

Weekly Study of Sunday's Message.

September 4, 2022 "Renovating our faith. How to honestly examine your faith/beliefs and grow an even deeper faith."

I Intro.

Welcome to the weekly devotional that gives you some specific things to work through from the message Sunday. Whether you were able to participate in this service or not, this devotion is free-standing, and you can use it to help you dig deeper into your own spiritual walk. School has started back and we'll be cranking up our fall schedule. Our children's area is expanding, and we've moved check-in into the lobby. We also have many ways you can plug into life at NCC. You can see all that through our newly upgraded app, and social media sites. We're so encouraged by your love and presence when you gather with us. A great group of familiar and new faces join us each Sunday. If you're joining us online, we appreciate your presence also. We are 100% committed to our virtual attenders. We are your church family, and if there is anything you need, prayer, ideas or suggestions, please pass them our way. We know the future is still uncertain, but we are committed to making our virtual congregation as central to NCC as our in person group.

II Sunday.

We really shifted gears Sunday. And this will lead us into a new and fascinating plunge into some of the basic beliefs of being a follower of Jesus. And I don't even know where to begin to lay out all that we presented Sunday. The best thing you can do is go back and watch that service. I will do my best to condense what we covered.

It began with a conversation about spiritual growth, how it happens, and this thing that's happening in our current world, called Deconstruction. We want to begin that we will not be framing spiritual growth under the bigger heading of Deconstruction. But spiritual growth has to have some of the elements of Deconstruction. So, a brief explanation of the current phenomena of Deconstruction. There is a fairly accepted belief that any organization, institution, belief system, over time takes on more than originally intended. Some of this additional structure is necessary, but a lot of it often is an overreaction or institutionalization. Which is the slow drift towards self-protection. And the school of Deconstruction simply says, on a regular basis there ought to be a critical look at all of our beliefs and practices to make sure they still fulfill the original purpose of the mission and vision.

And doing this personally is essential to spiritual growth. It's the identification and letting go of these restrictive practices and returning to the essentials.

We avoided the use of this particular word because it's so controversial. But the basic principles and values are essential for spiritual growth. So, a couple of questions.

Have you ever faced something that made you reexamine your faith?

How did you handle it?

What do you wish you had done differently?

We read two scriptures Sunday. One, to set the tone and make our case for this work. The second, to walk through a story about addressing our own spiritual blindness. So, read **1 Corinthians 13:8-12** first.

How did you understand this concerning what we think we know?

How could this grow both humility and desire for growth within us?

The second passage was a long and meandering story about Jesus healing a man born blind. Jesus states at the very end of this account he healed this man just so he could address the topic of spiritual blindness. Which is at the heart and process of spiritual growth. Read **John 9** and we'll unpack it.

What jumped out to you about this passage?

How could you overlap the Pharsee's reaction to the man born blind and spiritual blindness?

What did you take from this story about how to deal with our tendency to be spiritually blind?

There is so much packed in this story we can only hit the highlights as it talks about spiritual blindness. Each of these is from the story. The overarching question for each of these is this.

Where might you have some spiritual blindness in each specific truth from this story?

- 1.** The beginning of this story is to hear ourselves talk about our beliefs out loud. I'm surprised that the disciples actually asked who sinned to cause this man to be born blind. **Do we pull out our often unspoken beliefs to see what we believe?** This is the first step in real spiritual growth.
- 2.** You will have people close to you question you about your reexamination of your beliefs. The people who first started questioning were this man's neighbors. The people who knew and trusted him. But remember that Jesus' own family didn't really get who he was, and he wasn't able to do many miracles in his hometown because those who knew him didn't give him space to grow. Know that spiritual growth of any kind will create some tension with people who have less desire to grow.
- 3.** This man who was blind knew he had an encounter with Jesus but he wasn't able to put it into words what had happened. This is often the case with spiritual growth. I know something is happening. I had a real encounter with God. But I can't explain it just yet. Be okay with the fact that a genuine encounter with God is our ultimate goal. But it may take time to begin to understand what happened.
- 4.** When the man born blind was taken to face the Pharisees, what he encountered was institutional religion protecting itself rather than caring about someone else. The Pharisees knew recognizing Jesus would threaten their power and control. So squelching any forms of new encounters with the living God was necessary even if it meant harming others. This is what turns people away from church.
- 5.** Finally the Pharisees threw this man who had been healed by Jesus out of the synagogue. Why? Because when our religion becomes more about protecting purity (beliefs) rather than caring about people we can become addicted to the process of purification. There will be no upper limit to the ever decreasing window of who's acceptable and who's not. This is why we must regularly go through the process of spiritual growth. To cast off beliefs that keep people out rather than showing our love for them.

III Challenge.

I realize this was a lot. And there weren't questions after each one, but an overarching lead question to get you thinking about how we each become spiritually blind and need to reexamine our beliefs. That is the challenge for us as we grow in our understanding of God and practice of our beliefs. And this particular message was to move us into the future studies of our basics.

So, in what ways could you begin to work on seeing what areas in your life need some spiritual stretching?