

LESSON ONE
*Physical and
Spiritual Healing*

FOCAL TEXT

Luke 5:12–26

BACKGROUND

Luke 4:38–44; 5:12–6:11

MAIN IDEA

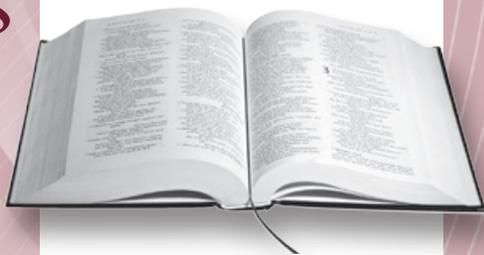
Jesus' healing touch met the physical and spiritual needs of a leper and a paralytic.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

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

TEACHING AIM

To lead adults to describe Jesus' encounters with a leper and a paralytic, and to identify areas where they may need his healing touch



UNIT ONE

Meeting Personal Needs

BIBLE COMMENTS

Understanding the Context

Luke provides a unique perspective on Jesus when compared with the other Gospels. The first part of a two-part work (Luke-Acts), this Gospel presents Jesus as a friend of the poor and of all who are oppressed or disenfranchised. Luke the physician seems to take special interest in Jesus' healing ministry, including those he healed or delivered from demons. Luke also records that Jesus showed remarkable kindness to women, children, slaves, and outcasts such as lepers, tax collectors, and Samaritans.¹

About half of the material in Luke is not found in the other three Gospels. The Gospel of Matthew is focused on Jesus as the long-awaited Jewish royal messiah. Mark points to Jesus as the savior whose life of serving others testifies to his identity as God's son. John reveals Jesus as the great "I am" and giver of eternal life who is worthy of belief. Luke, however, presents Jesus as the sympathetic savior whose love for those who are oppressed points his hearers to the Father.

The Gospel of Luke is easily divided into two main sections. The first half (Luke 1:1–9:50) primarily speaks of Jesus' life and ministry in Galilee. The remainder of the Gospel provides an account of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem where he was crucified and rose again. The passage for this lesson comes from the section that tells of Jesus' Galilean ministry.

The events of Luke 4:38 to 6:11 take place in and around the Galilean village of Capernaum, a town that served as the headquarters for Jesus' ministry in Galilee. Capernaum was a fishing village located on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. The two stories of healing that we will consider occur after Jesus had already healed many, including Simon Peter's mother-in-law and some who were possessed by demons. Jesus then withdrew and spent time alone while the crowds continued searching for him. Luke 5 records that Jesus enlisted some fishermen as his first disciples; then continued his healing ministry before inviting Levi (also known as Matthew) to be his disciple. Luke informs his readers of the growing criticism of Jesus by the Jewish religious leaders (5:30–6:11).

Interpreting the Scriptures

Jesus Heals a Leprous Man (5:12–16)

5:12. The man is described as “full of leprosy.” While many skin diseases would have been considered leprosy in Jesus’ day, this description indicates that the man had a variety that covered his entire body. This could also mean that the disease was in an advanced stage, which would have been more painful. In Old Testament days, leprosy was often understood to be a punishment for sin. For example, when King Uzziah disregarded God’s instructions, the Lord punished him by making him a leper until the day of his death (2 Chron. 26:16–21). Certainly one of the most difficult parts of having leprosy was being considered unclean and thus unable to have human contact with just about anyone. Almost certainly the crowd would have been surprised and upset to see a leprosy person approaching Jesus so publicly. The leper’s immediate response to seeing Jesus was to fall on his face and express his faith in Jesus to heal him if Jesus was willing. It is likely the crowd parted quickly so as to avoid any potential contact with the man.

5:13. The most amazing part of what happened next was that Jesus *touch*ed the man. Touching a person with leprosy was simply not done. It would result in the person contracting the same unclean status as the person with leprosy. In effect, Jesus became unclean so that this leprosy man could become clean. And yet, rather than Jesus contracting leprosy, the leprosy man experienced healing. What happened amazed everyone. Luke records that the leprosy man was cleansed *immediately*. Can you imagine the reaction of the crowd? Moments before they had seen this man with sores all over his body, only to look again and see that his skin was completely clear and clean! Jesus’ touch expressed great tenderness and compassion, and also his willingness to risk his own status in order to heal and restore the man.

5:14. Interestingly, Jesus told the man to tell no one, but instead to show himself to a priest so he could be officially declared clean. Priests served as health inspectors in such cases (see Leviticus 13–14). Once approved by the priest, the leprosy man would again be able to have conversation with others and rejoin his family and community. This shows that

Jesus had as much interest in the man's restoration to society as in his physical healing.

5:15–16. Although Jesus instructed the man to tell no one, the story about what happened continued to spread, and more people came looking for healing. Jesus responded to the pressure of the crowds by slipping away “to the wilderness and pray” (also see Luke 4:42). The wording here indicates that this was a regular practice for Jesus, and this gives us an insight into his humanity. When he was overwhelmed by the needs of the people who sought him, he had to get away and be alone with the Father. The text reminds us that Jesus did not withdraw for physical rest alone, but specifically to spend time communing with the Father in prayer.

Jesus Heals a Paralyzed Man (5:17–26)

5:17. Luke tells us that one day when Jesus was teaching, Jewish religious leaders had come from all around Galilee, from Judea, and even from Jerusalem to hear him. Likely these Pharisees and teachers of the law (better known as scribes) had heard about the great number of people Jesus healed in Capernaum. Both Pharisees and scribes worked hard to follow the Law of Moses. (The Law of Moses would have been understood as the first five books of our Old Testament today.) These Pharisees and teachers of the law were greatly admired by the people, and the context seems to indicate that they came to determine whether or not Jesus was teaching and ministering with legitimate authority. Ironically, most of these leaders, who were supposedly living a life that was very near to God, did not that recognize or believe that Jesus' healing power was from God.

5:18–19. When the friends of the paralyzed man could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd that had gathered, they carried him up on the roof of the house by means of an outside staircase. The roofs of Palestinian homes were typically made of branches laid over the beams and covered with a layer of dried mud. So it was possible to dig down through it.²

5:20. Did you notice that Jesus saw “*their* faith” (italics mine)? What an expression of faith for these men to figure out a way to lower their friend

down through the roof right in front of Jesus. And then Jesus gave the paralyzed man even more than he was seeking. He declared the man's sins to be forgiven.

5:21–24. Not surprisingly, the Jewish leaders began to accuse Jesus of blasphemy, for they rightly believed that only God could forgive sins. But Jesus was aware of their thoughts, and he then proved his authority to forgive sins by healing the paralyzed man. What a dramatic moment, as Jesus healed the man in the midst of accusations of blasphemy by a room full of Bible experts and theologians! He commanded the man, “I say to you, get up, and pick up your stretcher and go home.”

5:25. The man obeyed immediately, getting up in front of everyone, taking his bed, and heading home. The text says he “went home glorifying God.” Whatever the man had hoped for when he woke up that morning, he could not have imagined he would have experienced both spiritual and physical healing before the day was over.

5:26. Luke says, “They were *all* struck with astonishment and began glorifying God” (*italics mine*). That includes the scribes and Pharisees. One of the beautiful parts of this story is that Jesus' miracle of healing and forgiveness brought all of the people together in celebrating what he had done for the paralyzed man. No one who was there that day ever forgot what happened.

Focusing on the Meaning

The story of the healing of the leprous man reminds us that Jesus is interested in people who are considered outcasts by the rest of society. Perhaps today you and I know some people we would consider to be beyond hope for healing and/or forgiveness. The leprous man was one of those in the eyes of the Jews in the first century world. Jesus brought restoration and hope to this man, and he continues his ministry to outcasts today.

Although Jesus did not tell the leper that his sins were forgiven, this would have been assumed by those who saw his leprosy as a punishment for sin. In the story of the paralyzed man, Jesus explicitly told the man

that his sins were forgiven. Jesus then healed the man as evidence that he had the authority to forgive sins. Interestingly, the same New Testament word that is translated “save” can also be translated “heal”, “restore”, “deliver”, or “make whole.” So in each of these stories, Jesus provided both physical and spiritual healing. The two are intertwined. No one who witnessed what Jesus did that day could doubt that he came from God.

The story of the paralyzed man also reminds us that our faith as friends of those in need is powerful. It was when Jesus saw their faith—his and that of his friends—that he spoke to the paralyzed man and changed his life from that day forward. This underlines how important it is to be a part of a community of people who believe in Jesus. It is noteworthy that these friends did not give up and leave their friend behind so they would have a better chance of getting to Jesus themselves.

I have a friend named Mike who gives thanks often for a family that lived near him when he was a boy and regularly went by to pick him up for church. Eventually he gave his life to Christ, and today he is a tremendous Christian husband and father. That family did not give up on Mike, and Jesus changed his life. Is there a “Mike” in your life whom you could introduce to the Savior?

TEACHING PLANS

Teaching Plan—Varied Learning Activities

Connect with Life

1. Before the session, enlist a person who has been impacted by someone who made a sacrifice for them, or has sacrificed something to help another person. Prepare a list of questions and conduct an interview with the person. If you have difficulty finding a modern day story, conduct an interview with a class member who portrays a Bible character whom Jesus helped.

Explain to the class that this study of the Gospel of Luke will focus on Jesus' personal touch and how we are to follow his example of personal sacrifice and service to others.

Guide Bible Study

2. Present a mini-lecture to highlight the focus of this study of Luke's Gospel. Use the material in the introduction section of the *Study Guide* to outline your lecture. Ask how the personal stories Luke included supported his mission to convince people of the truth about Jesus.
3. Describe the physical, emotional, and social effects of leprosy using the notes from the *Study Guide*. Search online for pictures of the physical damage caused by leprosy. Print the pictures or create a slideshow to present to the class. Ask class members to list other diseases that exist in our day that have the same emotional or social effects. Write their answers on a marker board.
4. Read Luke 5:12–15. Give class members a sheet of paper and ask them to imagine they are the man Jesus healed. Instruct them to write how it felt to be an outcast and what it meant to them when they experienced the healing touch of Jesus. Ask for a couple of volunteers to share their story.
5. Enlist a member to read Luke 5:16. Lead a brief discussion about why Luke made this statement about Jesus. Point out that Jesus made prayer a priority even during hectic times. Guide class members through a few minutes of silent prayer. Suggest specific areas of need on which they might focus their prayers.
6. Enlist two volunteers to read Luke 5:17–26. Instruct one volunteer to read as a narrator and the other volunteer to read the words of Jesus. Write the following words on a marker board: "Jesus" and "Pharisees." State that the Pharisees were a group of religious experts. They were known for their exact observance of the Jewish religion and their accurate exposition of the law. Lead a discussion contrasting the reaction of Jesus with the reaction of the Pharisees to the paralyzed man. List the differences on the board. Discuss the importance of Jesus dealing with the man's spiritual condition

before he dealt with his physical condition. Point out that the cause of the man's paralysis is not mentioned. Mention that the common belief of the time was that physical ailments were the result of sin. Note that Jesus does not connect the man's sin to his physical condition.

Encourage Application

7. Divide the class into two teams. Assign one team the title of "Larry Law Keeper: head of church security", and the other team "Connie Compassion: head of the greeter ministry." Present the following case study: A man in a wheelchair shows up for worship at your church. He is dirty, smelly, wearing a large overcoat, and carrying a backpack. Ask, *How would you respond to the man based on your role in the church? How could Connie and Larry work together?*
8. Lead class members to think of a recent experience when Jesus did a remarkable thing in their lives (physically, emotionally, or spiritually.) Provide a large foam or cloth mat and markers. Encourage class members to write their story on the mat. Display the mat in the classroom for the remainder of the study of Luke.
9. Read Luke 5:25–26 again and highlight how the paralyzed man and the crowd reacted to Jesus' healing. Ask class members, *How did you respond when Jesus did the remarkable thing in your life?* Challenge members to find a specific way to give praise to God for what he did in their lives. Give each member an index card and instruct them to write one way they will give praise to God this week for his healing in their lives. Challenge them to put the card in a prominent place as a reminder. Close in prayer thanking God for being a God who meets our personal needs through his touch in our lives.

Teaching Plan—Lecture and Questions

Connect with Life

1. Inform the class that Luke’s main purpose in writing his Gospel was to present the truth of who Jesus is, and to show what is required to follow him. Luke used many stories to illustrate this point. Ask for volunteers to share who Jesus is to them, and why. Share a story of your own.

Introduce the study by stating that Luke shows Jesus as one who was, and is, willing to get involved in people’s lives. Note that if we are going to be true disciples, we will also need to be personally involved in meeting the needs of others.

Guide Bible Study

2. Before the session, enlist a class member or a doctor in the community to share research on the physical damage that occurs to those suffering with leprosy. Also point out the isolation that comes along with the disease. Ask, *How might the physical pain and isolation of leprosy affect someone emotionally?* Enlist three volunteers to read a Luke 5:12–16: a narrator, the man with leprosy, and Jesus.
3. Research and present information on the positive effects of the human touch. Lead a discussion of the significance of Jesus touching the man with leprosy. Inform the class that Jesus’ instructions for the man to present himself to the priest were in keeping with the Levitical law. Share an overview of what was required as part of the cleansing and restoration process found in Leviticus 14:2–32.
4. Read Luke 5:17–26. Use the material from the article “Pharisees” in the *Study Guide* to share information about the Pharisees. Inform the class that the role of a Pharisee was to ensure the Hebrews obeyed the laws of the Jewish religion, as well as to communicate the law accurately. Discuss the differences between the faith of the man with leprosy and the paralytic, versus the legalism of the Pharisees. Ask, *Why did the people see Jesus’ healing as a reason to praise God, but the Pharisees saw it as an opportunity to criticize?*

5. Compare and contrast the stories of the man with leprosy with the paralytic man. Discuss possible reasons why Jesus told the man with leprosy not to tell anyone about his healing, while he healed the paralytic in front of a crowd. Ask, *Why did Jesus address the paralytic's spiritual need before he addressed his physical need? What did the two miracles reveal about Jesus and his authority? How did the people in these two stories demonstrate faith?*
6. State that the Pharisees had listened to Jesus' teaching and perhaps had witnessed other miracles. Ask, *Why did the Pharisees respond negatively when Jesus forgave the man's sins?* Discuss the fact that according to Jewish law, blasphemy was a capital offense. Ask, *What are some possible reasons the Pharisees in the crowd missed the truth about Jesus? What are some ways the miracle might have impacted Jesus' critics?* Lead the class in listing other remarkable things Jesus did in his earthly ministry. Ask class members to identify some remarkable things Jesus has done in their lives. Write these answers on a marker board.

Encourage Application

7. Enlist a class member or someone in your church who has recently experienced God's healing (emotionally or physically) to speak to the class. Ask them to share their story and the impact it has made on their lives. Point out that the crowd praised God after the former paralytic picked up his mat and walked. Provide pens and a response sheet and lead members to write their own praise to God for his healing in their lives. Ask them to also write about something in their life that needs God's healing touch today. Close in a time of prayer praising God for his care and compassion. (A copy of the response sheet is available in "Teaching Resource Items" for this study at www.baptistwaypress.org.)

NOTES

1. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations in lessons 1–3 are from the New American Standard Bible, 1995 edition.
2. Craig S. Keener, ed., *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press), 202.