

THE WORD HEALS

DEVOTIONAL READING: [John 4:46–54](#)

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: [John 4:46–54](#)

JOHN 4:46–54

46 Once more he visited Cana in Galilee, where he had turned the water into wine. And there was a certain royal official whose son lay sick at Capernaum. **47** When this man heard that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judea, he went to him and begged him to come and heal his son, who was close to death.

48 “Unless you people see signs and wonders,” Jesus told him, “you will never believe.”

49 The royal official said, “Sir, come down before my child dies.”

50 “Go,” Jesus replied, “your son will live.”

The man took Jesus at his word and departed. **51** While he was still on the way, his servants met him with the news that his boy was living. **52** When he inquired as to the time when his son got better, they said to him, “Yesterday, at one in the afternoon, the fever left him.”

53 Then the father realized that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him, “Your son will live.” So he and his whole household believed.

54 This was the second sign Jesus performed after coming from Judea to Galilee.



KEY VERSE

The father realized that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him, “Your son will live.” So he and his whole household believed.—John 4:53

PARTNERS IN A NEW CREATION

Unit 2: The Word: The Agent of Creation

LESSONS 5–9

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Summarize the account of the healing.
2. Compare and contrast the concepts of faith and belief.
3. Suggest an appropriate action that follows right belief in Jesus.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

A. Epidemics and Pandemics

B. Lesson Context

I. Request of a Father (John 4:46–50a)

A. Certain Official (v. 46)

B. Confident Interaction (vv. 47–50a)

Signs of the Times

II. Responses of Faith (John 4:50b–54)

A. Trusting Departure (vv. 50b–52)

B. Resulting Belief (v. 53)

Perfect Timing

C. Documented Miracle (v. 54)

Conclusion

A. True Healing

B. Prayer

C. Thought to Remember

HOW TO SAY IT

Cana	<i>Kay-nuh.</i>
Capernaum	<i>Kuh-per-nay-um.</i>
Galilee	<i>Gal-uh-lee.</i>
Galileans	<i>Gal-uh-lee-unz.</i>
Herod Antipas	<i>Hair-ud An-tih-pus.</i>
Judea	<i>Joo-dee-uh.</i>
Nazareth	<i>Naz-uh-reth.</i>

Introduction

A. Epidemics and Pandemics

Epidemics and pandemics are often associated with centuries past. Generally, a disease is considered an epidemic if the disease rapidly affects a large group of people in a specific region. An epidemic becomes a pandemic when the disease rapidly spreads across many countries and regions. The Black Death (bubonic plague) of the fourteenth century is a prime example of a pandemic.

Because of medical advances, sanitation, and a forgetting of history, we might assume that the age of epidemics and pandemics is over. However, the events of recent history tell a different story.

Since the end of the nineteenth century, the world has faced numerous health crises. Epidemics and pandemics are still a harsh reality. For example, a cholera pandemic originated in India and spread throughout the global west in the first years of the twentieth century. To this day, cholera epidemics continue throughout parts of Asia, Africa, and the Middle East.

Even the first decades of the twenty-first century have seen multiple outbreaks of illness. Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), HIV/AIDS, H1N1 influenza (“Swine Flu”), Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS), Ebola, Zika fever, and COVID-19 are among notable outbreaks of illness since the year 2000. These illnesses serve as harsh reminders for the prevalence of sickness and, ultimately, death. Despite wondrous medical advances, sickness and ailments still fill the world.

The complete healing of all physical maladies will not be achieved on earth—no matter the extent of modern medicine. In today’s Scripture text, Jesus provides a sign to something

greater than physical healing.

B. Lesson Context

John's Gospel can be divided into four major movements: an introduction ([John 1:1–51](#), see [lesson 5](#)), Jesus' earthly ministry ([2:1–11:57](#)), the events of Passion Week ([12:1–20:31](#)), and an afterword ([21:1–25](#)). Today's Scripture text comes from the second movement.

This movement tells of Jesus' earthly ministry through seven miraculous works ([John 2:1–11](#); [4:43–54](#); [5:1–15](#); [6:1–15](#); [6:16–24](#); [9:1–41](#); [11:1–57](#)) and seven teaching discourses (see [2:12–3:36](#); [4:1–42](#); [5:16–47](#); [6:25–71](#); [7:1–8:59](#); [10:1–21](#); [10:22–42](#)). Presented together, these moments flesh out the nature of Jesus' ministry and provide evidence “that this is God's Chosen One” ([1:34](#)).

This lesson's Scripture text comes as Jesus returns to Galilee, the region of his first public miracle at Cana (see [John 2:1–11](#)). Following that miracle, Jesus traveled to Jerusalem in Judea for the Passover ([2:13](#)). While in Jerusalem, Jesus corrected unholy occurrences at the temple area (see [2:14–24](#)) and addressed a religious leader (see [3:1–21](#)).

The text does not give insight for how long Jesus stayed in Judea. Realizing the Pharisees were noticing his popularity, Jesus returned to Galilee via Samaria ([John 4:1–4](#)). After a two-day stop in Samaria ([4:43](#)), Jesus arrived in Galilee. The miracle worker of Galilee had returned!

The way John presents Jesus' teachings and miraculous works highlights their continuity and gives evidence that Jesus is more than a Galilean miracle worker. Jesus quenched the thirst of the wedding party in Cana ([John 2:7–10](#)), then taught a Samaritan woman how to quench her spiritual thirst ([4:10–15](#)). Similarly, Jesus taught how he could provide eternal life and backed up that claim by restoring physical life to a young child ([4:43–54](#)). John's inclusion of Jesus' teachings reveals that Jesus is more than a miracle worker. Jesus is the Son of God, who brings eternal life ([3:14–15](#)) and living water ([4:13–14](#)).

John's Gospel places a high emphasis on Jesus' miraculous works. These works serve as signs of Jesus' identity as the Son of God ([John 20:30–31](#)). Despite these miraculous signs, John's Gospel acknowledges that many people would not accept or listen to Jesus (examples: [1:11](#); [2:18](#)).

I. Request of a Father ([JOHN 4:46–50a](#))

A. Certain Official (v. [46](#))

46a. Once more he visited Cana in Galilee, where he had turned the water into wine.

His journey from Judea was completed when Jesus *visited* his final destination: *Galilee*. This was a region north of Samaria and Judah. The central geographic feature of the region is the Sea of Galilee. This so-called sea (in actuality, a lake) is the source for the Jordan River. Further, it was the backdrop and the site for many of Jesus' miracles (see [Matthew 15:29–39](#); [Luke 8:22–25](#); [John 6:16–21](#)). The town of *Cana* was located in the mountains west of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus' disciple Nathanael came from this community ([John 21:2](#)).

John's inclusion in his Gospel account of this Galilean community was not by chance—Jesus' adult public ministry was inaugurated in Cana. While attending a wedding banquet, Jesus miraculously *turned jars of water into wine* after the banquet ran dry ([John 2:1–12](#)). John referred to this event as the “first of the signs” ([2:11](#)), the first of many miracles to come from Jesus (see [Lesson Context](#)).

46b. And there was a certain royal official whose son lay sick at Capernaum.

This *royal official* likely worked in service to the regional ruler to this area: Herod Antipas. Herod was the tetrarch (that is, administrator) of Galilee ([Luke 3:1](#)). This *certain* official could have served Herod through a variety of administrative, political, or military contexts. Further, the official could have been Jew or Gentile. Other healing accounts in the Gospels provide clear details of all characters involved (see [7:1–2](#)). However, John's account of this healing narrative does not give the same level of detail.

The only other identifying marker of the official is that his ailing *son* was not in Cana with his father. Instead, the *sick* son was in *Capernaum*, another Galilean town. Capernaum sat on the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee, about 16 miles directly northeast of Cana. The town served as Jesus' base of operations (see [Mark 1:21](#); [Luke 4:31](#); [John 6:59](#)).

B. Confident Interaction (vv. 47–50a)

47. When this man heard that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judea, he went to him and begged him to come and heal his son, who was close to death.

News likely had reached the official concerning Jesus' interactions in *Judea* and his claims of divine authority and power (see [John 2:14–21](#)). Hearing of Jesus' claims (and perhaps having a recollection of his miraculous act at the wedding banquet), the official apparently saw no other option than to plead to Jesus for healing on behalf of his ailing *son*. Since *Jesus* had returned to *Galilee*, the time had come for the official to act. The official *went* from Capernaum to Cana to find Jesus.

John's narrative does not provide further detail on the nature of the boy's sickness. Whatever it was, it had advanced to where the boy's life was at stake; he *was close to death*. Some level of medical knowledge existed in the first century, and physicians worked to heal people of their afflictions (see [Matthew 9:12](#); [Colossians 4:14](#)). However, many people still lived with

incurable ailments (see [John 5:5](#)). As Jesus' earthly ministry grew in notoriety, he frequently was approached by people desperate for physical healing. These people had sought the help of a physician, but were unable to find workable remedies and healing (see [Mark 5:26](#)).

What Do You Think?

How often should believers turn to God in prayer regarding physical healing?

Digging Deeper

How do our prayers, whether concerning small or large requests, give honor to God?

48. “Unless you people see signs and wonders,” Jesus told him, “you will never believe.”

Jesus responded to the official's request for healing in an unexpected manner. Instead of addressing the sick child, Jesus questioned the spiritual status of the official's countrymen. They were *you people* who required miraculous acts from Jesus. The underlying Greek text indicates that Jesus' declaration was directed to a collective group. The official came seeking help, but Jesus responded to his request with particular criticism.

Many of Jesus' own countrymen demanded that he produce *signs and wonders* to justify the validity of his actions and teachings (see [John 2:18](#); [6:30](#)). Through these signs, some people came to *believe* in and follow him (see [2:11](#), [23](#)). The desire for evidence and tangible signs is understandable, especially regarding the claims of Jesus (see [1 Corinthians 1:22](#)). The ultimate goal of these signs was belief in the Messiah and the life that he provides (see [John 20:31](#)).

However, not all people accepted Jesus' miracles. This reflected their stubbornness and the hardness of their hearts. Time and time again Jesus' claims were backed by his actions—a sign of who he is. Despite this reality, many people refused to listen to Jesus (see [John 12:37](#)).

Jesus used this interaction with the official to critique the lack of faith of the Galileans. Rather than receive the gift of Jesus, they demanded signs. It would be easy to read Jesus' words as an angry indictment toward his countrymen. However, it's possible that Jesus spoke this as a lament regarding their spiritual blindness. Jesus came to his own people, yet they did not receive him (see [John 1:11](#)). Not only was Jesus frustrated, but he was also grieved by their lack of faith. Perhaps this official would change the tide and provide an example for how a person might properly believe.

While Jesus knows each person's heart ([John 2:25](#)), the official's level of faith at this point is unknown. Did his heart question Jesus' claims, or was he like the apostle Thomas, who desired tangible evidence for authentic faith (see [20:25](#))?

What Do You Think?

How can believers faithfully follow Jesus even when they do not immediately observe evidence of God's work?

Digging Deeper

How do [2 Corinthians 4:16–18](#) and [Hebrews 11:13](#) affect your response in this regard?

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

While driving through a small town in Ohio, I noticed a street sign that read, “Tom, Dick & Harry Road.” The sign commemorated an infamous local trio. Because of the sign’s novelty or originality, I imagine many people try to steal the sign as a keepsake!

In my travels, I’ve seen other amusing, eye-catching signs. A local tire store advertised “Free Air.” (I thought air was always free!) A souvenir shop in Turkey proudly sells “Authentic Fake Watches.” A chain of mortuaries in upstate New York is named “Amigone Funeral Home.” A sign on a flower shop in Ohio bears the name of its owners: “Swindler & Sons.” (You’d better count your change!)

Jesus’ miraculous acts were not meant for the amusement and amazement of the gathered crowds. Instead, these acts serve as signs and guideposts to God’s eternal truth in Christ Jesus. The miraculous signs presented in the Gospel accounts confirm Jesus’ identity as the Messiah. Have you opened your eyes and softened your heart to see Jesus’ work in your life (see [John 12:37–40](#))?

—D. F.

49. The royal official said, “Sir, come down before my child dies.”

The royal official begged Jesus to see the urgency of the situation. Here was a father dealing with the worst tragedy a parent could experience: his son was about to die. The official had no sharp retort to Jesus’ previous declaration on the nature of signs, wonders, and belief. Instead, the man wanted healing for his son. (Compare and contrast the request of Jairus for his daughter in [Mark 5:23](#).)

Stories from ancient Israel describe how God’s prophets healed children or raised them from the dead (see [1 Kings 17:17–24](#); [2 Kings 4:32–37](#)). In these cases, the prophet would visit the ailing child and be in their presence before healing. Perhaps the official thought Jesus’ physical presence was a prerequisite for healing. If Jesus would *come down* to his house, then he thought that his *child* would live.

50a. “Go,” Jesus replied, “your son will live.”

Instead of accompanying the official to Capernaum, *Jesus* told him to *go* on his way home and return to the child. Unlike ancient Israel’s prophets, Jesus is the Son of God and one with God the Father ([John 1:18](#); [Hebrews 3:5–6](#)). He has the power of life in himself ([John 1:3–4](#)).

Therefore, he merely had to speak the word and the official's *son* would *live* (compare [Matthew 8:13](#)).

What Do You Think?

How should believers respond when God's timing does not align with their expectations?

Digging Deeper

How do [Ecclesiastes 3:1-22](#); [Isaiah 40:27-31](#); and [2 Peter 3:8-9](#) inform your answer in this regard?

II. Responses of Faith ([JOHN 4:50b-54](#))

A. Trusting Departure (vv. [50b-52](#))

50b. The man took Jesus at his word and departed.

The official took *Jesus at his word* and believed in its validity. Because of his belief and trust, the official *departed* and returned to Capernaum. This moment provides a critical contrast in John's Gospel. Whereas the crowds looked for a sign in order to believe Jesus (see [John 4:48](#)), this official trusted Jesus without seeing the results of Jesus' word. He showed genuine faith in Jesus without the confirmation of an immediate sign.

In this sense, the official fulfilled Jesus' proclamation: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" ([John 20:29](#)). By believing the word of Jesus, the official's response provided an example for the kind of faith necessary for disciples of Jesus.

51. While he was still on the way, his servants met him with the news that his boy was living.

The official's journey *on the way* from Cana to his home in Capernaum would have been a literal walk downhill. Capernaum is located on the Sea of Galilee and, therefore, at a lower elevation than Cana.

Since most people traveled on foot, even a trip between the Galilean villages could take several hours or most of the day. We can only imagine that this man's emotional and physical states were likely pushed to the breaking point. Like any father, his only concern was to see his son healthy. He surely went to great lengths in order to see and plead with Jesus. As *he* rushed home to see his son, he likely pushed himself to the limit as well.

I AM...

the **bread of life** (John 6:35)

the **light of the world** (8:12; 9:5)

the **gate for the sheep** (10:7)

the **good shepherd** (10:11)

the **resurrection and the life** (11:25)

the **way, the truth, and the life** (14:6)

the **true vine** (15:1)

Visual for [Lesson 6](#). Show this chart as you ask students how Jesus fulfills one of these claims through the events of this week's Scripture text.

Before the man reached home, he heard the good news. His *servants* were so amazed at the dramatic change in the *boy* that they *met* the official on his way home. Likely, the servants had known the reason for and destination of the man's journey. Therefore, they could anticipate the direction and route by which he would return. Knowing the extent of the father's anxiety, the servants wanted to bring him relief and peace as they declared that the son *was living*. Despair had changed to relief, and grief had turned to rejoicing!

52. When he inquired as to the time when his son got better, they said to him, "Yesterday, at one in the afternoon, the fever left him."

Until this point in the narrative, John has not provided a critical detail—the exact time at which Jesus declared "your *son* will live" ([John 4:50](#), above). Therefore, at this point readers of the Gospel are left to conclude that the man's interaction with Jesus was held on the previous afternoon at 1:00 p.m. (*yesterday*). At the point at which Jesus declared it, the child experienced healing from his illness—his *fever left him*. Jesus' power in healing did not require him

to be physically present with the ailing child.

B. Resulting Belief (v. 53)

53a. Then the father realized that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him, “Your son will live.”

The text confirms what the previous verse anticipated but never explicitly stated. Jesus’ declaration of healing—*your son will live*—and its fulfillment occurred at *the exact same time*. This *father* had demonstrated faith that *Jesus* would heal his son. As a result of his faith, the man rejoined his healthy son. But even as the father celebrated the healing, something greater had been occurring for the man and his household.

53b. So he and his whole household believed.

The official had already shown faith concerning Jesus’ healing word. His expression of faith, as a result, affected others in his household beyond his son. Upon seeing the fulfillment of Jesus’ word, the official, his family, and all people in *his whole household* demonstrated belief in Jesus. The text does not include the object of their belief, but we can assume they believed in the messianic claims of Jesus. Like the Samaritan woman, they *believed* that “this man really is the Savior of the world” ([John 4:42](#)).

The official’s whole house likely included any immediate and extended family members and any servants in the household. Accounts of the growth of the church in the years immediately following Jesus’ ascension describe how whole households would express belief in Christ (see [Acts 11:14](#); [16:15, 31](#); [18:8](#)). The official and his family believed in Jesus upon seeing the ways he changed their lives.

PERFECT TIMING

The timing of a joke will make or break a comedian’s routine. If the comedian rushes to the punch line or pauses in the middle of the joke’s setup, the joke may be ruined.

Issues of timing aren’t just related to comedic performances. Professional athletes require exact timing for peak performance. (Next time you watch an American football game, observe the timing required for a placekick!) Without perfect timing, photographers will snap unbecoming and awkward photos. I’m sure you know the importance of perfect timing in your daily activities!

Even when Jesus’ timing is different from ours, his is always perfect! Following Jesus’ timing might prove challenging. He may act when you least expect! Are you willing to adapt your ways to Jesus’ timing? What obstacles stand in the way of your following his perfect timing?

—D. F.

C. Documented Miracle (v. 54)

54. This was the second sign Jesus performed after coming from Judea to Galilee.

John casts this, *the second sign*, against the backdrop of Jesus' previous miracle in Cana (see [John 2:11](#)). In so doing, John does not include in the miracle count those performed in Judea ([2:23](#)). The early travel narrative of John's Gospel came full circle. Jesus had traveled to Jerusalem in *Judea* ([2:13](#)) and, shortly after, had decided to return to his homeland in *Galilee* ([4:3](#), see [Lesson Context](#)). Although this was only the second miracle done in Galilee, the Galileans had seen other miracles while in Jerusalem for Passover ([2:23](#); [4:45](#)).

Older translations of the Bible translate the underlying Greek text, here translated "sign" (compare [John 2:18](#); [4:48](#); [6:30](#)), as "miracle."

In John's Gospel, Jesus' miracles served as signs so that people "may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God" ([20:31](#)). Jesus used miracles and signs to reveal his glory (see [6:2](#); [7:31](#); [9:16](#); [11:47](#)). Jesus was not interested primarily in providing physical life; he came to bring spiritual, eternal life to all who would believe.

What Do You Think?

How might periods of lament and celebration each provide opportunities to glorify God?

Digging Deeper

Who will you recruit to encourage your walk with God during times of lament?

Conclusion

A. True Healing

Beyond the detail of the son's fever ([John 4:52](#)), we are left wondering about the son's ailment. Perhaps it was a respiratory illness similar to the modern outbreaks of [MERS](#) or [SARS](#). Whatever the ailment, it was not more than Jesus could handle—even from a distance!

In addition to leading to humanity's belief (see [John 20:30–31](#)), Jesus' repeated acts of healing show us God's concern for humanity's ailments. Human suffering is unavoidable—just watch the nightly news! Only God has the power to heal every illness, hurt, and pain.

Ultimately, Jesus' physical healings testify to God's ultimate healing project—the spiritual healing of all who believe. As Jesus' disciples today, we set our eyes on this ultimate healing that is available only through faith in the Son of God. True disciples live for the promise of Jesus that he will someday raise believers from the dead and give them eternal life. Only by faith can people become disciples of Jesus and experience the complete and final healing he brings. Even when Jesus *feels* far away, does your life reflect your belief that he's never too far

way to provide healing—in this life or in the life to come?

What Do You Think?

In what ways has God worked in your life to lead you to saving belief in Jesus Christ?

Digging Deeper

How might you be used by God to help lead others to saving belief in Jesus Christ?

B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, we pray for our family, friends, and neighbors who need your healing. May your acts of physical healing serve as a testimony to your ultimate and final healing. Fill us with faith so that we might believe, even when we can't always see your work. In Jesus' name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Our God can heal—in every way!

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Enhance your lesson with NIV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Before class begins, write the following prompts on the board:

- The farthest I traveled to see a doctor.
- The farthest I traveled to see a sports team.
- The farthest I traveled to see a performance or concert.
- The farthest I traveled on a vacation.

As class begins, point class members to the written prompts. Give them one minute to decide on which of the prompts suggests a story they'd be willing to share. Divide the class into four groups and have each group member share with their group a story based on one of the prompts.

After 5 minutes of discussion, reconvene the class. Ask which class member reported the

farthest trip. Have them speak briefly regarding their travel and the reasons for their travels.

Lead into Bible study by saying, “At one time or another, many of us have traveled—out of necessity or for pleasure. Today we’ll learn about a man who traveled to see Jesus because only Jesus could provide what the man’s family needed.”

Into the Word

Divide the class into groups of three. To each group member, assign one of the following people from this lesson’s Scripture text: **Jesus, the royal official, a servant of the royal official**. Ask a volunteer to read aloud [John 4:46–54](#) while group members focus on the statements and reactions of their assigned role in the story.

Distribute a handout (you create) to each group member with the following headings across the top: **Thoughts, Actions**. Down the left side of the handout, list every verse in today’s Scripture. Ask each triad to complete the chart for their assigned person. Where the Scripture text does not specify, class members should imagine how their character might think or act based on scriptural context.

After 10 minutes, reconvene the class. Read aloud each verse from today’s Scripture text, pausing after each verse. Ask volunteers to share what they wrote under each verse. Allow time for class members to discuss the statements of others.

Option. Distribute copies of “Significant Miracles” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners work in pairs to complete as indicated. After 10 minutes, ask volunteers to share their findings.

Into Life

Write “What do we believe about God, Jesus, the Bible, and Christianity?” on the board. Ask class members to respond to this prompt through whole class discussion. Don’t edit or correct the responses—write down the responses on the board as they are stated. After three minutes, ask the class which of the statements are most important for faith. Draw a circle around those statements.

Divide the class into four groups. Ask the groups to discuss the following questions (which you will write out on a handout): 1—What are the sources and standards to inform right belief? 2—What is the connection between right *belief* and right *action*? 3—How should believers act in response to the circled statements?

After 5 minutes, ask class members to reconvene and discuss their answers in whole class discussion. Point to circled statements on the board and have a volunteer from each group read the suggested action step regarding that belief.

End class by saying, “Today’s lesson shows us that right belief and right action are connected. Let’s pray that we will be a people marked by belief and resulting right action.”

Option. Distribute copies of the “Seeking God’s Power” activity from the activity page. Have learners work in pairs to complete the activity as indicated.