

LESSON ONE

Physical and Spiritual Healing

FOCAL TEXT

Luke 5:12–26

BACKGROUND

Luke 4:38–44; 5:12–6:11

MAIN IDEA

Jesus' healing touch met the physical and spiritual needs of a leper and a paralytic.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

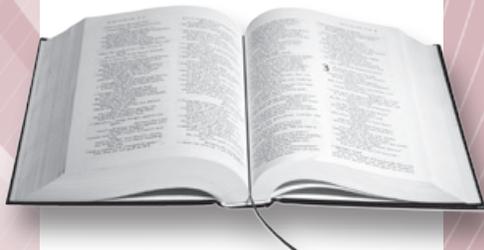
In what ways do we need to experience Jesus' healing touch?

STUDY AIM

To describe Jesus' encounters with a leper and a paralytic and to identify areas where I may need his healing touch

QUICK READ

Though the form of healing may not be the same as with the leper or paralytic, God helps us to deal positively with whatever affects us negatively. God still heals, restores, and redirects us.



Preaching, teaching, and healing are often identified as the three-fold ministry of Jesus. Jesus came telling the good news of the gospel, teaching his disciples through the ages about God and the godly life, and bringing wholeness and health to many people. This study of the Book of Luke focuses on his personal touch in meeting the needs of all people. For more information on this study, see the article, “Introducing *The Gospel of Luke: Jesus’ Personal Touch*” in this *Study Guide*.¹

Today’s Scripture deals with two persons whom Jesus healed. One was cast out from his society, a diseased man who people avoided. The second was of such great concern to his friends that they literally went *through the roof* in order to get Jesus to help them. These two encounters encourage us to turn to Jesus for help in dealing with our own needs for healing. These needs could include healing of the body, emotions, self-perception, or relationships. Jesus cares about our needs and is willing to extend his healing touch.

LUKE 5:12–26

¹² While Jesus was in one of the towns, a man came along who was covered with leprosy. When he saw Jesus, he fell with his face to the ground and begged him, “Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.” ¹³ Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. “I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!” And immediately the leprosy left him. ¹⁴ Then Jesus ordered him, “Don’t tell anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them.”

¹⁵ Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses.

¹⁶ But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed. ¹⁷ One day as he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law, who had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem, were sitting there. And the power of the Lord was present for him to heal the sick. ¹⁸ Some men came carrying a paralytic on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus. ¹⁹ When they could not find a way to do this because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right

in front of Jesus. ²⁰ When Jesus saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven." ²¹ The Pharisees and the teachers of the law began thinking to themselves, "Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" ²² Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, "Why are you thinking these things in your hearts? ²³ Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? ²⁴ But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins . . ." He said to the paralyzed man, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." ²⁵ Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God. ²⁶ Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, "We have seen remarkable things today."

God's Love for Outcasts (5:12–16)

Leprosy was a dreaded disease during biblical times and is still common in many parts of the world. It manifests itself in a variety of types, but commonly a person with leprosy has skin lesions and nodules. The nerves can become so affected that one loses the sensation of touch or even pain. Left untreated, leprosy can lead to numbness in the legs and arms, disfigurement, and can be the cause of many accidents. Though we know much about leprosy today and can successfully treat it, people knew little about it centuries ago. People in biblical times practiced the best preventive medicine they knew—to avoid leprosy they avoided close contact with those who were infected. In those days leprosy was as devastating as AIDS or cancer is in our time. The additional implications of the disease related to social interaction and religious involvement increased the lepers' misery.

Leviticus 13 and 14 provided instruction for how people were to deal with leprosy. A key part of the prevention of leprosy involved lepers having to continually identify themselves as *unclean*. Other health problems carried a similar penalty, but lepers were a particular object of scorn. Not only did they suffer with an awful disease, there was also a commonly held misunderstanding about lepers. Many religious people

believed that lepers were receiving a deserved penalty, in that their physical condition was caused by their sinfulness. By Jesus' time, people generally avoided lepers and lepers generally avoided other people. Most people were fearful of coming into contact with a leper.

In light of the first century world, Jesus' actions with the leper were even more amazing. Jesus did not tell him to stay away or rebuke him. Jesus did not avoid him or run from him. The man fell at Jesus' feet, face down, and begged Jesus to "make me clean" (Luke 5:12). The man wondered if Jesus was willing to heal him. Then Jesus touched him, saying "I am willing" (5:13). In touching him, Jesus violated the religious rules regarding leprosy; however, his touch did not heal the leper. But when Jesus said, "Be clean," (5:13) the man was immediately healed.

Jesus healed in many ways. He healed a royal official's son in Cana by long distance. Jesus did so because the man believed Jesus could heal his son, and then asked him to do so (John 4:43–54). He healed a woman with an issue of blood after she touched the hem of his garment. The healing did not happen, however, because of her touch, but because of her faith to touch and believe in Jesus (Mark 5:25–34). He spit on some dirt and made mud, then placed the dirt on the eyes of a man who was born blind. Jesus then told the man to wash in the pool of Siloam. The blind man obeyed Jesus and he "went and washed, and came home seeing" (John 9:7).

Jesus healed people. He had the compassion, power, and authority to do so. The crowds liked what Jesus did, though the first century Jewish leaders were confounded by his actions. They should have rejoiced at what happened to so many people; instead they felt threatened by Jesus and his growing popularity. Jesus knew that some of his popularity was due to his miracles (see John 2:22–25), not just those that brought healing, but also those that revealed his power to calm the sea and feed thousands with a limited supply of fish and bread.

Jesus could have spent all his time in individual healing experiences or he could have announced, "Everyone, be healed!" and that would have taken care of leprosy and all diseases. As nice as that would have been, the day of no more mourning or sorrow, no more sickness or pain (Rev. 21:1–4) is still in the future. Jesus did not heal everyone because that was not his purpose. In the process of his ministry, however, he helps us understand that all sin brings suffering, but our sin is not necessarily the

reason for all our sufferings. Suffering is part of our common humanity.

When Jesus stopped to heal the leper, it was not the time for a seminar on leprosy; it was a time to exercise his compassion and prerogative as the Son of God to heal one person. Jesus instructed the man to show himself to the priest, which followed the Old Testament ritual (Lev. 14:2–32). He also told the man not to tell anyone what happened, but word spread quickly, so much so that “crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed” (5:15). Apparently the man was so blessed he could not restrain his tongue.

Prayer, God’s Way to Renewal (5:16)

“But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed” (5:16). Today’s Scripture is about two people who were healed: a leper and a paralytic. The linking verse between the two stories does not indicate that these events followed quickly in time. Underline the word *often* in this verse. After Jesus healed the leper, he turned aside to spend time alone with his

PHARISEES

The Pharisees arose during the time between the Old and New Testaments. Initially they were a lay movement that helped Judaism survive the tough times of domination by foreign powers. By the time of Christ, they became a leading division within Judaism. The Pharisees appear frequently in the Gospels, fulfilling their self-appointed role as guardian of the faith and making sure that Jesus, a popular young teacher, was observing all the ways of the Jewish faith. As religious legalists, they came under severe criticism from Jesus (Luke 11:37–52). Luke wrote, “The Pharisees and the teachers of the law began to oppose him fiercely and to besiege him with questions, waiting to catch him in something he might say” (Luke 11:53–54). Their hostility toward Christians continued long after the resurrection of Jesus.

Saul was a famous Pharisee in the New Testament who was converted on his way to persecute Christians in Damascus (Acts 9:1–31). He became known as Paul, one of the first Christian missionaries and writer of many New Testament books.

GOING THROUGH THE ROOF TO REACH OUTCASTS

You are in charge of a missions committee in your church, with a specific assignment. Identify individuals or groups who are treated like outcasts. Bring a report to the church that includes: (1) attitudes toward these persons that need to change within your congregation, (2) practical ways of developing personal relationships with these persons, and (3) suggestions for how the church can go *through the roof* in bringing outcast and ignored people to God and to the fellowship of your church.

Heavenly Father. We certainly can learn from that. Rather than building on his popularity as a miracle worker, Jesus paused to pray and spend time alone with God. Could that be a key to his power and perspective on life? How could our lives be affected if we adjusted our calendars and rearranged our priorities to spend time alone with God?

Spiritual and Physical Healing (5:17–26)

Imagine the scene. The master teacher and preacher had the right audience. The big time religious leaders were present and the house was packed. We do not have a record of what Jesus was teaching, though every moment with Jesus would have been a teachable moment. The teaching time soon became a healing time. Doorways were blocked by the committed and curious people, and by those who were sick and wanted to be healed. Into that scene, four latecomers arrived, carrying a man on a stretcher. They could not get in. They all believed Jesus could heal the sick man, but they could not get to Jesus. They were not deterred. They took the man to the roof, made an opening in the roof, and lowered the man into Jesus' presence. What a scene that must have been. Can you imagine the impact on the crowd?

It was a good show, but Jesus saw something else. Jesus saw their faith. That statement could refer to the faith of the four friends, but it probably refers to the faith of five people (the paralytic included). Seeing their

faith, Jesus first addressed the man's spiritual needs. There are no formulas for the order in which needs are met: spiritual first and then physical, for the pattern varies. Jesus told the paralyzed man, "Friend, your sins are forgiven" (5:20). What a wonderful word to hear, *friend!* Jesus called him his friend. Then he said, "your sins are forgiven." I believe Jesus wants to say that to all of us.

Why were the teachers of the law and the Pharisees present? They often showed up to watch Jesus, to catch him doing something that was outside of their traditions. If they had seen him touch a leper, they would have howled, but they did hear him speak of forgiving someone's sins. Their minds were having trouble digesting those words. Their unspoken questions are understandable: *Who is Jesus and who can forgive sins?* Unfortunately they modified the questions to inwardly condemn Jesus for blasphemy and for doing something they reserved for God alone. In their understanding, the penalty for such blasphemy would be to have Jesus put to death.

Before these religious leaders could speak, Jesus did. "Why are you thinking these things in your hearts?" (5:22). He then gave them something to reflect on: which was easier, forgive the man's sins or perform a miracle of healing? Jesus implied that it was easier to say something than do it—easier to say *I forgive* rather than actually heal someone and enable them to walk. Jesus did not wait for reflection or answers from his critics. Instead he brought up the issue of authority. What authority did Jesus act upon? Earlier in Luke, we find Satan testing Jesus on the issue of authority (Luke 4:5–8). Jesus revealed his authority by saying "Worship the Lord your God and serve him only" (4:8). In the ministry that followed that time of testing, Jesus acted within the fullness of the authority of God. He obediently executed the mission of God. God gave him the power to both heal and forgive. To prove his point, Jesus brought forgiveness first to this man he would end up healing. He had the authority to do both. Jesus turned away from his critics and devoted his attention to the man he would heal.

The paralyzed man had already heard the unexpected, that his sins were forgiven. Now Jesus told him to rise, walk, and go home. Note the man's response: he immediately stood up in front of Jesus' critics, his friends, and the crowd. He then took his mat and started walking home, praising God all the way. What a different trip than the one he made earlier in the day! Can you imagine the excitement of his friends? They

had carried him to Jesus. They believed Jesus could help. Now they were walking home together!

What about the rest of the crowd? The critics were there, the committed were there, and probably the disciples as well. Luke does not differentiate between any of them, he simply writes that everyone was amazed and praised God. They were in awe of what must have been a holy moment. They said, “We have seen remarkable things today” (5:26). Perhaps this response could mean that even the critics gave Jesus some credit. The curious were amazed and Jesus’ followers were strengthened.

Then and Now

Jesus was a miracle worker who healed many people. In varied circumstances, Jesus restored people to the way God intended them to be. Paralyzed people were created to walk, blind people to see, and deaf people to hear (see Matt. 11:4–6). Jesus was in the restoration business. Jesus was also in the redirection business. He had a purpose for those who were healed. When they left him they praised God because they had seen and experienced remarkable things. Their future was different because of Jesus.

Whether we suffer alone or within a caring community, we can know that God is not unconcerned about our struggle. God chooses to be there with us, helping to restore us to his ideal will and helping to redirect us to the good future he has for us. Sometimes, we have to walk a lonely path to Jesus; most often however, others are willing to walk with us. When heartaches come your way or when you may need healing of any sort, don’t turn inward but look to Jesus. He will meet your need and he will provide people to help you when you cannot make your way to him alone. His healing touch is still available today.

QUESTIONS

1. If you could ask God for healing of any kind, what would you ask for? What areas of your life need his healing touch?

5. What is the most remarkable experience you have had with God?
Who can you share it with?

6. What in this lesson helps you to prepare for Christmas?

NOTES

1. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations in lessons 1–13 and the Christmas lesson are taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 Biblica.