

Small Group Guide

Luke 5:12-26 -- The Authority of Jesus to Heal and Forgive



Overview

This passage presents two encounters with Jesus that reveal the full scope of his authority - over physical illness and over sin itself. Through the healing of a leper and a paralyzed man, we see not only the compassion and power of Jesus, but also the starkly different ways people responded to him. This guide is designed to help your group move from observation to personal reflection and outward action.

Key Takeaways

- Jesus is so pure that his purity overtakes what is unclean rather than what is unclean contaminating him -- a power none of us possess on our own.
- Jesus withdrew regularly to pray, setting an example that time in God's presence shapes our ability to affect the world around us rather than being shaped by it.

- Forgiving sins is the harder and more significant claim Jesus makes, because only God can forgive sins. Healing the paralyzed man was the visible proof of an invisible, divine reality.
 - The Pharisees and teachers of the law refused to submit to Jesus's authority even when the evidence was directly in front of them, because they viewed themselves as the authority.
 - The friends of the paralyzed man model a kind of desperate, self-sacrificing concern for someone else's access to Jesus that should challenge every believer.
 - Reaching people with the gospel is never about pride or standing on a pedestal. It is rooted in the honest recognition that we need Jesus just as much as anyone else.
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Discussion Questions

Opening

1. Think about a time you misjudged someone's intentions and it caused confusion or conflict. What did it take to clear things up? How does that connect to the way people responded to Jesus in these passages?
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Observation -- What Does the Text Say?

2. In Luke 5:12, the leper says, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." What does this statement reveal about the leper's understanding of both Jesus's power and Jesus's authority over his own choices? What does it mean to approach Jesus with that kind of humility?
3. Jesus touched the leper even though the law forbade it and touching a leper would normally make a person ceremonially unclean. What does it tell us about Jesus that contact with him cleanses rather than defiles?
4. In Luke 5:20, before healing the paralyzed man physically, Jesus first says his sins are forgiven. Why do you think Jesus addressed sin before addressing the paralysis? What does that order of priority reveal about his mission?
5. When the Pharisees and scribes questioned Jesus internally, he perceived their thoughts and responded directly. What does that moment reveal about who Jesus is? How do you think the Pharisees should have responded to that, and why do you think they didn't?

6. Jesus asked, "Which is easier to say, your sins are forgiven, or rise up and walk?" How would you answer that question in your own words, and why does it matter?
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Interpretation -- What Does the Text Mean?

7. The sermon drew a contrast between Jesus affecting his environment and us being affected by ours. Why is that distinction so important for how we think about holiness, temptation, and the limits of our own spiritual strength?
 8. Even though Jesus is divine he still regularly withdrew to pray. What does that say about the value of prayer? What might it say about what our own prayer lives should look like?
 9. The Pharisees saw everything the crowd saw but came to a completely different conclusion. What conditions of the heart make it possible to witness something extraordinary and still walk away unchanged?
 10. The paralyzed man's friends were willing to carry him, climb a roof, and dig through it just to get him in front of Jesus. What does their faith and effort say about how seriously they took their friend's need?
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Application -- What Does the Text Require of Us?

11. The sermon asked, "What would it take to inspire a generation -- or even a small group of people -- to have that kind of passion?" How would you honestly answer that question for yourself right now?
12. The sermon made the point that reaching out to others with the gospel is never about pride or arrogance, but about recognizing that "we are all in the same boat without him." How does that perspective change the way you think about sharing your faith with someone in your life?
13. Is there someone in your life right now who needs to be "lowered through the roof" -- someone who needs you to go out of your way, past your comfort zone, to make sure they encounter the gospel? What is one specific thing you could do this week for that person?
14. The leper approached Jesus with full confidence in his ability but complete submission to his will, saying "if you are willing." How does that model shape the way you bring your own needs and the needs of others before God in prayer?

Practical Applications

- **Personal Prayer Audit:** Jesus withdrew regularly to pray even though he had no spiritual deficit. Evaluate your own prayer life honestly. Set aside one additional block of time this week specifically to withdraw from distraction and seek God's presence.
- **Identify Your Person:** Write down the name of one person in your life who does not know Jesus. Pray for them every day this week. Ask God to give you the same urgency the paralyzed man's friends had, and ask him to show you one concrete step you can take toward them.
- **Examine Your Posture:** Before you engage anyone about faith this week, ask yourself whether you are approaching them from a place of shared brokenness or from a place of superiority. Let the honest answer shape how you speak.
- **Submit to His Will:** Practice the leper's posture in your own prayer this week. Bring a specific request to God and close it with a genuine acknowledgment that his will, not yours, is what you are ultimately asking for.

Closing Reflection

The two people healed in this passage came to Jesus with nothing to offer and everything to gain. The Pharisees came with credentials, authority, and pride, and left with nothing they did not already have. The question for each of us is simple: which group do we more closely resemble when we approach Jesus? Come with open hands, honest need, and faith in his willingness, and you will find the same Jesus who touched the untouchable and forgave the unforgivable.

Closing Prayer Points

- Gratitude for a Jesus whose purity is more powerful than our sin
- Honesty about our tendency to be shaped by our environment rather than shaping it
- Boldness and compassion for the people in our lives who need the gospel
- A deeper hunger for time in God's presence, following the example Jesus set

5-Day Bible Reading Plan and Devotional Guide

Based on the Gospel of Luke: Authority, Compassion, and the Mission of Jesus



Day 1: The Purity That Overcomes Reading: Luke 5:12-16 — The account of Jesus healing a man covered in leprosy by reaching out and touching him, despite the ceremonial and medical prohibitions against doing so. Devotional: Jesus did not have to touch the leper. A word from a distance would have been enough. Yet he reached out his hand and made contact with the untouchable. This single act reveals something staggering about the nature of Christ: his holiness does not retreat from contamination — it conquers it. Where we are shaped and stained by the environments we enter, Jesus reshapes every environment he enters. His purity is not fragile. It is a force. Consider the places, relationships, or patterns in your own life where you have been slowly contaminated rather than transforming what is around you. The answer is not simply stronger willpower. It is deeper communion with the one whose holiness is stronger than every form of unclean.

Reflection: Where in your life have you allowed your environment to shape you more than your faith has shaped your environment?

Practical Application: Identify one relationship or habit that has been pulling you toward compromise. Bring it before God in prayer today and ask him to give you his presence in that space rather than your own strength.

Day 2: The Faith of Friends Reading: Luke 5:17-20 — The account of a group of men who carried their paralyzed friend to Jesus, and finding no way through the crowd, dismantled the roof above him and lowered their friend down to where Jesus stood. Devotional: These men did not debate whether it was worth the effort. They did not weigh their own discomfort against their friend's need. They carried him. They climbed. They tore open a roof. Their faith was not a private, internal experience — it was visible, physical, and costly. The text says that when Jesus saw their faith, he spoke to the paralyzed man. The faith of those friends created the moment in which their friend encountered Jesus. You may be the roof-breaker in someone's life. The question is whether you are willing to carry someone toward Christ even when the crowd makes it difficult, even when it costs you something, even when it looks strange to everyone watching.

Reflection: Who in your life needs someone to carry them toward Jesus right now, and what is stopping you from doing it?

Practical Application: Think of one person in your life who does not yet know Jesus. Take one concrete step this week to move them closer to the gospel, whether through a conversation, an invitation, or simply a prayer spoken on their behalf.

Day 3: Authority Over What Only God Can Do Reading: Luke 5:21-26 — The account of Jesus declaring the paralyzed man's sins forgiven, the Pharisees reasoning inwardly that only God can forgive sins, and Jesus healing the man physically as proof that he holds the authority to forgive. Devotional: The Pharisees were not entirely wrong in their theology. Only God can forgive sins. Where they failed was in refusing to follow that truth to its conclusion. If only God can forgive sins, and this man standing before them is forgiving sins, then this man is God. Jesus did not argue the point abstractly. He proved it by doing the thing that everyone in the room knew was impossible without divine power. He healed the paralytic. The miracle was not the point — it was the evidence. The point was the forgiveness. Everything Jesus did pointed toward a cross where that forgiveness would be purchased for every person willing to receive it.

Reflection: Are there areas where you have accepted parts of who Jesus is while quietly resisting the full weight of his authority over your life?

Practical Application: Spend time today meditating on what it means that Jesus has the authority to forgive your specific sins — not sin in general, but yours. Write down one sin or area of shame you have been carrying and surrender it to him in prayer, trusting his authority to make it clean.

Day 4: The Son of Man Withdraws to Pray Reading: Luke 5:16 — The brief but significant note that Jesus, even amid growing crowds and mounting demands, regularly withdrew to isolated places to pray. Also read Mark 1:35, which describes Jesus rising before dawn to go to a desolate place for prayer. Devotional: It would be easy to skip past this verse. It is easy to miss because it is quiet and brief, tucked between miracles and confrontations. But it may be the most important verse in this passage. Jesus, who is divine, who can cleanse leprosy with a touch and forgive sins with a word, made a practice of withdrawing to pray. He did not do this because he was weak. He did this because he was human, and because he had submitted himself to the will of the Father. If the Son of God found it necessary to regularly pull away from the crowd and seek the presence of his Father, what does that say about how seriously we should take our own time with God?

Reflection: What does your current pattern of prayer reveal about how much you believe you need God's presence to do what he has called you to do?

Practical Application: Restructure one part of your daily routine this week to create a consistent, uninterrupted time of prayer. Treat it as non-negotiable, not as something that happens if time permits.

Day 5: The Humility of the Leper and the Pride of the Pharisees Reading: Luke 5:12-13 and Luke 5:21 — Two contrasting responses to Jesus: the leper who fell on his face and said, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean," and the Pharisees who reasoned internally that Jesus had no right to say what he was saying. Devotional: Two groups encountered Jesus in these passages and walked away with entirely different experiences. The leper came with nothing — no status, no leverage, no demand. He simply acknowledged what Jesus was capable of and placed himself entirely at Jesus's mercy. The Pharisees came with everything — education, authority, religious standing — and used all of it to protect themselves from having to submit to someone greater. The leper was healed. The Pharisees were not. The difference was not intelligence or theological knowledge. The difference was humility. One man fell on his face. The other group reasoned in their hearts. The posture of your heart before Jesus determines everything about what you receive from him.

Reflection: In your approach to Jesus, are you more like the leper who surrendered everything, or the Pharisee who protected his own sense of authority?

Practical Application: Begin each morning this week by deliberately acknowledging your need for Jesus before you do anything else. Speak it aloud if you are able. Let the first words of your day be an act of surrender rather than self-sufficiency.