



# The Gospel of John

## Session Nine: Healings and Conflict

### THE LESSON AT A GLANCE

In today's text, John highlighted the next two public miracles of Jesus—healing the official's son and healing the paralyzed man at the pool of Bethesda. God is always at work on behalf of His children, even when we can't yet see it.

This lesson might particularly resonate with various members of your class. While these stories represent instantaneous healing, there are some who have been patiently waiting for months, or even years, for God to heal them or a loved one.

Ask the Lord to give you particular sensitivity to those who are waiting, and that the Spirit will allow you to speak hope that God is always at work, and we can approach Him as a loving and caring Father.

### TODAY'S SCRIPTURES

*John 4:43-54; 5:1-18*

### THE MAIN IDEA

Jesus's public ministry in Galilee continued with two public healings; the first of an official's son, and the second of a man who had suffered with a disability for thirty-eight years. These miracles drew censure from the Jewish leaders, who rebuked Jesus for calling God His Father.

### QUESTION TO EXPLORE

*How do you see Jesus working in your life? Where is an area in which you continue to pray for divine guidance, help, or healing? How does it help you to know that Jesus is always at work, even when we can't see it?*

### SCRIPTURE IN CONTEXT

**John 4:43-54** A royal official was an unlikely person to approach Jesus and petition healing for his son. The boldness of the man's request was matched by Jesus's bold answer—go home, your son will live. The man chose to walk home in faith and received the happy news along the way of his son's healing. At times, Jesus calls us to walk in faith, not sight. This healing showed no distance is too great for Jesus's power to reach.

**John 5:1-16** The man at the pool of Bethesda spent nearly four decades suffering paralysis. He was losing hope in the only option he thought he had left—waiting to bathe in the pool's waters in search of a miracle. Jesus healed the man with only His words—no water needed. Though his physical healing was complete, Jesus warned the man to give equal concern to the healing of his spiritual condition.

**John 5:17-18** God the Father, and Christ His Son are always at work. While this is good news for believers, it drew harsh criticism from the Jews, who couldn't believe Jesus called God His own Father. Now, through Christ, we have the same privilege. God is our eternal Father who, even now, is at work in all things.



## START HERE

Today's text reminds us that Jesus is not bound by distance, circumstance, or even human expectation. He healed the official's son from afar, the paralytic beside the pool, and revealed that His work is the Father's and is unceasing, redemptive, and full of grace. The same Savior who spoke life then speaks life now. As followers of Christ, our invitation is to believe without seeing, respond when He calls, and rest in the quiet assurance that our heavenly Father is always at work.

## DISCUSS

*How do you see Jesus at work in your life right now? How does seeing Jesus's work in the lives of other believers strengthen your faith?*

## REVIEW AND DISCUSS THE TEXT

### 1. Jesus's work is not bound by distance.

*John 4:43-54: After two days He left there for Galilee. (Jesus Himself had testified that a prophet has no honor in his own country.) When they entered Galilee, the Galileans welcomed Him because they had seen everything He did in Jerusalem during the festival. For they also had gone to the festival.*

*He went again to Cana of Galilee, where He had turned the water into wine. There was a certain royal official whose son was ill at Capernaum. When this man heard that Jesus had come from Judea into Galilee, He went to him and pleaded with him to come down and heal his son, since he was about to die.*

*Jesus told him, "Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will not believe."*

*"Sir," the official said to him, "come down before my boy dies."*

*"Go," Jesus told him, "your son will live." The man believed what Jesus said to him and departed.*

*While he was still going down, his servants met him saying that his boy was alive. He asked them at what time he got better. "Yesterday at one in the afternoon the fever left him," they answered. The father realized this was the very hour at which Jesus had told him, "Your son will live." So he himself believed, along with his whole household.*

*Now this was also the second sign Jesus performed after He came from Judea to Galilee.*



### *Unpacking John 4:43-54*

Technology has made it possible for us to communicate with people in real time, anywhere in the world (or in space!). With the click of a button, we can talk, text, share photos or computer files, or even perform robotic tasks from hundreds, even thousands of miles away. We can even track people on their devices anywhere in the world. In Jesus's day, this kind of communication would have been unimaginable. In today's text, we'll examine how one man had to trust that Jesus's healing power could reach faster than any communication device—even reaching a dying boy in another town.

After preaching to the Samaritan woman at the well, Jesus remained in Sychar two days, sharing the good news of the kingdom of God. Then, Jesus returned to Galilee, as opposed to Nazareth, His hometown, where Luke 4:24-30 tells us that Jesus was not well received. The Galileans welcomed Him, however. He performed His first public miracle in Cana in Galilee (John 2:1-12), and the Galileans saw the signs He performed during Passover in Jerusalem.

As Jesus entered the town, a certain royal official, most likely a Gentile, approached Him. His son was in Capernaum, nearly twenty miles away, and gravely ill. The official pled with Jesus to heal his son before he died. The text gives no evidence the man doubted Jesus could perform a healing miracle. He did not publicly question if Jesus would heal a Gentile. Instead, he boldly approached the Lord.

*“Jesus told him, “Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will not believe” (v. 48).* Jesus's words, at first, may appear callous, or unfeeling. However, this is an instance where it's important to look at other Gospel texts that give clarity to this challenging verse. At the beginning of this section, John gave the reason Jesus went to Galilee and not Nazareth. He wrote, *“After two days he left there for Galilee. (Jesus Himself had testified that a prophet has no honor in his own country)” (v. 43).* The story he referenced, however, isn't in John's Gospel, it's in Mark 6:1-6, and Luke 4:16-30. In both accounts, Jesus traveled to His hometown of Nazareth, but the people rejected Him. In their unbelief, they refused to acknowledge that the Messiah could be someone they knew—Joseph's son. Even though they doubted, however, they still wanted Jesus to perform miracles for them like He had done in other places. The people of Nazareth didn't want a Savior; they wanted a Shaman. Mark 4:5-6 tell us that *“He was not able to do a miracle there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them. And he was amazed at their unbelief.”*

The royal official came to Jesus for healing, but Jesus's offer was far greater than curing an illness. During His earthly ministry Jesus healed, but His divine purpose wasn't only healing physical ailments. His purpose was the healing of human hearts, and to sacrifice His life for our ultimate healing. When Jesus spoke to the official, the question He may have been asking, on a deeper level, was *“Did you come for me, or for what I can give you?”*

*“Sir,” the official said to him, “come down before my boy dies.”*

*“Go,” Jesus told him, “your son will live.” The man believed what Jesus said to him and departed.”*



Suddenly, the man was left with a choice—did he continue to follow Jesus, begging Him to return with him, or did he begin the twenty-mile trip home alone, trusting that Jesus would keep His word? Here is where the royal official's faith outshone the faith of the men and women in Nazareth. He did not wait for a sign. He did not demand proof. Instead, the text says that the man believed and departed. In Galilee, as in Nazareth, Jesus's desire was belief. He wanted His own people to believe without demanding proof on top of proof. Interestingly, it was a Gentile man who heard, believed, and later received, while many Israelites remained in unbelief.

*While he was still going down, his servants met him saying that his boy was alive. He asked them at what time he got better. "Yesterday at one in the afternoon the fever left him," they answered. The father realized this was the very hour at which Jesus had told him, "Your son will live." So, he himself believed, along with his whole household (vv. 51-53).*

Jesus's work isn't bound by distance. He is near to people in their suffering in ways we cannot understand. As Psalm 34:18 says, *"The LORD is near the brokenhearted; he saves those crushed in spirit."* God's promise in Deuteronomy 31:8 was true for the royal official, and it is true for us today: *"The LORD is the one who will go before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or abandon you. Do not be afraid or discouraged."* In times of suffering, struggles, or doubts, it is helpful to remember God's promises, so we can walk in faith regarding what our eyes cannot yet see: Jesus is working, and He calls us to believe and put our faith in Him.

## DISCUSS

- *How did the people of Nazareth miss the point of Jesus's teaching and healing ministry?*
- *Are you ever tempted to look to Jesus as a genie more than as a Savior? How can this passage encourage you?*
- *How might God be calling you to take Him at His word right now, even before you see the outcome?*

## 2. Christ's work is not bound by our understanding of time.

*John 5:1-16: After this, a Jewish festival took place, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. By the Sheep Gate in Jerusalem there is a pool, called Bethesda in Aramaic, which has five colonnades. Within these lay a large number of the disabled—blind, lame, and paralyzed.*

*One man was there who had been disabled for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and realized he had already been there a long time, he said to him, "Do you want to get well?"*

*"Sir," the disabled man answered, "I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, but while I'm coming, someone goes down ahead of me."*



*“Get up,” Jesus told him, “pick up your mat and walk.” Instantly the man got well, picked up his mat, and started to walk.*

*Now that day was the Sabbath, and so the Jews said to the man who had been healed, “This is the Sabbath. The law prohibits you from picking up your mat.”*

*He replied, “The man who made me well told me, ‘Pick up your mat and walk.’”*

*“Who is this man who told you, ‘Pick up your mat and walk’?” they asked. But the man who was healed did not know who it was, because Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there.*

*After this, Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, “See, you are well. Do not sin anymore, so that something worse doesn’t happen to you.” The man went and reported to the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. Therefore, the Jews began persecuting Jesus because he was doing these things on the Sabbath.*

#### *Unpacking John 5:1-16*

Imagine going to the emergency room late one evening. You sit there for several hours, listening to name after name being called ahead of you. As you wait, you start to notice that some people who arrived after you had already received care. You might begin to grow agitated, maybe going up to the desk, begging (or even yelling) to be seen. Now, imagine that when you return to your seat in the waiting room you notice the cure had been sitting beside you that whole time. No one was passing you by—you had the medicine you needed all along.

Some time had passed since Jesus’s second miracle of healing the official’s son in Galilee, though we don’t know how long. The text begins simply with *“After this.”* In this text, Jesus and His disciples traveled up to Jerusalem for a feast. When they arrived in town, Jesus made His way to the Sheep Gate, in the northwest corner of Jerusalem, to a pool called Bethesda, meaning *“house of mercy.”*

The pool of Bethesda, a large water cistern with five pillars, was a place disabled people went for healing. You might notice verse 4 in this passage is missing. You might notice a footnote containing verses 3b-4, which reads, *“waiting for the moving of the water, because an angel would go down into the pool from time to time and stir up the water. Then the first one who got in after the water was stirred up recovered from whatever ailment he had.”* This extra information was likely added sometime after John the apostle wrote this Gospel. At some point, scribes felt inclined to add this information, perhaps to explain the cultural significance of the pool and why sick and disabled people congregated there. When looking at late manuscript editions to Scripture, it’s important to read them with cautious discernment. Under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, John the Baptist did not feel inclined to provide details about the substance of these “stirring” waters. Perhaps there was an underground spring that fed the pool and created the effect of movement in the water. Perhaps there was a myth surrounding the waters that was passed throughout the community. Or perhaps, God worked a series of miracles in this space over the years, and people congregated to see if He would do it again. It is best to approach



these verses open-handed. The focus shouldn't be on why the waters moved—the real focus should be on Jesus and how He moved in the man's life.

*“One man was there who had been disabled for thirty-eight years”* (v. 5). In biblical times, there were no social services or government programs to care for disabled persons. Families and communities came together to provide for needs, and many of them were forced to beg for coins or food to survive. Imagine this man's desperate need. He had spent thirty-eight years waiting beside a pool of water, hoping that a miracle would come his way. The desperation of his condition moved Jesus to extend mercy.

*When Jesus saw him lying there and realized he had already been there a long time, he said to him, “Do you want to get well?”* (v. 6). At first glance, this seems like an odd question. Why wouldn't the man want to get better? Having spent thirty-eight years living as a disabled person would surely have made the man desire healing. If not, why did he continue to lie there? However, the verb usage here implies some sort of desire on the man's part. Jesus wanted to know if he desired to be freed of his infirmity. Perhaps Jesus knew the man's long-suffering had taken what meager hope he had that his situation could improve. The seemingly hopeless nature of the man's suffering was made worse in his reply that he lacked a single person who would help him into the “healing” waters (v. 7). The man, in his dire circumstance, appeared totally alone.

*“Get up,” Jesus told him, “pick up your mat and walk.” Instantly the man got well, picked up his mat, and started to walk.*” The man's body immediately responded to the healing power of Jesus's words. While he had waited nearly four decades for someone to carry him into waters that likely would have offered no healing, Jesus spoke healing into the man's life in an instant and everything changed. The healed man began to walk, and Jesus slipped away into the crowd.

In verses 9-13, two dynamics occurred at once: The man was healed, and controversy broke out. The Jewish leaders wanted more details than the man was able to supply. Jesus had healed on the sabbath, breaking one of their laws. The synagogue leaders' strict adherence to tradition took the law far-beyond Scripture, heaping on regulations that God never intended. The man doing “work” by carrying his mat is a perfect example. Jesus always upheld God's law, but He often broke man's tradition. Mercy triumphed over tradition. As Hosea 6:6 says, *“For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.”* The Jewish leaders of the day loved the external expressions of sacrificial living more than they loved seeing a man set free of his affliction. Christ's work isn't bound by our understanding of time. This man had suffered for thirty-eight long years. In Christ's mercy, He set the man free from suffering even one day longer. As Timothy Keller wrote, *“God does not rest from mercy. The Sabbath is not a pause in compassion but a picture of it.”*

*After this, Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, “See, you are well. Do not sin anymore, so that something worse doesn't happen to you”* (v. 14). Jesus sought out the man at the temple. He addressed the man's spiritual condition, which was ultimately more important



than his physical healing. In fact, Jesus possibly implied that this particular man's ailment was in part connected to his lack of repentance. This is an example of a place where Scripture is descriptive rather than prescriptive. Jesus had divine knowledge of the man's spiritual condition. He had perfect discernment on the connection between his faith and his ailment. Scripture is clear that not all suffering is a result of sin (Job 1:22; John 9:2). Like the Pharisees who misapplied the law to take it farther than God intended, we must be careful not to misapply a single healing into a unilateral statement on suffering and personal sin.

Jesus's healing was an act of mercy. The man didn't ask for healing, didn't have faith for healing, and didn't show immediate gratitude for healing. However, God's mercy is greater than our efforts and attitude. Psalm 103:10 says, *"He has not dealt with us as our sins deserve or repaid us according to our iniquities."* In this text, Jesus demonstrated God's deep mercy, and His deep concern for and power over the suffering of His people.

## DISCUSS

- *Why do you think the man continued by the pool for thirty-eight years? What does this say about his life and hope?*
- *How can discouragement or disappointment keep us from seeing God's movement in our lives?*
- *Have you ever experienced a season of waiting, only to later discover that Jesus was right on time?*
- *What does this story reveal about Jesus's authority over human traditions and expectations?*

### **3. Christ is working everywhere, all the time.**

John 5:17-18: *Jesus responded to them, "My Father is still working, and I am working also." This is why the Jews began trying all the more to kill him: Not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal to God.*

#### *Unpacking John 5:17-18*

Many family trades are learned by sons and daughters right alongside their parents. The company's values and the secrets of the business are passed down from one generation to the next as younger employees take on the role of carrying the business into the future. Jesus used the imagery of a parent and son working, not to describe apprenticeship, but perfect unity. Jesus's mission on earth wasn't just to replicate the Father's work—He was carrying it out as One with Him.

Both the official's son and the paralytic experienced transformation through Jesus's word—but His actions stirred controversy. As the religious leaders question Him, Jesus revealed a greater truth: He works in perfect unity with His Father, whose mercy never rests. If the religious leaders



had reason to dislike Jesus before, this gave them added ammunition. After this encounter, they didn't just want to discredit Jesus, they wanted Him killed.

*Jesus responded to them, "My Father is still working, and I am working also" (v. 17). Jesus responded to the Jews who persecuted Him for healing on the Sabbath (v. 16). Their strict interpretation of the law made them blind to Christ's act of compassion. In response, Jesus told them that His Father "is working until now" (literal translation), and that He Himself is presently working. God is at work, and Christ is also presently working. Don't rush past the truth of Christ's statement—He and His Father are at work on the Sabbath and every other day of the week. Like the paralyzed man, God was at work in our lives before we knew Him. Isaiah 45:5 says, "I am the LORD, and there is no other; there is no God but me. I will strengthen you, though you do not know me." God is working all the time—He never grows tired or weak. "He will not allow your foot to slip; your Protector will not slumber. Indeed, the Protector of Israel does not slumber or sleep" (Psalm 121:3-4).*

*This is why the Jews began trying all the more to kill him: Not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal to God (v. 18). Where we might read verse 17 and find comfort in the truth that God the Father and the Son are always working, the Jews heard blasphemy. They became enraged at the thought that Jesus called God His own Father. In the Old Testament, Father was an unusual title for God, reserved mostly for describing His relationship as the Father of the nation of Israel (Deuteronomy 32:6; Psalm 103:13; Isaiah 63:16). Jesus, however, highlighted the relationship He has with God. In Mark 14:36, Jesus prayed before His arrest and crucifixion: *And he said, "Abba, Father! All things are possible for you. Take this cup away from me. Nevertheless, not what I will, but what you will."* Abba was a name for Father, used by little children as a sign of affection. Jesus's words expressed the intimacy and tenderness of His relationship to the Father.*

Not only did Jesus call God "Father" repeatedly throughout the Gospels, He gave us permission to do the same. We do not come to the Father as co-equals like Jesus. We come to the Father through Jesus. He secured our relationship with God through His sacrifice on the cross. God's affection and tenderness are poured on us as His children. Through the Holy Spirit, we walk in freedom as sons and daughters of God. *For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear. Instead, you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father!"* (Romans 8:15).

Whatever we face, we can hold onto two truths from this short passage. First, God is always at work, no matter the circumstance. Second, God is at work on behalf of His children (all believers) as we come to Him through faith in the atoning work of Christ on the cross. Christ's power is at work everywhere, all the time. We can experience that power at work in our lives as we draw near to Him.



## DISCUSS

- *How does Jesus's statement about the Father shape your understanding of God's work in the world?*
- *What does it mean for us, as followers of Christ, to join in that ongoing work?*
- *How does the knowledge that God is always working encourage you today?*

## DEEPER FOCUS

### REFLECT ON THE TEXT

## DISCUSS

- *In today's text, we saw a man who received healing by faith, and a man who received healing without expressing faith. What does that reveal to you about Christ's character?*

### RESPOND TO THE TEXT

What is harder to believe—that God is always working, or that we can come to Him like a little child to his or her Father? How does today's text enhance your view of God's character?

## APPLY

In what area of your life do you need a reminder of Christ's ongoing work? How can you be reminded of His promises when the solution feels far away?

## REFERENCES

Timothy Keller, The Power of Deep Rest, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-power-of-deep-rest/#:~:text=Therefore%20the%20Lord%20your%20God,in%20Pharaoh's%20brick%20production%20system>. 2012.