

Men Like Trees Walking

Ignorance and Insight: Part 9
Mark 7:24-8:26 4/6/2019

After Jesus' first touch the blind man could see but couldn't understand what he was seeing ("I see men like trees walking"). That is often our experience in reading the Bible—we can't understand what we're seeing. In six vignettes, Mark teaches how we can improve our spiritual insight and hear more clearly when God speaks to us.

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Introduction: Perception

The Mexican cave fish has eye sockets but no eyes. Where they live, it's so dark, eyes are useless and so they lost them. Biologists have discovered that some species of fish who live in waters that have some light, and they do have eyes. Stay too long in the dark and your eyes go away.

That's an accurate metaphor of the spiritual world. There are a lot of terrible consequences of sin, but one of the scariest is spiritual blindness. When you can't hear what God is saying to you and you can't see what he's showing you, that's one of the worst things that can ever happen because God *communicates* his grace to us. We get it through perception. He could have chosen any number of ways to give us grace. He could have designed us with a big funnel coming out of the top of our head where he just poured it in. But his choice was to give us grace in a form that requires perception—spiritual hearing and seeing... , and so if we become unable to make out what he's communicating, it cuts us off from grace. On the other hand, the sharper your spiritual hearing and eyesight become, the more you'll be able to receive grace from God.

So you have faculties of spiritual perception, and God has given you responsibility over those faculties. With your physical senses, if you stare at the sun too long you damage your eyesight. You fail to use ear protection while shooting (or you play the trumpet too many years) and you have to get hearing aids in your 40's. It works the same way in the spiritual realm. You can do things that will damage your spiritual hearing beyond repair, so you can't hear God. And you can do things that will destroy your eyes so spiritual insight becomes impossible.

But on the other hand, unlike the physical realm, on the spiritual side you can do things to *improve* your senses. You can do things that will give you excellent spiritual hearing and better and better spiritual vision. And Mark writes a long section of his gospel to teach us how to do that. We left off last time in ch.7 where Jesus made all foods clean. After that, Jesus leaves the country and goes into gentile territory where he will spend most of the rest of his life. From where we left off to the big, climactic center point in the Gospel of Mark where everything changes, six things happen.

- 1) The Syrophoenician woman (7:24-30)
- 2) Healing of the deaf mute (7:31-37)
- 3) Feeding of the 4000 (8:1-9)
- 4) The Pharisees' demand for a sign (8:10-13)
- 5) Warning about yeast (8:14-21)
- 6) Healing of the blind man (8:22-26)

I've preached all those before, so if you want a full sermon on each one of those you can go to TreasuringGod.com. I would urge you to do that because they are all important events in the gospel. But I'm not going to re-preach all that. What I'd like to do tonight is to show you how all six of those events teach one crucially important theme that Jesus illustrates in what has to qualify as the strangest miracle Jesus ever performed, where Jesus spits on a blind man's eyes and he sees men like trees walking around.

Only God Opens Eyes

When Jesus healed a blind man in John 9:32 the people said, "**Since the beginning of time nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind.**" That was true. There are a lot of signs and wonders in the Old Testament, but one miracle you *never* see in the Old Testament is giving sight to the blind. It's spoken of numerous times, but only as a future promise for the glorious age to come.

Isaiah 42:6,7 I ... will make you ... a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind.

Isaiah 35:5 Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped.

So all through the Old Testament there are spectacular miracles: seas open, fire comes down from heaven, the dead are raised, a world-wide flood, manna from heaven, water from a rock to supply a whole nation—on and on and on, but never a blind man healed. Then along comes Jesus, and of all the different kinds of miracles he performed, anyone care to guess which miracle he did most often? Giving sight to the blind. It was his favorite miracle.

And in the section we're looking at today, Jesus does both the miracles mentioned in Isaiah 35— healing of the blind and the deaf.

Mark 7:32 There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged him to place his hand on the man.

The word for this man's speech problem is *mogilalas*. That word only appears one other place in the whole Bible, and it's that passage I just read from Isaiah 35.

Isaiah 35:1 The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom...2 ...they will see the glory of the LORD, the splendor of our God... 5 Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. 6 Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the *mogilalas* tongue shout for joy!

So Mark is making a point to tell us that Jesus is one who will fulfill that great promise in Isaiah 35. Jesus is so tender—he uses sign language to communicate to this guy.

33 After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue. 34 He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him,

"Ephphatha!" (which means, "Be opened!"). 35 At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly.¹

So Jesus heals a deaf man, then if you skip ahead to the last of these six events, he heals a blind man. Just as Jesus Christ is the only one who can heal the deaf and blind physically, so it is spiritually. But he wants to teach us something about how that happens, so watch how Jesus does this.

Healing of the Blind Man

8:23 He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, "Do you see anything?" 24 He looked up and said, "I see people; they look like trees walking around."

What kind of a half-baked miracle is that?

25 Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly.

Since when does it take Jesus two tries to heal someone? He can create the universe with a word on his first try, but this guy's blindness gives him trouble? Is Jesus struggling here? Is he in a healing slump? What is this? Why would Jesus create a situation where a man has functional eyes but can't understand what he's seeing?

Back up to v.18 and look what Jesus said to his disciples.

8:18 Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear?

He says that to his disciples, then does a miracle that creates a physical situation that perfectly illustrates the disciples' spiritual situation. "You guys have eyes but still don't see," then he gives a blind man sight, but the guy still can't make out what he's seeing. It's not a failed miracle; it's an intentional, spiritual lesson.

Once you understand that lesson, you'll see how all six of these events fit together and lead into the climactic point of the book when the disciples' eyes are finally opened. And in the process we're going to learn how to avoid spiritual deafness and blindness and how to improve your spiritual insight.

So let's start with this question: After Jesus' first touch, why did the people look like trees? Every commentary I read and every sermon I listened to all said the same thing—the guy's vision was blurry. Jesus just gave him the wrong prescription the first time, then got it right the second time.

I don't buy that. No matter how blurry your vision, men don't look like trees. Those of you with glasses—take them off for a second and look at me. Do I look like a tree? No. People don't look like trees. The coloring, the size, the shape—people don't look like trees even without your glasses.

Visual Agnosia

After the first touch, I believe this man's eyes were healed completely—perfect, 20/20 vision. The problem was he didn't understand what he was seeing. That's a known condition; it's called visual agnosia, where the eyes can see with perfect clarity, but the brain doesn't understand what the eyes see. Oliver Sacks is a scientist who studies neurology and has written about this. He tells of one patient who could see clearly enough to copy intricate details of a bird from a picture onto a piece of paper, but then afterward, when asked what it was, guessed that it was a tree trunk. Another patient saw his wife and thought she was a hat even though he had perfect eyesight.

¹ Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. Jesus never forbade preaching of the gospel, just testimonies. The work of Jesus is not about miracles. The divine purposes for which Jesus came into the world are not fulfilled by the miracles. They are fulfilled by part 2 of the Gospel of Mark—the cross. The miracles verify his message. So apart from the message, they are useless.

He tells the story of Virgil Adamson, who was blind for 45 years and then had corrective surgery and regained his sight. When it was time to remove the bandages after the surgery, the doctor and Virgil's fiancé were in the room, and he opened his eyes. And he just had a blank stare. He looked like he was still blind. Then, after a long silence, the doctor finally said, "Well?" Then his face lit up and he realized he was seeing. Up to that point he had no idea that the sensation he was experiencing was sight. But when the chaos of colors and shapes in front of him spoke, he realized, "That's the doctor."

At that point you expect him to be jumping around with joy. That's not what happened. Regaining his sight ruined Virgil Adamson's life and brought him to the brink of suicide.

He couldn't understand movement, space, distance, color, shape, or perspective. He couldn't imagine how his dog when viewed from the side was the same as the one viewed straight on. It made no sense. Stairs were just a confused jumble of crisscrossed lines. He would stand in the middle of the street and a car was coming. He just saw this object getting larger and larger. He had no idea that meant it was getting closer and he was about to be run over.

He couldn't look at a bunch of parts as a whole. He could look at your eye, and then your mouth and your nose, but his mind had no ability to put it all together and understand that it comprised a face. And so he couldn't learn to read. He couldn't even count fingers. To look at one thing, then stop, focus, interpret, then shift, stop, focus, shift, stop, focus, etc. took so much concentration that he couldn't do that and count at the same time. Virgil Adamson's life became unbearable when he received his sight because he got sight but not understanding.²

Two Kinds of Blindness

So Jesus' first touch wasn't a failed miracle. It's just that normally, when Jesus healed a blind person, he would do two miracles simultaneously—heal the eyes and repair the brain. But in this case, Jesus did those miracles one at a time to teach that there are two different kinds of blindness: the kind where you don't even have functional eyes (like the Pharisees), and the kind where you do have eyes but can't understand what you see (like the disciples). And so spiritual perception and insight comes in two stages.

How to Avoid Blindness

(1) Don't Seek Signs

Now, let's take a look at these five events and learn how we can not only avoid hearing loss, but improve our spiritual perception. Back up to 8:11 and we'll see the first kind of blindness—the worst kind. After Jesus healed the deaf man, he repeated the feeding miracle—this time 4000 and in gentile territory. Then he makes a quick trip back to Israel and has a run-in with some Pharisees.

8:11 The Pharisees came out and began to argue with Jesus, seeking from him a sign from heaven to test him.

Are you kidding me? A sign? It says Jesus **sighed deeply in his spirit**. I guess! Jesus was internationally famous for his miracles. He just got done feeding thousands with a single lunchbox of food—again. He has healed lepers, told paralyzed people to get up and walk and they did, heaven opened at his baptism, he cast out demons by the thousands, healed insanity, walked on water, stilled the storm,

² In fact, there was one time Virgil Adamson visited a grocery store and there was so much visual stimulus that it scared him and he had to leave. Then it says this: "he enjoyed uncluttered views of green hills and grass. Especially after the overfull over-rich visual spectacles of shops." Somehow it was soothing for him to be out in the country. That struck me because v.23 says before Jesus healed this man's eyes he took him outside the village. Jesus is making a point, but he makes it as easy on this man as possible.

and raised the dead. And after all that they're saying, "That's not quite enough—how about one more? Maybe something up in the sky?" After all those miracles, and all the fulfilled prophecy, and all John's testimony and all Jesus' preaching, you still don't know who Jesus is? How blind can a person be?

You say, "Maybe they didn't know about all those miracles." No, they knew about them. They are the ones who came up with the theory way back in ch.3 that Jesus must be using satanic power to do all these miracles.³

12 ... "Why does this generation ask for a miraculous sign? I tell you the truth, no sign will be given to it." 13 Then he left them

A miracle in the sky wouldn't be any more persuasive than miracles on the ground—in fact, less. How many times have you seen something in the sky that you couldn't explain? That happens all the time. Jesus did miracles up close—right in front of everyone's faces. I defy anyone in this room to think up a miracle that would be more difficult or more persuasive or better proof than the ones Jesus did. People who demand more proof only prove that they are irrational and impervious to any proof.

And so you can see why Jesus has such an emotional response. Suppose your toddler says, "I'm hungry," so you give him some mac and cheese. And he says, "I can't eat this slop," and he throws it in your face. So you make him a PBJ sandwich and he chucks it like a frisbee into the living room. So you say, "Oh, you're not in the mood for a sandwich? Here," and you give him a plate of cookies. As soon as you turn your back, he starts pelting you in the back of the head with the cookies and kicking his feet in a tantrum and screaming. By this time you're starting to suspect, *maybe he's not really hungry*. But you don't want to be cruel, so you make some more mac and cheese and another sandwich and more cookies and chicken nuggets and filet mignon and lobster and fried chicken, and you put it all out there on his tray, and he just kicks the tray, knocks all the food on the floor, and screams, "I want celery!" How long would you let that go on before you said, "We're done here. You're not hungry. Time for bed."?

Jesus let it go on for a good year and a half. And here he finally says, "No more." The literal translation is: **Why does this generation seek a sign? I tell you the truth, if any sign is given to it ...** and then he doesn't even finish the sentence. He just spins on his heels and gets right back in the boat and leaves the country. When you don't finish a sentence—that's emotion. It's almost like an oath: "May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if any sign is given to this generation." Except he doesn't even verbalize the oath part. "If another sign is given to this generation, so help me ..." and walks away.

You want a sign? Here's your sign: no more signs. It's a sign of judgment. After this Jesus does a few miracles in private or in gentile territory, but the time of mass public miracles in Israel is over.

This is the worst kind of blindness. No matter what miracle Jesus does, they are blind as bats. And no matter how clear he makes the truth, they are deaf as a post. And there's no remedy because it's a willful blindness. They refuse to see.

The Warning

So that's the first danger to your spiritual vision—seeking something other than what God has given. And that's a real danger for us—for followers of Christ. We can be influenced by that, so in the very next paragraph Jesus warns his disciples to make sure they aren't influenced by the Pharisees.⁴

15 "Be careful," Jesus warned them. "Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod."⁵

³ Mark 3:22.

⁴ Herod was the same way—he was seeking more miracles even at Jesus' trial. There were other negative influences that came from the Pharisees (such as legalism) and Herod (such as investing in political power rather than the kingdom of God).

⁵ The way Jesus states that warning, he quotes Jeremiah 5 where God rebuked the people of Israel for blinding themselves by allowing themselves to be influenced by blind leaders.

Jeremiah 5:30 A horrible and shocking thing has happened in the land: 31 The prophets prophesy lies and my people love it this way.

Yeast is a metaphor for subtle, invisible, pervasive influence.

The Disciples' Blindness

So Jesus warns the disciples to watch out for that, and their response to his warning gets Jesus so upset, he goes off on them like no other time in the gospels. You can just hear the exasperation in his voice. He fires off seven questions without giving them a chance to answer. When someone asks you seven rapid fire questions without taking a breath, he's not happy with you.

17 ...Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened? 18 Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don't you remember? ... how many basketfuls of pieces (of bread and fish) did you pick up? ... 21 "Do you still not understand?"

It's like Jesus is taking them by the ears and slamming their head against the side of the boat seven times, trying to wake them up. "Don't ... you ... get ... it ... yet ... blind ... morons?" What did they do that got Jesus so upset? Did they commit adultery? Steal something? Murder? Lying? What horrible thing did they do?

They talked about bread. He gives the warning about the yeast of the Pharisees, and ...

16 They discussed this with one another and said, "It is because we have no bread." 17 Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked them: "Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? ...

What's so evil about that? If Tracy and I went camping, and we packed a bunch of food, and we get half way there and realize someone forgot to put the cooler in the car, I guarantee that would be a topic of conversation. "What do you mean we don't have the cooler?" For me, not having food is a crisis. Anyone, in a situation like this, would talk about the food problem.

What was so wrong with that? It wasn't that they were talking about food. It was that their obsession over it made them miss what Jesus was telling them. They were just like the blind man after the first touch. Jesus' words were like trees walking around. They couldn't understand it for two reasons, and these are both things that will destroy your spiritual eyesight.

(2) Misinterpretation

First, misinterpretation. Look at how they interpreted Jesus' words. How do you get from "Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees" to "He's upset that we forgot the bread"? How could they twist Jesus' words that much? That's what happens when you're preoccupied. When your mind is consumed with something, you'll tend to interpret what God says in terms of what's already dominating your thoughts.

Why are there so many different interpretations and denominations and arguments and fights over what the Bible means? Why do people read the Bible and all they see is men like trees walking around? People think it's because the Bible is unclear. No. The problem isn't with the Bible; the problem is with the people interpreting it.

The disciples expected Jesus to say something about the bread problem, so that's what they heard. When you read your Bible and expect it to say something, that's what you're likely to hear even if it's saying the exact opposite.

So, you can become completely blind like the Pharisees by seeking something other than what God has said, or you can have eyes but fail to see like the disciples by importing your own expectations into the Word of God instead of just letting it say what it says.

People are attracted to blind leaders because blind leaders tend to say the things our sinful hearts want to hear. And their influence causes spiritual deafness and blindness. xxxx

(3) Don't Be Distracted

Or, a third way to blind yourself—you can simply be *distracted* by the cares of this life. Jesus already warned them about the blinding effect of distraction way back in ch.4.

Mark 4:18 Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; 19 but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful.

That is exactly what's going on here. The worries of this life—"What are we going to do for lunch?"—came in and choked out the word of Christ so they couldn't even hear what Jesus was saying.

Beware of distracting worries—they will blind you. You read your Bible, but you can't focus long enough to understand because you're distracted about your taxes, or your car troubles, or your marriage or health problems or issues at work or the news headlines or any number of other cares of this life. That will choke the word out of your heart or blind your eyes so you can't understand—two different metaphors describing the same thing.

Solution: Remember

And what's the solution? Suppose you're distracted by something, and you don't want to be distracted—you want to focus on God's Word instead of that thing you're worried about but that's way easier said than done. How do you pull your attention out of the mud bog of that distraction and focus on God's Word? Jesus gives us the answer embedded in his rebuke.

18 Do you have eyes but fail to see and ears that fail to hear, and don't you remember?

There's the key—remember. If they had remembered, neither their misinterpretation nor their distraction would have happened. Remember what?

18 ... don't you remember? 19 When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?" "Twelve," they replied. 20 "And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?" They answered, "Seven." 21 He said to them, "Do you still not understand?"

They didn't understand because they were worried about temporal, earthly matters like food, and they were worried about temporal matters because they didn't remember the promise of provision implied in the feeding miracles. Whenever you get distracted from your spiritual life because you're worried about some earthly problem—you're forgetting Jesus' promises. Didn't Jesus say, "Do not worry about what you will eat or drink or wear ... seek first the kingdom of God and all those other things will be given to you?" (Mt.6:31-33) If we make eternal things our priority, he promises to provide the temporal things we need to do God's will.

How to Improve Sight

So those are three things to watch out for that can ruin your eyesight or hearing: distraction, misinterpretation, and seeking something other than what God has given. But how about on the positive side? How do you *improve* your hearing and insight? Let's go all the way back to the first of these 6 events, starting in 7:24, and we'll see someone who had binocular vision spiritually. This is the first person in the entire gospel to get one of Jesus' parables. She doesn't even have to think about it for a second. She understands it instantly and even adds to it. And she ends up being the only person to ever win an argument with Jesus. Of course, he set her up to win—just like the angel of the Lord let Jacob win the wrestling match. Jesus set her up to prevail because he wanted to grant her request but first he wanted to put her great faith on display. Who knows how many other people he set up to win and they totally

missed it because they lacked insight? This woman is a hero of the faith. She's one of my favorite characters in the Bible.

7:24 Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it

He wanted to focus on training the 12, and that had proved impossible in Israel. And it didn't work that great here either.

(4) Embrace God's Will

24 ... he did not want anyone to know it; yet he could not keep his presence secret. ²⁵ In fact, as soon as she heard about him, a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an evil spirit came and fell at his feet. ²⁶ The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter.

So far in this Gospel, everyone who asks for healing gets it. In fact, everyone who so much as touches Jesus' clothes gets healed. So you fully expect Jesus to go heal the girl. But look what he says.

²⁷ "First let the children eat all they want," he told her, "for it is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs."

Now, at this point everyone gets all worked up about Jesus calling this woman a dog. And the commentaries go on and on about the insult. And in doing so, they all miss the point of the parable. The point is not to insult her. It's a parable about priorities. In feeding your family, the priority is to get the kids fed. That's a higher priority than the pets. In the same way, right now the priority is to get the disciples trained.⁶ They are like children at dinner time—it wouldn't be right to neglect them right now.

So it's not an insult, but even if it were, I doubt it would have mattered much to this woman. Her little girl was under the control of a demon. Whatever horrible disease you can imagine your children getting, this is worse. In a situation like that, a mother could be called every 4-letter word in the book and it wouldn't matter a hill of beans to her if she could get some relief for her little girl. What was devastating in Jesus' words was not any insult, but simply the answer—"not now. I have to finish this first, then I'll heal her." That's the meaning of Jesus' little parable about the children and the dog. Now look at this woman's response.

²⁸ "Yes, Lord," she replied

Stop right there. Jesus tells her about his priorities, which didn't include her, and the first words out of her mouth are, **yes Lord**. Whatever else comes later in this conversation, let's get this straight right up front: **yes Lord**. Even though she was probably as desperate as it's possible for a human being to be, still, there's not the slightest resistance to Christ's plan and priorities.

If you want clear spiritual vision like this woman had—you want to understand the Bible and hear God's voice clearly and have deep, spiritual insight, it can only come through an attitude that begins with an immediate, "Yes Lord" before any other response. If you try to come to God on your own terms instead of his terms, you'll go completely deaf when he communicates his grace to you.

⁶ Scholars debate about whether the children are the Jews, or the disciples. Is Jesus saying the Jews are a priority over the Gentiles, or that in that instance, giving attention to the disciples was a priority over doing healings for people? I believe it's the latter because Jesus says "first." That implies after the children are fed, then he will go and heal the woman's daughter. But either way, the bottom line for this woman is the same. She's not the priority right now.

The Crumbs Will Do

So the woman completely embraces Jesus' terms. But that doesn't mean she gave up. Embracing God's will doesn't mean you become apathetic and just tell God, "Do whatever, God, I don't care."

Not at all—she's still going to pursue her request. And her request will be granted because this woman finds a hole in Jesus' argument. It is a hole that Jesus purposely left there, but only a heart of faith could spot it, because in order to spot it, she first had to understand the point Jesus was making. And if she would have resisted his will, she would have been just like the disciples and missed the point. But she listens with a humble, accepting, compliant, submissive heart and so she instantly understands. And that puts her in a position to exploit the hole that Jesus left in his argument and weave her counter-argument right into Jesus' own parable.

(5) Trust His Power

When Jesus says, "No, I can't come now because the disciples are the priority," can you see the hole in his argument? "You'll have to wait because it wouldn't be right for me to leave the 12 right now—they are like children at my table."

28 "Yes, Lord," she replied, "but even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs."

What's the meaning of her parable? When the dogs eat the crumbs, are the children being neglected? No. Are the priorities violated in any way? No. The point of her parable is this: "Jesus, if the only problem is you don't want to neglect the training of the disciples right now, that's a non-problem. Don't leave them. Stay seated, right where you are." You see, this woman knows that Jesus doesn't have to come to her house. All he has to do is think a thought and her daughter will be healed.

Everyone else assumes Jesus has to travel to the sick person to heal them. But there are two people in the gospels who understand that Jesus' power is unlimited, which means he can heal at a distance with a mere decision of his will. One was this woman; anyone know who the other one was? The centurion in Matthew 8. Jesus says, "I'll come heal your boy," and the guy says, "First of all, I'm not worthy for you to come under my roof. Secondly, I'm in the military—I know how authority works. You give the order, and my boy is healed." That centurion and this woman, both gentiles, were the only two people in the Bible Jesus said had great faith.

29 Then he told her, "For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter." ³⁰ She went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

Do you want the keen spiritual insight this woman had? Expect God to behave like God. Trust in his unlimited power. This woman assumes Jesus can command a demon from a distance, and the blind disciples ring their hands because they don't have enough lunch.

Okay, so if you want great spiritual insight, don't seek signs, don't import your own meaning, don't be distracted, embrace God's will with a humble, accepting, submissive attitude, trust in God's power, and one more:

(6) Look and Listen

How did this woman get such strong faith? The Pharisees had seen Jesus' miracles with their own eyes and didn't believe. The disciples had seen even more miracles and they were mostly blind. This woman hadn't seen any miracles—not a single one. She had never met or seen Jesus. How did she gain that level of confidence in Jesus' power? What does v.25 say? **She heard about him.** What does Romans 10:17 say—faith comes through seeing, or faith comes through hearing? The world says, "Seeing is believing," but the Bible says, "No, hearing is believing." The Pharisees and the disciples see it all, and they are blind; this woman hears the message, and she has eagle vision.

And we've seen that before in Mark. Remember the woman with the bleeding problem? How did she have such strong faith in Christ?

Mark 5:27 *When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak.*

So if you want excellent spiritual hearing, *listen*. And listening has to do with your attitude as much as with your ears. And it's an effort.

2 Timothy 2:7 *Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this.*

Most Christians expect God to give them insight right off the bat, as soon as they read it. But God designed our hearts such that insight increases only after serious contemplation.

So listen, listen, listen. Listen to expository preaching, study the Word for yourself, read books by people who help you think it through—expose yourself more and more to the Word, and think, reflect, meditate, study, mull it over, concentrate, ruminant—digest the truth of God's Word.

Use it or Lose it

If you fail to do that, you'll eventually lose the ability to do it. Remember what Jesus said back in ch.4.

Mark 4:23 *If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear." 24 "Consider carefully what you hear," he continued. "With the measure you use, it will be measured to you-- and even more. 25 Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him."*

Virgil Adamson eventually went blind again. The visual agnosia was too much for him, and he finally just closed his eyes and operated as a blind man, and gradually lost his vision.

Conclusion

So if you don't use it, you'll lose it; but the converse is also true.

Mark 4:25 *Whoever has will be given more.*

Remember the main point of Jesus healing the deaf man and the blind man—it was to show us where perception comes from—from Christ alone. These six principles will put you in a position to receive the gift or not receive it, but the gift comes from Christ alone. And why does Jesus give the gift of spiritual perception? He invented eyes because he wanted us to see. He invented ears because he wanted us to hear. Jesus wants you to get what he's communicating, and if we follow these six principles, nothing will prevent us from receiving his grace.