

1. We are going to continue with our series on the subject of discernment.
2. Let's review again some truths concerning discernment.
3. Discernment, in a most general sense, is the capacity to recognize and respond to the presence and the activity of God – both in the ordinary moment and in the larger decisions of our lives.
4. As spiritual beings God has designed us to be in tune with what he is up to and what he is doing.
5. But the reality is that it is not always easy to discern what God is up to.
6. Partly because we have an enemy who wants to cloud our ability to recognize the activity of God in our lives.
7. The bible calls Satan a deceiver.
8. A deceiver is someone who causes someone else to believe something that is not true, typically in order to gain some personal advantage.
9. What is the advantage Satan longs to achieve by deceiving us? To lead us astray or away from Jesus Christ.
10. The great deceiver is at work to destroy, damage, or strain our relationship with Jesus Christ.
11. And because of that the Lord God makes himself available to us to give us wisdom and discernment so that we will not be deceived or lead astray.
12. The Lord Jesus Christ offers every believer the gift of intimate relationship with him in which he communicates with us and guides us and leads us by His Spirit.
13. Why, so we can discern what is good and what is evil and not fall into the devil's traps.
14. 1 Corinthians 12:2 You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols.
1. The word Pagan describes a person or group of people who were not devoted to the one true God, through his Son Jesus Christ.
15. Instead, these Pagans are followers of many gods (little g);
16. Paul identifies one of the characteristics of these false God's. they are mute. They don't speak. They don't communicate.

17. That is the exact opposite of how the Lord God almighty relates to us.
18. Our God invites us into intimate fellowship and relationship with Him in which he opens himself up to us so we will open ourselves up to him.
19. One of the signs of a strong relationship with Jesus is that he regularly speaks and guides and communicates with us.
20. One of the signs of a strained or damaged relationship is when we can no longer hear our God speaking.
21. I closed last week by saying, these truths are not meant to condemn us. Rather they are meant to stir us and make us hungry for something more than silence.
22. It is meant to make us hungry for an intimate relationship with Jesus marked by our discerning his will for our lives because we believe he speaks to and guides us.
23. This morning we are going to move into another aspect of why it is difficult at times to discern the workings of God in our lives.
24. I would like to read the entire story found in John chapter 9, but it comprises 41 verses, and for time's sake I can't read them all.
25. So, allow me to read some highlights that will give us the gist of the story.

TEXT: **John 9:1-3** As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. **2** His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" **3** "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him."

John 9:6-9 After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. **7** "Go," he told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam" (this word means "Sent"). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing. **8** His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, "Isn't this the same man who used to sit and beg?" **9** Some claimed that he was. Others said, "No, he only looks like him." But he himself insisted, "I am the man."

John 9:13-14 They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. **14** Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man's eyes was a Sabbath.

John 9:18-21 They still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they sent for the man's parents. 19 "Is this your son?" they asked. "Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that now he can see?" 20 "We know he is our son," the parents answered, "and we know he was born blind. 21 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."

John 9:35-38 Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" 36 "Who is he, sir?" the man asked. "Tell me so that I may believe in him." 37 Jesus said, "You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you." 38 Then the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him.

TITLE: Discernment Detractors

INTRO:

1. A detractor is something that takes away from something else.
2. In this case we are talking about things that take away from our ability to discern properly the workings of God in our lives.
3. In John chapter 9 we see 4 common detractors illustrated in the lives of 4 groups of people.
4. We said in week one that one of the miracles Jesus performed frequently in the New Testament was the healing of blind eyes. That's because the physical healing is a symbol of our spiritual healing.
5. We often need our spiritual eyes opened so we can see God clearly.
6. And on one occasion Jesus opens the eyes of a blind man. In fact the greatness of this miracle is that the man had been born blind.
7. He had never seen one single thing in his life.
8. 2,000 years later it is obvious to us that Jesus was at work, and powerful, wonderful things were happening.
9. But the reality is that in the moment almost no one could discern that this was the work of God.
10. In fact, everyone except the blind man himself missed the obvious truth that Jesus was doing something great. And even the blind man didn't recognize the work of Jesus at first.

11. So, if we will be honest with ourselves, we will have to admit that if several groups of people could miss something so obvious as the healing of a blind man, we too are susceptible to having difficulty discerning the workings of God in our lives.
12. And there are some very good reasons why we have difficulty at times. Because there are beliefs, attitudes, and emotions that detract or take away from our ability to see clearly.
13. Let's look at several of them.

The disciples. Missing the point.

1. Jesus and the disciples are walking along when they encounter a man who had been blind since birth.
2. The fact that this man was seen by Jesus should have been the beginning of a beautiful story. But it only took a few seconds for things to go downhill.
3. John 9:2-3 His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" 3 "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him."
4. What's sad is that those who should have been seeing spiritual reality most clearly were the most blind and undiscerning.
5. Jesus sees a man, with a need, who needs healing. He sees a person. But the disciples skip right over the humanity of the situation and they dive off into a theological discussion about sin.
6. Who sinned? This man or his parents?
7. There was no love, no compassion for this man's situation, no concern for his well-being.
8. Instead, they turned him into an object lesson to satisfy their curiosity.
9. Instead of seeing this as an opportunity to care for another human being and to wonder about the spiritual possibilities, they added insult to injury by asking the blame question. Whose fault is it that this happened.
10. They were blinded by the belief that if someone was suffering some difficulty it must be because it is someone's fault.

11. I wonder how many times today we see or hear the need of others and rather than being moved with compassion by their situation we judge or make assumptions? Please don't answer.
12. Jesus responds essentially by saying, you're asking the wrong question. Neither this man nor his parents sinned.
13. This man was born blind so the works of God could be revealed in and through his life.
14. This was an opportunity for the Lord to do something great.
15. The right question according to Jesus was, what is God doing in this situation and how can I get on board with it?
16. For sure, Jesus wasn't trying to avoid the realities of life. Yes, there is evil in the world.
17. Yes, there is sin and sin has consequences.
18. Yes, the law of sowing and reaping is in effect all around us.
19. But what does placing blame have to do with it.
20. The real question is, what is God going to do with all of this sin and mess and heartache?
21. One of the first things we need to know about discernment is that **whatever God is up to is always centered around his desire to show love and compassion to people.**
22. If we lose sight of God's ultimate desire to love on people, we will have a hard time seeing God in any of it.

Friends & Neighbors. This doesn't make sense.

1. Jesus makes some mud. Put it in the man's eyes, and told him to go and wash in a pool of water.
2. The man obeys and is instantly healed. And the first thing he does is go home to his friends and neighbors.
3. **John 9:7-10** So the man went and washed, and came home seeing. **8** His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, "Isn't this the same man who used to sit and beg?" **9** Some claimed that he was. Others said, "No, he only looks like him." But he himself insisted, "I am the man." **10** "How then were your eyes opened?" they asked.
4. These people who had seen the blind man every day.

5. Some who were friends with the family and may have been there the day he was born, and were there to cry when they realized the baby was blind.
6. These very people rejected this as the work of God because it didn't make any sense to them.
7. They couldn't wrap their minds around what was happening, even though it was happening right in front of them.
8. If the situation weren't so sad it would almost be comical.
9. Some are saying, yes, I know it is him.
10. Others were saying, no, it's just somebody who looks like him.
11. And all the while the man claims, it's me. I'm the one you have known all my life.
12. The doubt of these friends and neighbors points out another detractor of our discerning the work of God around us.
13. Sometimes we only see what we are ready to see, what we expect to see, and even desire to see.
14. Sometimes we are only able to see God when what we are seeing makes perfect sense.
15. But when it doesn't fit into one of those categories we are blind to the truth, even though this whole Christian life is lived by faith not by sight.

The Pharisees. Outside the box.

1. By now the friends and neighbors are so confused that they take the man to the religious leaders to try and make sense of it all.
2. This is what happened.
3. John 9:13-16 They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. 14 Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man's eyes was a Sabbath. 15 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." 16 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.
4. Notice with me a couple of things the Pharisees didn't do.
5. They didn't question if in fact this man had once been blind.

6. We'll get there in a minute, but even when they asked the parents if this was their son who was born blind, it really wasn't about that at all.
7. The pharisees didn't question whether or not this man had truly been healed of his blindness.
8. But the third thing they didn't do was celebrate with the man that something amazing had happened in his life. They were not happy at all.
9. No one was curious about what it was like to be able to see for the first time. All because of the circumstances surrounding the healing.
10. These pharisees were the most committed followers of God in their day.
11. They saw it as their job to hold strongly to the keeping of the law, and to demand that everyone else do the same.
12. They were by the book people. They were determined to be right.
13. But in the midst of an obvious miracle, they only had one concern.
14. Jesus had healed the man on the sabbath.
15. And the law of Moses forbid doing any work on the sabbath.
16. They considered this healing to be work, so they determined, this couldn't be God because it didn't happen when and how they believed it should have.
17. This healing was outside the box if you will.
18. I want to quote from the book Pursuing God's Will Together by Ruth Haley Barton.
19. "Getting caught up in preserving the system gave them a convenient way to avoid dealing with who Jesus was, the miracle he had performed," and the fact that this new thing that was happening had to be God.
20. **We can't put God in a box. There is no box big enough.** God is going to do what God is going to do and I'm pretty sure he isn't going to stop and ask our opinion before he does it.
21. Could it be that our mindsets about what is acceptable is keeping us from seeing the working of God?

The Parents. Fear.

1. John 9:18-21 They still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they sent for the man's parents. 19 "Is this your son?" they asked. "Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that now he can see?" 20 "We know he is our son," the parents answered, "and we know he was born blind. 21 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."
2. When they questioned the man's parents about what had happened the parents were afraid to acknowledge how this miracle had occurred.
3. Now, there is a reason they were afraid. They knew if they claimed that Jesus had healed their son the Pharisees were prepared to throw them out of the church because of Jesus.
4. That's because the pharisees had already made up their mind about who Jesus was. They had already established the limits of what they were willing to accept, and they were going to reject anyone who disagreed with them.
5. They didn't want to be bothered with the facts. Only what they wanted to believe.
6. On a day that should have been one of the happiest of their lives, the parents were afraid to name and celebrate the work of God in their family.
7. **Fear has a way of blinding us.** It has a way of making us feel weak, unloved, and a little bit crazy. Fear is a terrible companion.
8. And yet at every turn we are tempted to be afraid. On a daily basis we are tempted to be driven by fear rather than faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And if we give in to that life of fear it blinds us to the work of God all around us.

Conclusion:

1. But thank God in the middle of all this there was one person who was willing to accept the truth of who Jesus was.
2. The man who had been healed of his blindness. Upon confessing that Jesus had healed him he too was thrown out of the temple.

3. John 9:35-38 Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" 36 "Who is he, sir?" the man asked. "Tell me so that I may believe in him." 37 Jesus said, "You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you." 38 Then the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him.
4. Notice the progression in this man's faith.
 5. In verse 11 he calls Jesus a man.
 6. In verse 17 he calls him a prophet.
 7. In verse 33 he calls Jesus a man from God.
 8. And finally in verse 38 when Jesus declares himself to be the Son of Man or the savior of the world, the blind man makes a full confession, says Lord I believe, and worships Jesus.
 9. Finally, someone saw this for what it was.
 10. The work and hand of God bringing life and hope.
 11. Taking a man not only from physical blindness to sight, but taking that man from Spiritual blindness to seeing clearly who Jesus was.
 12. And that my friend is God's desire for all of us. To help us see clearly, to discern his working in our world and in our life so we can surrender to him and follow his will.
 13. Now. If you are listening today and you find yourself to more resemble one of the other groups in this story rather than the blind man, don't distress.
 14. To quote Craig Groeschel. You can't defeat what you can't define. In other words, recognizing that I might be one of the ones who would have missed Jesus, or someone who misses the works of Jesus now is the first step in having our eyes opened.
 15. I want to encourage all of us to ask ourselves the question. Is there something in my life that is detracting me from discerning accurately the working of God in and around my life?
 16. Have I, like the disciples, somehow missed the point that everything God does is about touching the heart of and showing compassion and love to people?
 17. Have I, like the friends and neighbors, rejected or missed the work of God in my life because I will only accept what I understand?
 18. Have I, like the Pharisees, developed the habit of rejecting everything that doesn't fit nicely and neatly into the way I believe?

19. Or have I, like the parents, allowed fear to keep me from recognizing and acknowledging that God is great, and he is doing great things all the time?
20. I don't know about you, but I want to see clearly. I need to see clearly.
21. I can't afford to miss what the Lord is up to. Because if I am blind to his workings then I can't surrender to his will, and I can't live a victorious life.
22. We are going to change our position for a time of prayer in just a moment.
23. Confess that Jesus is Lord.
24. Seek the Lord. Not answers, but seek Him.
25. Be open to the prompting of the Holy Spirit concerning areas in our life that keep us from discerning what God is doing clearly.