

# The Struggle to Be Real



SABBATH—JANUARY 24

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY:** John 4:43-54.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “Jesus said to him [the king’s officer] ‘Go; your son will live!’ The man believed Jesus’ words and went” (John 4:50, TEV).

**IMPORTANT THOUGHT:** When we meet Jesus, He challenges us to think about everything in our lives, including how we understand ourselves.

**IN THIS LESSON, WE MEET** a man who has enough faith in Jesus to walk 16 miles (25 kilometers) uphill in order to find Him and ask Him to heal his son. If we had watched him, we would have decided he was a man of faith. But Jesus knew that the man’s faith was the kind of faith that is just looking for miracles, signs, and wonders.

The human heart is deceptive (tricky) by nature (Jeremiah 17:9). Even at our best, we sometimes fool ourselves and other people. But John tells the story of Jesus, who sees past our false ideas to help us have a deeper knowledge of both self and God.

In this lesson, we will examine a living parable<sup>1</sup> of Jesus, whose word is as good as His touch. During this study, we will develop a better understanding of real Christian faith.

\*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 31.

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<sup>1</sup>living parable—a story of things that really happened. We use a living parable to teach a truth.

## SUNDAY—JANUARY 25

**NO HONOR AT HOME (John 4:43-45).**

John 4:43-45 takes place between the story about the woman of Samaria and the story about a king's officer in Galilee who tries to meet Jesus for his son's sake. These verses may surprise us when we first read them, because there are two things in these verses that do not seem to agree with each other.

**What saying does Jesus have in mind as He nears His home country? John 4:43, 44. What do you think He means?**

**How did people from Galilee feel about Jesus' arrival? Why? John 4:45.**

As Jesus approached Galilee, He knew that "a prophet has no honor in his own country." But the Galileans<sup>2</sup> welcomed Jesus. In the Greek language, the word *therefore* appears at the beginning of John 4:45. This suggests that verse 45 naturally follows verse 44, "A prophet has not honor in his own country. When Jesus arrived in Galilee, therefore, the Galileans welcomed Him!" But the welcome of the Galileans is somehow "without honor" to Jesus.

**Read carefully John 4:45, as well as John 2:23-25. How do these verses explain what happened to Jesus?**

<sup>2</sup>Galileans—the people of Galilee.

The people of Galilee welcomed Jesus in the same way the people from Judah welcomed Him. The people from Judah showed faith in Jesus because they had seen miracles and signs. The people of Galilee thought they were welcoming Jesus in a positive way. But their interest in Jesus also was based on miracles only. This was no honor for Jesus. The Galileans were more interested in Jesus' miracles than in His words. Their excitement about Jesus shows more selfishness than faith.

**All of us have some selfish reasons for believing in Jesus. (For example, do we want salvation to gain something for ourselves?) Must our reasons always be pure in our walk with Jesus? Can Jesus still work with people who might not be exactly what they should be? Explain your answers.**

## MONDAY—JANUARY 26

**IT IS HARD TO BE REAL  
(John 4:46-49).**

The story in John 4:46-49 is a living parable. This story also shows how some people are more interested in Jesus' miracles than in His words.

**What problem does the king's officer bring to Jesus? What does he want Jesus to do? John 4:47, 49.**

**Where did both Jesus and the king's officer live? John 2:12; John 4:46.**

Jesus and the king's officer probably were neighbors in a very small town. Capernaum was only four hundred feet (one hundred meters) wide. The officer's faith and doubt show that a prophet may have a hard time finding honor at home.

**How did Jesus answer the king's officer? John 4:48. What did Jesus mean by this answer?**

Jesus' first answer shows that the officer, like Nicodemus before him, had weak faith. It seems that most Galileans welcomed Jesus outwardly. But they did not really believe *in* Him (John 4:43-45). The miracles Jesus did may have prevented the people from accepting Him fully.

The king's officer was faced with his weak faith. He was not depending fully on Jesus' word. He wanted proof before he would believe. He was shocked to discover that he could not hide his weak faith from Jesus. (Remember the theme of John 2:23-35: Jesus knows!) The officer realized he might lose everything because of his weak faith. So he threw himself at Jesus' feet.

**What are some ways of handling doubt? How can doubt sometimes play a positive role in a Christian's experience?**

**TUESDAY—JANUARY 27**

**THE PATH TO FAITH (John 4:50-54).**

**What was Jesus' second answer to the king's officer? What did the king's officer do next? John 4:50.**

"The nobleman (king's officer) left Jesus with great peace and joy. He believed that his son would be healed. With strong faith, he trusted in Jesus as the Savior."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 198, 199.

The message that Jesus spoke to the officer is shocking. Jesus did not need to travel to Capernaum. He could heal at a great distance. This is a living parable to the second generation of Christians<sup>3</sup> that teaches that Jesus' word is as good as His touch. He does not need to be there in person to meet any of our needs.

The second message of Jesus in this living parable finally brings faith to the king's officer. But faith brings a test. Would the officer act on his new faith? Would he go home believing his son would live? Or would he continue to beg Jesus to come home and touch his son? His actions show that he really believed.

**What do the following verses say about the relationship between faith and works? Isaiah 58:1-12; John 15:5; James 2:22.**

<sup>3</sup>second generation of Christians—Christians who were not living before Jesus was crucified.



**Faith and works are linked together.**

It was about one o'clock in the afternoon when the king's officer met Jesus. Suppose the officer had hurried downhill toward home. He could have made it back to Capernaum that night because Capernaum was 16 miles (25 kilometers) away. (Read Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 199.) One would think that the officer would have hurried home to find out whether his son was really healed. But the fact is, the officer's servants went to look for him the day after he met Jesus. This shows that the officer took his time going home. He stopped somewhere for the night. This

shows that he had fully accepted Jesus' word. The proof of faith is action.

**We are not saved by works. But how do works show our faith? In your own experience, how have works made your faith stronger? In your experience, how do sinful works weaken faith and add to doubt?**

**WEDNESDAY—JANUARY 28**

**THE ANSWER TO LIFE'S PROBLEMS  
(Romans 10:17; Hebrews 11).**

**According to Paul, how does faith come to a person? Romans 10:17.**

Faith came to the king's officer by hearing Jesus' word from Jesus' own mouth. For the second generation of Christians, faith comes when they accept the word of Jesus in oral (spoken) or written form.

In the story in John 4, we find God's answer to life's problems. The story begins with a need. The officer's son lay dying. When the officer heard that Jesus was near, he did not waste time at home hoping that something good might happen. He brought his problem directly to Jesus. He guessed that if Jesus followed him back to Capernaum, Jesus' touch would remove the illness that was taking his son's life.

Instead, Jesus spoke the shocking words that He did not need to travel to Capernaum. He could heal at a great distance. Jesus' word is as good as His touch. The officer accepted Jesus' word.

And his actions afterward showed his strong faith in Jesus' word.

**YOUR PROBLEM  
+BRING YOUR PROBLEM TO JESUS**  

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**PROBLEM SOLVED**

**Read Hebrews 11. How does Hebrews 11 help us understand the relationship between faith and our actions?**

How can we use this lesson in faith for our problems today? There are four possible steps: (1) Know that you have a problem. This is not simple. But we will discuss this step further in tomorrow's lesson. (2) Take your problem to Jesus in prayer. (3) Receive the word that Jesus has met your need. Jesus' words to us are found in the Bible. If we want to hear His words, we need to read the Bible. That is why regular Bible study is important. (4) Speak and act God's answer. It is not enough to just hear God's answer. His answer becomes real to us when we act on it and when we tell other people about our faith. True belief leads to proper action.

But what if we are like the king's officer? What if our belief is mixed with doubt? This story suggests that we need to challenge our doubts with words of faith and acts of faith. Take God at His word. Do what the Bible says. Then our faith will grow.

**Why is doing what the Bible says so important for healthy faith?**



**Moses' parents showed their faith by protecting Moses.**

**THURSDAY—JANUARY 29**

**STEPS TO BECOMING TRUE CHRISTIANS (Romans 5:8).**

**What is the natural condition of the human heart? Jeremiah 17:9. What is Laodicea's<sup>4</sup> basic problem? Revelation 3:17. How do the natural condition of the heart and Laodicea's problem work together against us?**

<sup>4</sup>Laodicea—the seventh church of Revelation (Revelation 3), which is famous for being weak and lukewarm.

“Like a flash of light, the Savior’s words to the nobleman (officer) showed his heart. The nobleman saw that his reasons for trying to find Jesus were selfish. He saw how horrible his weak faith really was.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 198.

The king’s officer did not know how deep his doubt was until Jesus reminded him. We, too, do not know the depth of our sinfulness and doubt. We are the same as Laodicea. This church in Revelation is blind to its spiritual condition. How can you bring a problem to Jesus when your heart is fooling you?

The best path to becoming a true Christian is to spend time daily with God.

1. Through Bible study we discover that God works with real people who make mistakes, such as David, Peter, and Nicodemus. We do not have to be afraid to confess<sup>5</sup> our sins and problems to Him. God already knows them. And we find out that God does not give up on people who make mistakes. So, we gain the courage to get real with God.

2. Through prayer we try to be real with God. God wants us to be totally honest with Him in prayer. Jesus certainly was honest when He prayed, “‘My God, my God, why did you abandon [leave] me?’” (Matthew 27:46, TEV). If Jesus could be honest with God, it cannot be a sin for us to be honest with God. God wants to hear about our deepest needs, our deepest feelings, and even our deepest anger.

3. Through keeping a spiritual diary, we can bring both our Bible study and prayers into sharp focus. Writing helps us think more deeply and better understand our spiritual problems. Writing can help us develop a deeper understanding of our need for God in several areas of life.

4. Responsibility to other people can make us aware of our responsibility to God. True Christians can usually name people who understand and love them but who can also share honest thinking about their behavior.

By practicing the above steps we can have a better understanding of the walls we set up against God in our lives.

**We know our own hearts are sinful. We know our own reasons for doing things are not pure. Then why must we put our whole hope only in what Jesus did for us at the Cross? Romans 5:8; Colossians 1:14; 1 Timothy 1:15; 1 Timothy 2:6.**

#### FRIDAY—JANUARY 30

**ADDITIONAL STUDY:** Many people are worried about the idea of responsibility. They suggest we should take everything to God in prayer. Read Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ (Jesus)*, p. 119. Ellen G. White has written things that support such an idea. But she also points to the fact that it is important to be responsible. “It is your duty to share your problems with fellow Christians.

<sup>5</sup>confess—to say that we have sinned and that we want to stop sinning.

This may touch your pride. But a humble mind with the Holy Spirit's leading will listen to advice and will do away with the wrong kind of self-confidence (faith).”—Adapted from *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 315.

“When people's hearts are softened by the Holy Spirit, they will listen to advice. But when they refuse to accept warning until their hearts become hardened, God permits them to be led by other influences.”—Adapted from *Prophets and Kings*, p. 425.

“There may be souls filled with doubt, burdened with problems and suffering, weak in faith, and not able to understand God. But an understanding Christian friend can re-direct them and their



**Let the Holy Spirit soften your heart.**

weak faith to Jesus.”—Adapted from *The Desire of Ages*, p. 297.

#### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. Read Hebrews 11:6. Why is it not possible to please God without faith? What does it mean to “please God”?
2. Read again John 4. How does the attitude of the Galileans toward Jesus contrast<sup>6</sup> with the Samaritans' attitude? What lessons should that difference have for us?
3. Faith is a gift from God (Ephesians 2:8). So why is acting on our faith so important? Why does God not just keep giving us more faith no matter what we do?

**SUMMARY:** Jesus returned to Galilee and found people who showed faith just because they believed He could do miracles. Using the example of the king's officer, John showed how weak this kind of faith is. But he also points the way to true faith. Through Jesus' words, we have a better understanding of our own sinfulness and of the walls we build to avoid closeness with God. But showing our faith in our actions gives us answers to life's problems. God Himself offers these answers through His Word. His Word is the Bible.

<sup>6</sup>contrast—show how things are different.