God allows certain things to happen, I can point people to Jesus. And when I look at Jesus, I see the heart of God. I see a Savior who notices people others overlook, who moves toward suffering rather than away from it, who ultimately enters into our suffering through the cross. I may not understand why, but I can trust the One who sees me.

That's what happens in this story. *Jesus says, "While I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (v. 5).* He is about to demonstrate what he declared in chapter 8. Jesus spits on the ground, makes mud, and places it on the man's eyes. Jesus takes the initiative. The man hasn't asked for healing, but Jesus notices him and acts. Then Jesus tells him to wash in the Pool of Siloam. John adds that Siloam means "Sent." Throughout this Gospel, Jesus calls himself the One sent by the Father. Now the One who was sent, sends this man to a pool called Sent.

The man goes, washes, and comes home seeing. Imagine that first moment: a world he has only known through sound, touch, and imagination suddenly becomes visible. Don't miss the order of events. Before this man ever sees Jesus, Jesus sees him. Jesus sees something different. He sees beyond blindness, assumptions, and labels, and sees a man worthy of dignity, compassion, and love.

That's good news for anyone who feels overlooked or known only by a label, an accomplishment, or a struggle. Jesus sees the person others miss. But there's something else happening here that I don't want us to miss. Hundreds of years before Jesus walked the streets of Jerusalem, the prophet Isaiah spoke about what would happen when God came to rescue and restore his people. In Isaiah 35:5, he writes: *"Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped."* And in Isaiah 42, God speaks about his Servant, the One who would be a light to the nations, whose mission would include opening blind eyes and bringing people out of darkness.

Now think about what's happening in John 9. Jesus has just declared, *"I am the light of the world."* And standing in front of him is a man who has never seen the light. Jesus opens his eyes. This isn't simply an extraordinary miracle; it's a sign that God's promised restoration has arrived in Jesus. The One Isaiah spoke about was standing right there, bringing light into darkness and sight to the blind. The tragedy is that some of the very people who knew these Scriptures so well couldn't recognize what was happening right in front of them. They could see the miracle, but they couldn't see the Messiah. As we'll discover, physical sight is only the beginning of this man's story.

> **His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, "Isn't this the same man who used to sit and beg?" Some claimed that he was. Others said, "No, he only looks like him." But he himself insisted, "I am the man." "How then were your eyes opened?" they asked. He replied, "The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see." "Where is this man?" they asked him. "I don't know," he said. They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man's eyes was a Sabbath. Therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. "He put mud on my eyes," the man replied, "and I washed, and now I see." Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath." But others asked, "How can a sinner perform such signs?" So they were divided. Then they turned again to the blind man, "What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened." The man replied, "He is a prophet." John 9:8-17**

When Religion Blinds Us

You might think that when a man blind from birth suddenly receives sight, everyone would be celebrating. This is an extraordinary miracle! But instead of celebrating, everyone starts asking questions. His neighbors can hardly believe it's the same man. Some insist it is, while others think he just looks like him, and the man keeps saying, "I am the man!"

They want to know what happened, so he tells them. Notice how he describes Jesus in verse 11: *"The man they call Jesus."* He doesn't know much about Jesus yet. He just knows he was blind, and now he can see. Then they bring him to the Pharisees, and the story takes a surprising turn. John tells us Jesus healed him on the Sabbath. The Sabbath was God's gift of rest and worship, but religious leaders had developed detailed rules about what was considered work. Making mud and healing a condition that wasn't life-threatening could be seen as violations. So instead of celebrating that a man born blind can finally see, some are more concerned that Jesus broke Sabbath rules.

In verse 16, they say, *"This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath." Others disagree: "How can a sinner perform such signs?"* John tells us they were divided. Here's what's striking. The evidence of God's power is standing right in front of them, but some are so convinced they know how God should work that they can't recognize what he's actually doing.

It's easy to shake our heads at the Pharisees and wonder how they could miss something so obvious. But I wonder if we're sometimes more like them than we'd care to admit. We have our own expectations about how God works. We have traditions, preferences, theological convictions, and ideas about what faithfulness should look like. Those things aren't necessarily bad. Theology, Scripture, and obedience does matter, but when our interpretations and traditions matter more than identifying the character and work of Jesus, we can miss what God is doing right in front of us. Sometimes God works in ways that challenge our assumptions, and we need Jesus to open our eyes to what he's doing.

When the Pharisees ask the man what he thinks about Jesus, he answers in verse 17, *"He is a prophet."* He doesn't have everything figured out, but he's beginning to recognize that God is at work. Here's the irony, the man who was physically blind is beginning to see spiritually, while those who are convinced that they see clearly are revealing their own blindness. Which raises a question for us: Are we willing to let Jesus challenge what we think we know? Because sometimes our greatest blindness is being convinced that we already see clearly.

> **They still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they sent for the man's parents. "Is this your son?" they asked. "Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that now he can see?" "We know he is our son," the parents answered, "and we know he was born blind. But how he can see now, or who opened his eyes, we don't know. Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself." His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders, who already had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. That was why his parents said, "He is of age; ask him." A second time they summoned the man**

who had been blind. "Give glory to God by telling the truth," they said. "We know this man is a sinner." He replied, "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!" Then they asked him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" He answered, "I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples too?" Then they hurled insults at him and said, "You are this fellow's disciple! We are disciples of Moses! We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from." The man answered, "Now that is remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly person who does his will. Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." To this they replied, "You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!" And they threw him out. John 9:18-34

From Blindness To Boldness

The religious leaders still aren't convinced this man was ever blind, so they question his parents. They confirm he's their son and was born blind, but when asked how he can now see, they respond, "Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself." John tells us why: They're afraid. Acknowledging Jesus as the Messiah could mean being expelled from the synagogue, losing not just a place of worship but relationships and community. Imagine their son seeing for the first time, yet their joy is overshadowed by what acknowledging Jesus might cost them.

Before we judge them, I wonder how often we face that same tension. Following Jesus is wonderful when it brings comfort and hope. But what happens when obedience costs us something? When it means having a difficult conversation, forgiving someone, standing with Jesus when others might misunderstand or loving a neighbor whose beliefs differ greatly from yours? Sometimes keeping the peace feels easier than being faithful. Are we willing to follow Jesus when doing so costs us something?

Now notice the contrast. His parents step back, but their son keeps speaking about what happened. He does not have every answer. He simply refuses to deny what he knows. *The leaders summon him again. "Give glory to God by telling the truth," they say. "We know this man is a sinner" (v. 24).* That first phrase is a solemn appeal to tell the truth, but they have already announced their verdict about Jesus. The man responds with one of the most memorable lines in this Gospel: *"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).* I love the honesty of that answer. He does not pretend to know what he does not know. He can't settle every theological argument. But he can tell the truth about what Jesus has done.

That reminds me of another time I was surrounded by darkness. Years ago, I was out on a lake with our junior high team for Jr. High Summer Camp, trying to find our way back to the houseboats where we were staying. We were picking up a student and leader who had to come later that evening, so we met them at the dock. Night had fallen and it was pitch black. We looked for familiar landmarks, but nothing looked familiar. We were pretty sure we were lost. Then we came upon a boat with two fishermen. They had a lantern, and somehow helped guide us toward our camp. Eventually, we could make out the faint lights of the houseboats and our camp in the distance. What a relief! But when we turned around to thank the fishermen, they were gone. Gone, like in "the blink of an eye gone!" To this day, many of us believe those fishermen were angels God sent to keep us safe. I realized we needed help; there was a light, and we were guided home.

I think about that when I hear this man say, "One thing I do know." He could not explain everything, but he could respond to what he had been given. Sometimes faith means trusting Jesus with the next step, even when we can't see the whole way ahead.

The questioning continues. *The leaders ask again how Jesus opened his eyes, and the man responds, "I have told you already, and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples too?" (v. 27).* You can hear his frustration—and perhaps a little sarcasm. They keep asking questions, but they don't seem willing to hear the answers. They insult him, call themselves disciples of Moses, and insist they don't know where Jesus comes from. The man challenges their reasoning: how can they dismiss someone who has done something so extraordinary? He concludes, *"If this man were not from God, he could do nothing" (v. 33).*

Notice the progression. In verse 11, Jesus is "the man they call Jesus." In verse 17, "a prophet." And now, in verse 33, someone "from God." His understanding is growing even under pressure. That's often how faith develops. We listen to Jesus, respond to what we understand, and keep learning. Sometimes growth comes through joy. Sometimes it comes through difficult questions or circumstances we would not have chosen. But his boldness has a cost. In verse 34, the leaders insult him and throw him out. He has received his sight, but now he faces rejection from the very community that should have been celebrating with him. This is where the story takes a beautiful turn.

Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" "Who is he, sir?" the man asked. "Tell me so that I may believe in him." Jesus said, "You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you." Then the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him. Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind." Some

Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, "What? Are we blind too?" Jesus said, "If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains. John 9:35-41.

Found By Jesus.

Did you notice how verse 35 begins? Jesus found him. Remember how the chapter started? Jesus saw a man blind from birth. The man didn't seek Jesus out; Jesus noticed him first. And now, after being questioned and rejected, Jesus seeks him out again. The religious leaders may have been finished with this man, but Jesus wasn't. Being rejected by others didn't mean Jesus had abandoned him.

A beautiful connection appears next in John's Gospel. The chapter divisions were added later, and this story leads directly into John 10, where Jesus says, *"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (10:11).* The people who should have cared for this man had cast him out. The Good Shepherd went looking for him. Jesus does not simply check on him, he invites him to a deeper faith. *"Do you believe in the Son of Man?" He asks (v. 35).* Jesus is inviting this man to recognize who stands before him. "Who is he, sir?" the man asks. "Tell me so that I may believe in him." Then Jesus says something extraordinary: *"You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you" (v. 37).*

"You have now seen him." Think about that. When Jesus sent this man to wash in Siloam, he hadn't yet seen the face of the One who healed him. Now, for the first time, he sees Jesus with his own eyes. And he responds, '"Lord, I believe,' and he worships him." The chapter began with a man who couldn't see. Now he's looking at Jesus and worshiping him. His physical sight was an incredible gift. But the greater gift was recognizing the Light of the World.

Then Jesus says in verse 39, *"For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind."* He's not talking about physical blindness as a spiritual failure. He's exposing the difference between those who recognize their need for him and those who insist they already see clearly. This idea goes all the way back to Isaiah 6:9, where God describes people who are *"ever seeing, but never perceiving."* John returns to this passage in chapter 12 to explain why some continued to reject Jesus despite witnessing his signs, which is what we're seeing here. These religious leaders know the Scriptures. They've heard the man's testimony. The evidence is standing right in front of them. Yet some still refuse to recognize Jesus. They can see the miracle, but they cannot see the Messiah.

There's a warning here for us. Spiritual blindness isn't always about what we don't know, sometimes it's about being so convinced of what we think we know, we stop listening. We can know Scripture, attend church, and have all the right answers, yet still resist what Jesus wants to show us. That's why humility matters. The man who was born blind recognized his need for Jesus. The religious leaders were convinced they could already see. The question for us isn't whether we have everything figured out. It's whether we're willing to let Jesus open our eyes.

That's the good news of John 9. Jesus sees this man when others overlook him, finds him when others reject him, and reveals himself so the man can believe. He continues to invite us to see him more clearly because Jesus sees us and helps us see. As we come to the end of John 9, I want to leave us with three simple invitations on learning to see more clearly.

See People Differently

The disciples saw a problem. Jesus saw a person. Who have you put into a category because of their circumstances, beliefs, behavior, or past? Who might you be overlooking? We often pray this in our huddle before the second service here at CPC: "Jesus, give us your eyes to see people and your ears to listen to them." I love that prayer. We can be so focused on what needs to get done that we miss the person right in front of us. Sometimes seeing someone as Jesus does begins with slowing down long enough to listen. This week, who might Jesus be inviting you to notice? Become curious and listen to their story. Ask Jesus to help you see them not as a problem to solve, but as someone made in God's image and deeply loved by him.

Stay Teachable

The religious leaders knew the Scriptures. They knew their traditions. But some were so convinced they understood how God worked that they couldn't recognize what God was doing right in front of them. I think that's a warning for all of us, especially those of us who have followed Jesus for a long time. We can become so confident in what we know that we stop listening. We can become so committed to being right that we lose the humility to recognize what we might be missing. So here's a question worth asking: Where might my certainty be keeping me from seeing what God is doing? Staying teachable doesn't imply abandoning our convictions. It means approaching God, his Word, and one another with humility, recognizing that we still have much to learn.

Step Out in Faith

I love that the man who was born blind didn't have everything figured out. His understanding of Jesus grew throughout the story. He started by calling him "the man they call Jesus." Then a prophet. Then someone from God. And eventually, he stood facing Jesus and said, "Lord, I believe." Along the way, he continued responding to what he knew, even when it cost him something.

Maybe that's where some of us are today. You know you need to have a conversation, forgive someone, or take a step of obedience Jesus has been inviting you to take, but you've been holding back because you're not sure what will happen next. You don't

have to have everything figured out to follow Jesus. Sometimes faith simply means taking the next step with the light he's already given you.

This is where our Rule of Life connects so naturally with John 9. We have been talking as a church about cultivating Presence with God so we can more faithfully participate with God in the world. One way we cultivate that presence is by being attentive. We can be busy doing good things—even spiritual things—and still fail to notice what God is doing in front of us. That is why practices like silence and solitude, Sabbath, and time in Scripture matter. Not because they're another checklist, or because they earn us God's favor, but because they make room for us to slow down, listen, and pay attention. These practices don't manufacture God's presence. They help us become more attentive to the God who is already present.

One of the things I've learned through my Porch Time is just how important it is to slow down and be quiet before God. I'll be honest, that's not always easy for me. But as I've made silence and solitude a regular part of my life, I've begun to notice things I might otherwise have missed. Sometimes it's something going on in my own heart. An emotion I haven't paid attention to, grief I haven't made space for, or something God might be inviting me to surrender. Other times it's simply recognizing that I don't have to accomplish anything in that moment. I can just be with God.

Through this practice, I've experienced God's presence in a much deeper way. Not because he's suddenly become more present in my life, but because I'm learning to slow down long enough to notice him. Sometimes Jesus helps us see not by changing what's around us, but by helping us recognize what's happening within us. I wonder what God might help us see if we made a little more room to be quiet and listen. As we become more attentive to Jesus, we become more available to the people around us and more responsive to his invitations. Presence with God leads to participation with God.

This week, talk a look at the Presence with God part of your Rule of Life and choose one simple practice. Spend five minutes in silence, make space for Sabbath, or open Scripture and ask, "Jesus, what do you want me to see today?" This isn't another thing to accomplish. It's an invitation to be with Jesus, to know him more deeply, and to become more like him. Maybe your prayer this week can be this simple: Jesus, help me see what you see. Give me your eyes to see people and your ears to listen to them. Help me notice your presence, recognize where I still need to grow, and take the next faithful step.

I keep thinking about that tunnel in Jerusalem. We stood in the darkness waiting for our eyes to adjust, but no amount of waiting could produce the light we needed. We needed light to come to us. In John 9, the Light of the World comes to a man who has never seen. Jesus sees him, heals him, finds him, and reveals himself to him. That same Jesus invites us to trust him because Jesus sees us and helps us see.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

© 2026 Central Peninsula Church, Foster City, CA
Catalog No.1502-17FC