



Day 3: One Powerful Healer

Bible Passages: Matthew 9:1-8,18-33

Lesson Truth: The one true God is the Healer to whom we can turn for help concerning physical well-being.

Teaching Aim: To lead adults to thank God for His healing care and concern about our physical well-being and to decide how they will minister in His name to other people

An illness disorients you. It makes you feel bad, worries you, and disrupts your normal routine. Sometimes you cannot attend to tasks such as working or carrying out your family duties. At such times you need some support.

This Bible study points to the help available from God who is the powerful Healer. He cares when ill health strikes you or someone close to you. This passage shows how the authority of Jesus, when combined with simple faith, makes a positive difference for those with physical afflictions.

Forgiveness and Healing *(Matt. 9:1-8)*

Jesus possessed miraculous powers that benefitted many people. After a healing in the region of Gadara (Matt. 8:28-34), Jesus returned by boat across the Sea of Galilee to His own town. During His ministry in Galilee, Jesus used Capernaum as His headquarters. There some men brought a friend to Jesus. They carried the man on a mat because he could not walk. Apparently they knew Jesus possessed healing power. They desired that power in their friend's life. Their faith challenges us to be open to ways to minister in God's name on behalf of people who need physical and spiritual healing.

The man and his friends approached Jesus without knowing how or if He would receive them. They simply barged into the house to make their plea. Those who dared bring this man to Jesus impressed Him with the boldness of their faith. Jesus addressed the paralyzed man and told him to have courage. He connected with the man by using the intimate term "son." Jesus showed openness to the plea for help.

Jesus then made an astounding statement to the man, "Your sins are forgiven." This raises the question of how sin relates to sickness. Was the man's illness a direct result of sin? Certainly many people of that day held this view, but Jesus rejected it (John 9:2-3). Sometimes sin can produce problems with physical health. For instance, liver disease may be caused by consumption of alcohol. But all illnesses cannot be traced directly to a specific sin. Indirectly though, sin must be blamed for all bad things that happen in our world. In the beginning, because humans chose to sin, evil and imperfection entered the realm of human existence (Gen. 3). All people since then, because they have an inherited nature to sin, have joined those first humans in sin. Forgiveness then is something all people need.

Note that unconditional forgiveness preceded the healing. The man was not required to obey any law or to perform any other acts before Jesus forgave him. The man and his friends had faith, and Jesus forgave him.

Jesus' act of forgiveness caught the attention of some teachers of the law. These 26 religious leaders were experts in interpreting the Old Testament. They knew that only God can forgive sin (Isa. 43:25.) Privately they accused Jesus of blasphemy against God. They kept their thoughts to themselves because they hesitated to challenge Jesus publicly at this point. Blasphemy was a serious charge. It meant "to speak against another" or "to defame." How had Jesus spoken against God or damaged God's character? In their view, by offering forgiveness, Jesus had performed an act reserved for God alone. An attempt to usurp God's place amounted to blasphemy.

Although the teachers kept their ideas private, Jesus knew what they were thinking. He openly accused

them of entertaining evil thoughts. Jesus sensed a hurtful anger within them. This set Jesus and the teachers in direct opposition because each thought the other harbored evil. Of course, only Jesus was correct because He had no evil in Him.

How could they resolve this standoff? Jesus proposed a test by asking if it would be easier to say that one's sins were forgiven or to heal someone. Certainly forgiveness is more difficult to prove because it takes place within a person spiritually. A physical healing, however, can be verified in the person's restoration to health. So Jesus healed the man as a way to prove His authority to forgive.

Jesus wanted the religious leaders to know what He could do. He often used "the Son of Man" to identify Himself. He took the title from the Old Testament (Dan. 7:13). Jesus interpreted the term to refer to the fact that His ultimate victory would come through suffering. Using this title in public created less discord than using the term "Messiah."

With this action Jesus claimed the authority to heal and to forgive sins. From whom did Jesus receive this authority? It came from God. Jesus had the right to forgive and heal because the Father granted it. Also, since Jesus was God, Jesus had the power to forgive and heal because God is all-powerful. Thus Jesus backed up His claim to be able to forgive sin by performing the visible healing. He possessed the authority to do both. This authority set Jesus apart and identified Him as God's Son.

Jesus told the man to take up his mat and go home. What a simple statement. But it carried profound consequences. The man then walked. No doubt he rose immediately and jumped and danced all the way home. But the religious teachers got a message too. They said nothing but understood Jesus had identified Himself as God with the authority to do God's work. Thus they were opposed to Him. The crowds saw what happened and were filled with awe. This reverent fear reflected the positive impact Jesus' authoritative actions made on many who saw them.

In viewing this miracle, the people began to see Jesus for who He was—the authoritative Son of God. He showed that God cares about the physical and spiritual needs of people. This account also demonstrates that you can have an impact on people with physical problems. Through your ministry God can bless them too.

Touch and Healing *(Matt. 9:18-26)*

With the incident related to the paralyzed man, Jesus proved He did not fit into the mold of the traditional religion of His day. Succeeding verses show Jesus' words and deeds continued that theme. Jesus associated with sinners to meet their needs spiritually. The religious leaders refused to mix with such people for fear of defilement (vv. 9-13). Jesus also challenged the religious customs related to fasting (vv. 14-17). He pointed to the truth that a rules-oriented religion leaves no room for the kind of living faith He practiced. People mattered to Jesus more than rules. His way reached into hurting human hearts more effectively than laws.

Jesus used His authority to demonstrate the priority He placed on people. Two intertwined miracles illustrate this by describing how He touched people where they hurt. As Jesus finished teaching, a leader approached Him. Mark 5:22 identifies this man as a synagogue leader. In this influential position he was responsible for arranging the details of the synagogue's weekly service.

This high-visibility leader named Jairus ignored what people might think and knelt before Jesus to request help. His daughter had died, and he asked Jesus to come and put His hand on her so she would live. In desperation the man threw off his pride and expressed faith that Jesus could help. Jesus immediately followed, taking His disciples along, presumably as witnesses.

On the way to the house a woman interrupted the entourage. She suffered from a disorder that had caused bleeding for 12 years. This ailment rendered her unclean by Jewish legal standards (Lev. 15:19-33). Her situation prohibited her from mingling with people, which would have made them unclean spiritually too.

The woman came up behind Jesus. Not wanting to taint Him she reached out to touch the edge of his garment. Possibly she grabbed a fringe or tassel that most Jews attached to the hem of their garments. They wore these at the four corners of the outer cloak to remind them of their commitment to obey God's commands (Num. 15:37-41). The woman hoped this touch would result in healing. If Jesus held the kind of power of which she had heard, getting this close might bring her relief.

It worked. Jesus sensed her touch on His garment, and He knew she needed help. Jesus required no explanation as to the nature of her problem. He knew. And He responded to her simple trust. She touched His clothes. He touched her life through His power. The word used here for healed can mean "saved." Jesus' salvation extended to the whole person including physical problems. Her uncleanness failed to contaminate Jesus. Instead He cleansed her.

At the ruler's house Jesus noticed flute players and a loudly lamenting crowd. A traditional Jewish funeral included paid mourners as well as professional musicians hired to play dirges. Their presence confirmed the girl's death. Jesus ordered them to leave and stated the girl was not dead but sleeping. Jesus used this term to deny the finality of death in the girl's life. His statement brought laughs from the professionals in the house. They knew death when they saw it. The girl was dead physically, but Jesus demonstrated that death did not have the last word in His presence.

Once Jesus emptied the house He took the girl by the hand. Immediately "she got up." Jesus apparently spoke no words but God's power flowed to her through His touch. Although the noisy crowds did not see the miracle, they saw the result. News of it spread quickly.

In both of these circumstances desperate people expressed faith and reached out to Jesus. He reached back to them. You can trust God to respond to you when you turn to Him for help in times of sickness. Be assured that even in seemingly hopeless situations God cares enough to be present with you.

Faith and Healing *(Matt. 9:27-31)*

As Jesus left the leader's house, two blind men followed Him. They kept calling out for Him to help them. Because of their blindness, these men had many difficulties, including the lack of opportunities to earn a living. Unlike today, no accommodations were made for this disability. Another factor related to the spiritual condition of the blind men enters into understanding this miracle. Physical blindness often symbolized the spiritual condition of unbelief. Jesus referred to the Pharisees as "blind guides" (Matt. 15:14).

These two men urgently asked Jesus to have mercy on them. They addressed Him as "Son of David," a term that goes back to the Old Testament account where God spoke to King David through the prophet Nathan. The prophet assured David he would have a son whose kingdom would endure forever (2 Sam. 7:12-16). Thus "Son of David" came to refer to the Messiah. The people anticipated the coming time of peace and miracles to be brought by the Messiah. Perhaps the blind men knew of the Scripture that proclaimed the messianic kingdom as a time when the blind will see (Isa. 29:18). Jesus never used this title to refer to Himself. He avoided attempts to be associated with a Messiah who came with political or military desires. He came instead to rule in human hearts.

Seemingly Jesus refused to acknowledge the two men until He went indoors. Perhaps He wanted to keep from showing any acceptance of the title "Son of David" which carried political and military connotations. At any rate, the blind men persisted on the walk between houses. They demonstrated a hopeful faith in their pursuit of Jesus. They followed Jesus into the house.

Once inside Jesus asked them if they thought he could do this. He sought a response of faith. Note that Jesus asked nothing about what they needed. He could see their infirmity. Unhesitatingly they replied, "Yes, Lord." They believed. Faith became the supreme issue; their healing resulted from their faith.

After their response Jesus touched their eyes. He took a risky, bold move. We cannot know the nature of the eye disease that caused their blindness. Without the modern treatments of our day, eye diseases in ancient times could be gruesome. Runny sores or contagious conditions characterized diseased eyes. But Jesus, undeterred by their circumstance, reached out to touch these men where they needed help.

Jesus proclaimed them to be well according to their faith. These men demonstrated confidence in His ability to aid them. Jesus rewarded their faith with restored sight. How much faith is required for healing? That question is not addressed here. The only question was whether they would express faith in Jesus, and they did.

Perhaps because the men had used the title Son of David, Jesus warned them sternly not to tell anyone about their healing. If so, this warning illustrated Jesus' deep feeling about this issue. He wanted no publicity for His compassionate works of healing. Jesus guarded against a strong emphasis on miracle working, which attracted large crowds. It tended to send a wrong message about His real purpose. He refused to base His ministry on popular opinion. He determined to follow God's will.

The two men promptly left the house and did what Jesus warned them not to do. Why? Even people of faith fall short of God's desires. They disobeyed Jesus, but this did not show a loss of faith. However, the men certainly demonstrated room to grow in their faith. Jesus' miracles, even when done in private, created a public stir. Jesus' actions continued to stir a variety of public opinions.

Jesus confirmed that God cares about us when we are sick and responds when we turn to Him in faith. God is present, comforting and helping us, even when healing does not occur. Take time to thank God for His concern for you when you turn to Him in times of physical crisis. Sometimes God uses other people to minister to those who are sick. Are you willing to be His instrument?

Day 3: Discussion Points

1. When men brought their paralyzed friend to Jesus, what did Jesus do before healing him?
2. On what grounds did the scribes accuse Jesus of blasphemy?
3. For what reason did Jesus tell the woman who touched his garment that He had healed her?
4. What evidence was there that the people thought the synagogue leader's daughter had died?
5. Reconsider each of the miracles recounted into today's Scripture. In what ways did each of the people Jesus healed, or someone representing that person, demonstrate faith in Jesus' healing power?
6. All serious illnesses are not preventable, but many are. What specific responsibilities should Christians assume in caring for their bodies in an effort to prevent illnesses?
7. If you should become seriously ill or face another tragic event in your life, how do you think you would react? Would you boldly and courageously approach and trust God as those in today's Scripture did?
8. How strong is your relationship with God? Do you really depend on Him to guide and strengthen you during times of your own physical illness or that of family members and friends? If you are blessed with good health, do you praise and thank God for your good health?
9. When we pray for healing, God sometimes does not bring physical healing for reasons we do not always understand. What other kinds of healing does God bring in addition to physical healing?
10. God often uses people to minister to those who are ill. Is there someone who is ill to whom you and/or your church can minister? What are specific things you can do to help the person and the person's family?

Day 3: Case Study

Reaching the End of Her Own Strength

At 45, Janet was a churchgoer but not a believer. She considered herself a good church member, but deep down she knew she did not rely on God. She didn't have a faith that permeated her life and decisions. She had always been able to handle what life brought pretty much on her own.

Then her first marriage ended as the youngest of her three children was leaving for college. Although finances were tight, Janet decided to attend a school for realtors. Soon after she finished training, she found a sales position with a realty company. She has "the gift of gab" and genuinely cares about people. So she is a natural to help people find the home that fits their needs and dreams.

Weekends are the busiest time for showing houses. Even though she works most Sunday afternoons, Janet decided she needed to attend church as often as possible. Besides attending Sunday morning worship, she began to take part in some single adult church activities during the week. Through the singles' program, she met Rob and they soon began dating. Rob, a Christian, was an active church leader whose wife had died three years earlier.

After dating for several months, Janet and Rob married. Their wedding celebrated God's goodness in bringing them together. After their marriage, Janet made a profession of faith, joined Rob's church, and began singing in the choir. Rob returned to the choir and continued serving in other areas of the church. Their happiness was reflected in the smiles that usually lighted Janet's and Rob's faces.

Three years after their marriage, Janet and Rob sat in a doctor's office and heard the dreaded word—cancer. Janet was diagnosed with a malignant tumor in her abdomen. Janet and Rob felt as if their world was crashing around them. They enlisted friends at church to pray with them for Janet's healing.

Janet began to understand that prayer is much more than she had ever understood. It is not just asking God for something we need or want. Prayer is a two-way conversation with God. The depth and intensity of Janet's prayers paralleled her relationship with God and her faith in Him.

Over the 10 years since Janet's diagnosis, her faith has deepened as she has prayed, studied Scripture, and depended on God for strength. She has discovered that only when she reaches the end of her own strength does she begin to draw on the strength God wants to give her. Her life has included the ups and downs of chemotherapy and radiation, remission, and two recurrences of cancer. Janet and Rob no longer pray merely for Janet's physical healing. They have learned to pray also for spiritual and physical strength and encouragement and for God's help in facing whatever happens. Janet delights in sharing how God continues to bless her, even when some days bring weakness and pain. Her smile is still evident and a testimony of her belief and faith.

Janet is grateful for the spiritual and emotional healing God has given her, even as she continues to battle cancer. She wants to minister to others impacted by cancer so they also can experience the peace and assurance that God loves them and cares about them. To encourage cancer patients and their friends and families, Janet has become director of a Christian cancer support group sponsored by several neighboring churches. The focus of the monthly meetings is prayer—praising God for the victories and asking Him for strength in the struggles. Janet spends hours each month compiling a prayer list of those dealing with cancer. She updates the list by calling to every person on the list each month. In a time of e-mails and texts, Janet's calls are a caring touch and usually include a prayer time over the phone.

Janet chose to minister to those who are ill. Be aware of the needs of the ill in your church and community and seek ways that you and others can minister to those people and help meet their needs.

As she deals with cancer, Janet has learned to rely on God's strength, wisdom, and peace. Should you become seriously ill, do you think your relationship with God would become stronger as Janet's did? When we pray for healing, God does not always bring physical healing for reasons we do not always understand. However, he does bring about other types of healing that are significant in the lives of the ill person, friends and family members, and even strangers.