

Created with Possibilities

*Adventist Possibility Ministries,
A Movement Restoring Dignity, Hope,
and Purpose*

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Scripture Reading: Hebrews 11:6

The American musician Ray Charles became blind at age seven. It didn't happen all at once. Something seemed to gather over his eyes. At first, his vision was grainy and gray, and then eventually his sight closed, and he was left in utter darkness. Ray lived in poverty as a child. The family's home was a one-room shack next to the field where his father worked. As his story is told, he is seen running into the house and trips over a chair and falls to the floor. He cries out for his mother and instinctively she begins to reach down to pick him up. But she stops. Backs up. Stands still. She watches to see what would happen next.

Ray stopped crying. He became still and listened. He heard, behind him the boiling water on the wood stove. He heard the wind outside blowing through the cornstalks. He heard the thud of horses and wagons on the dirt road near his house. But then he heard something near him. It sounded like a scratching noise. He discovered it was a grasshopper. He moved closer, reached out near the scratching sound, and picked up the grasshopper. He held it in his hands and said, "I hear you too, Mama." With pride but also with sorrow and wonder, Ray's mother wept

for her son who was blind. Ray once explained, "I hear like you see."

Isn't that the motto of faith: I hear like you see? Trusting God, and hearing Him speak, is like seeing God with us when times may be confusing and difficult. Together, the blind, the deaf, and all of us who are learning to walk with God are called to place our trust in Him--in what He's done and is doing and will do. As a result, our lives are filled with hope and purpose. Faith is often a learning experience. It changes not only us but also those who stand with us. Trusting faith frees us to live a life filled with possibilities seldom seen before. That's what we discover as John tells the story in John 9:1-41.

Generations before Ray Charles, there was a different story unfolding. There was not an understanding mother standing with the man who was blind, but Jesus was there. Standing near the man were those who saw blindness and not the man's possibilities, but Jesus was there, and He believed. The parents were asked if the man was born blind, but Jesus knew why they were asked. There is more to the story that calls us to hear what Jesus said and did. We must also listen so we too may see. By listening to the story, we learn at least three timeless truths from Jesus as the story is told in the gospel of John.

1. Faith works to develop possibilities in others.
2. Faith in those who are different from us is abnormal.
3. Faith expands possibilities to reach others unlike us.

Faith Sees Possibilities

John chapter 9 begins not only what the disciples think they see, but also what they don't see.

As he [Jesus] went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (vv. 1,2)

It was no coincidence that Jesus and His disciples met this man as they were traveling. Jesus was mentoring his leaders and this was necessary if they were to be His leaders when He was gone. They needed to see others differently from the way their culture had taught them. Jesus took the initiative in drawing attention to the man who was blind. This was a moment that He would not let pass,

"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." (vv. 3-5)

Jesus saw more than the man's blindness. Suffering is not always due to sin and this blindness is not the result of sin either in the man or in his parents. Jesus saw how "the works of God" could change his life. The night of blindness could be changed and would be changed by the light of the presence of Jesus. Light can replace darkness. Even as close followers of Jesus, the disciples needed to see differently. They and the Jewish leaders failed to see

difficulties as opportunities for the grace of God to be manifested. Such insights would take time to learn but Jesus never gave up. For such a cause He came to minister. What happened next was a truth taken from the Genesis textbook.

Jesus took the dust from the ground, "made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes" (Gen. 2:7; John 9:6). He was told to go and wash in the pool of Siloam. John, the disciple, points out that the name of the pool actually means "sent" something emphasized in the Gospel of John. Not only did the man's blindness leave but the eyes of understanding of Jesus' disciples were also being opened. The Creator God had come to heal, restore, and send forth hope for all. Jesus who could see saw much more than suffering, sin, and rebellion. We are reminded that,

"Christ can look on the misery of the world without a shade of sorrow for having created man. In the human heart, He sees more than sin, more than misery. In His infinite wisdom and love, He sees man's possibilities, the height to which he may attain. He knows that, even though human beings have abused their mercies and destroyed their God-given dignity, yet the Creator is to be glorified in their redemption." (Ellen White, 7T 269)

Faith Is a Gift

Seeing possibilities in others, as Jesus did with the man who was blind, is a gift made possible by the Creator. Inherent in everyone is the image of God (Gen. 1:26) and it is the studied purpose of Satan to hide and malign that

image. Jesus speaks of Satan as the one who came “only to steal and kill and destroy” (John 10:10). It is not only physically that Satan seeks to destroy us. He does it through vicious stigmas that depreciate the value or worth of an individual.

Somewhat innocently the disciples did this by echoing the ingrained beliefs of their society--“who sinned, this man or his parents.” In doing so, they cast doubt regarding the moral worth of both the man and his parents. The tender healing of the hands of Jesus carefully formed the mud that was placed upon the eyes that had been blinded from birth. Can you imagine the thoughts of Jesus as He did so? Adam was formed by His hands but then believed the lies of Satan. Nevertheless, Jesus had come to restore the plan He had from the beginning--a home with Him without pain and suffering. What an amazing symbol. It is no wonder that much of Jesus' time was spent with those who suffered.

Faith in God does not come quickly or easily. We see this in the experience of the man who was healed. He referred to Jesus first as “the man” (v.11); then as “a prophet” (v.17); then one “from God” (v.33); and, finally, we see the man’s faith expressed in worship and adoration (vv. 35-38). Seeing possibilities in others is a gift that God is willing to give to His followers. It is a gift that is sorely needed in a world of comparisons, criticisms, and hatreds of all kinds. Faith, however, is not daunted by these obstacles nor by degrading stigmas. Nevertheless, we must not remain silent,

Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves,

*for the rights of all who are destitute.
(Proverbs 31:8)*

More than advocacy of rights, however, is called for.

“If we wish to do good to souls, our success with these souls will be in proportion to their belief in our belief in, and appreciation of, them. Respect shown to the struggling human soul is the sure means through Christ Jesus of the restoration of the self-respect the man has lost. Our advancing ideas of what he may become are a help we cannot ourselves fully appreciate.—Fundamentals of Christian Education, 280, 281

Faith Sees Far

In John 9, we see four different reactions to Jesus. The neighbors revealed surprise and skepticism; the Pharisees showed disbelief and prejudice; the parents believed but kept quiet for fear of religious and social rejection; and the healed man showed consistent growing faith. Each reaction to Jesus aided the man in his search for who he was and who this Healer was. In Jesus, he found a dignity that was there all the time, a hope that was greater than he had ever experienced, and a renewed purpose for living. He had lived with a limited horizon, but Jesus gave him more than eyesight. He gave him a faith that could live despite mountains of prejudice that stood in the way of him seeing any more than his disability.

In every human being He discerned infinite possibilities. He saw men as they might be, transfigured by His grace—in “the beauty of

the Lord our God.” Psalm 90:17. Looking upon them with hope, He inspired hope. Meeting them with confidence, He inspired trust. Revealing in Himself man's true ideal, He awakened, for its attainment, both desire and faith. (Education, p.80)

In the world today it is estimated there are 1.2 billion who have some kind of serious disability or loss. However, the earth's population is nearing 8 billion. Everyone is gifted, needed, and in need of love. Stigmas have isolated the Deaf, the blind, and those with physical and mental challenges. Orphans and widows often feel isolated and less than appreciated. Satan has come in to stigmatize, kill, and steal from each of us God's purpose for our existence. We are called not just to minister by ourselves but to join with others to share the story of wholeness in Jesus whether they can hear, see, walk, or talk. As one author put it, “There is no disability ministry if the disabled are not ministering.”

Faith Is for Sharing

During the persecution of the early church, Lawrence, who was a deacon in the church of Rome, was ordered to bring the treasures of the church before the emperor. He collected all the poor, the sick, the lame, the elderly, and the disabled he could find, took them to the emperor, and said, ‘See, here are the treasures of the church!’ He made his point . . . that those with disability are treasures in the church.

The compassion of Jesus leads us to see one another differently too. The Apostle Paul concluded,

So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! (2 Cor. 5:16,17)

Every part of the body of Christ is needed to carry God's mission forward! No one should be excluded! All are gifted and needed to share this end-time message of hope and purpose! People who may have a disability are still God's treasures his disciple for this mission movement. As Jesus demonstrated and Paul preached, we must “regard no one from a worldly point of view.” When our thinking is transformed, we will think differently. We will believe in the possibilities God has given to each one.

Appeal

May we be open to the Holy Spirit's leading and take action today from these three timeless truths from Jesus.

1. Faith works to develop possibilities in others.
2. Faith in those who are different from us is abnormal.
3. Faith expands possibilities to reach others unlike us.

Resources for Adventist Possibility Ministries

1. A free online training course is available in American Sign Language, English, French, Spanish, and Portuguese
<https://www.adventistlearningcommunity.com/courses/adventist-possibility-ministries>
2. A 30-second and a 60-second spot have been prepared to acquaint local churches with Adventist Possibility Ministries.
<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLVJlvj62GQnT9i5gW-xd7eRZOjhtGHhko>
3. The APM website: <https://possibilityministries.org/>
4. The website especially for the Deaf:
<https://adventistdeaf.org>
5. Hope Channel Deaf:
<https://www.hopechanneldeaf.org>
6. APM Theme Song, “Not Alone”
<https://youtu.be/LXEIGzvwTIA>
7. Accessibility Questionnaire:
<https://www.possibilityministries.org/resources/general-resources/accessibility-questionnaire/>
This questionnaire is designed to assist local church leaders in making their church more receptive to those who live with a disability or those who have experienced a loss such as the widowed and orphans. Each member and visitor should not only feel accepted but also have a sense of belonging. Available in English, French and Portuguese.
8. Join the Adventist Possibility Ministries movement on Facebook
 - a. <https://www.facebook.com/adventistpossibilityministries>
 - b. Adventist Deaf Ministries International
<https://www.facebook.com/adventistdeaf>
9. Join the conversation on Twitter
https://twitter.com/gc_apm
10. Hashtags to use
 - a. English
 - i. #AdventistPossibilityMinistries
 - ii. #PossibilityMinistries
 - b. Portuguese
 - i. #MinistérioDasPossibilidades
 - ii. #MinistérioAdventistaDasPossibilidades
 - iii. #mapdsa
 - c. Spanish
 - i. #MinisteriosDePosibilidad
 - ii. #MinisteriosAdventistasDePosibilidades