

**PLEASE DON'T READ THESE NOTES UNTIL YOU HAVE COMPLETED YOUR LESSON.
HEARING GOD FOR YOURSELF IS WAY BETTER THAN MY COMMENTS!**

Discussion starter

- As you get older, do you find yourself becoming more or less like your parents? Why?

Introduction

In the first four chapters of John, as Jesus began his ministry by calling his disciples and doing miracles, people generally responded positively to Jesus. Beginning in **John chapter 5**, however, things begin to change as Jesus challenges the authority of the Jewish religious leaders. When confronted, Jesus makes some astounding claims about his own identity and, as a result, he becomes more and more controversial.

Jesus is just as controversial today. As we read Jesus' claims, we too, must decide to believe or reject his identity and mission. It has been argued that there are three possible beliefs about Jesus – he was a *liar*, a *lunatic* or he is who he says he is – *Lord*. There is no middle ground. Who do *you* say he is?

Questions

Read **John 5:1-15**

1. Picture the setting of this story in your imagination (5:2-5). What are the smells? The noises? The atmosphere? How does it make you feel? What do you see Jesus doing as he comes to this place?

Picturing gospel scenes in our imagination will help move the message of the story from our head to our heart.

Have your small group share what they see, smell, hear and the atmosphere they sense. What do different ones see Jesus doing as he comes into this place? What do his eyes reflect? What is his facial expression?

We can build a portrait of this man's life: People moved him from place to place unless he crawled; most of his income came from begging or from charity from friends or family (if he had any); if he did not have bladder or bowel control would have been enormous. People stayed away from him. His hands (used for mobility) were rough and torn from the streets as he crawled from place to place over the years.

Healing shrines were common throughout the ancient world. This story portrays Jesus as greater than the healing sanctuaries of his day.

2. What does the fact that the man had been sick **thirty-eight years** add to the story?

This case was hopeless by human standards. Ancient reports of healing often specified how long the person had been sick to emphasize the greatness of the healer's cure. The longer a person had been sick, the harder it was to cure or heal them.

Jesus selected for his attention the person who seemed most needy. Jesus was not only looking at his physical condition, but also his psychological state also. The man had become resigned to

his fate and accepted the inevitable. Jesus' selection of this man from the large number of invalids at the pool indicated his interest in restoring those who have been reduced to utter helplessness both in body and in spirit. This man's suffering and isolation are beyond measure.

A Missing Verse? Does your Bible include **John 5:4**, or does the verse numbering go from verse **three** to verse **five**? Verse four is usually deleted in most contemporary translations because it is not found in ancient manuscripts dating before 400 AD, which are considered the most reliable. (Look for the omitted verse in the footnotes of your Bible.) Scholars think verse four was added at some point in history as an explanation to how the waters were occasionally stirred (5:7). A more likely explanation is that there were underground springs that occasionally caused the water in the pool to bubble or move. It was believed that the waters had healing power and the pool site became a sanctuary of healing where sick people gathered. Contemporary examples of similar healing places might be the spa at Lourdes, France or the shrine of Guadalupe, Mexico.

3. What motives and underlying attitudes did Jesus intend to expose by his question, "Do you want to get well" (5:6)?

Jesus was addressing the man's will and his heart of hopelessness and resignation. The question implies an appeal to the man's will, which the long years of discouragement may have paralyzed. Even today we speak of the "will to be well" or having the "will to live". What is in our heart, affects all of us – body, soul and spirit. The body often follows the will and the heart.

♥ What is the connection between wanting to be well and receiving healing?

Our wills (ability to make choices) are very important in relation to our spiritual condition. We have to will to be well before we can be healed. We have to be willing to give up our unhealthy or ill identity and take on an identity of wellness and wholeness. The body, soul (heart), mind and spirit all work together.

You may want to ask your group:

♥ What are some reasons why a person may not want to get well?

They could be avoiding responsibility and independence; they have become self-centered and the sickness keeps attention on self; they need and find satisfaction from getting sympathy from others; they would have to give up placing blame on others or their situation and assume responsibility for their own actions. Sometimes we use sickness as an excuse to not have to cope with life.

4. List several things the invalid man would have to "give up" if he were healed, as well as several things he would have to "take on." Answers will vary. Below are some examples.

"Give Up"	"Take On"
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Dependence on others</i></p> <p>self-pity self-centeredness not dealing with his sin (v14) identity as a disabled person pity and sympathy of others blaming others for his lack of healing dependence on others discouragement and despair isolation</p>	<p>Responsibility for himself (and perhaps others) Working for a living reconcile and renew relationships confronting sin and dealing with it independence new vision of the future new self-image learn to give instead of take</p>

♥ How does Jesus' question (5:6) apply to the problem areas of your life? What is your answer? What might you have to change?

5. What does the man's answer in 5:7 tell you about his expectations for being healed? Where is his focus? What are some words that describe his attitude?

The man seems to be resigned to his fate and accepted the fact that he will never be healed. His only hope is someone to help him into the water and obviously there was no one and that wasn't going to change. Because he himself could not get to the water in time, his attitude was hopeless, helpless, resigned, bitter and resentful. He had lost his independent determination. He was placing the blame for his condition on what someone else had not done for him.

- ♥ When have you wanted to give up all hope because you thought things would never get better? What happened to change things?

6. What did Jesus contribute towards the man's healing and what did the invalid contribute (5:8-9)? Why were both contributions important?

Jesus, of course, supplied the command, the power and the ability to heal. However, the things that Jesus offered would have done no good if the man did not obey by exercising his will and choosing to try and get up. Complete hopelessness would have kept him from even trying. He could have said, "It's no use. Nothing is going to change." Again, we see the importance of a person's will (the ability to choose, in this case the choice to believe Jesus). God can do very little for us if we don't believe that he **can** and **will** intervene in our situations. The moment the man's will agreed with Jesus' will, the power for healing was present. Also, the man knew it was the Sabbath and that he shouldn't be carrying his mat – but he obeyed Jesus' total command.

- ♥ When did God last work in your life to correct a situation that seemed hopeless? What was God's part? What was yours?

- ♥ Is there an area of your life where you feel paralyzed, lame, and not able to "walk"? What kind of hope does the story give you? What will you do?

7. How would the outcome of this whole story (**John 5**) have been affected if Jesus had told the man to get up and walk, but *not* to pick up and carry his mat?

The healing might have gone unnoticed if Jesus hadn't told him to carry his mat. It was the carrying of his mat on the Sabbath that drew the attention of the religious leaders. This then led to the confrontation of Jesus with the religious leaders where Jesus declares his true identity. Jesus was eventually killed for making these statements. We can be sure that it not just a coincidence that Jesus happened to tell the man to also take his mat with him.

Can you think of any reasons why the man taking his mat with him was important?

First, Jesus used this incident to make a statement about what the Sabbath had become in his day. The rules and regulations had become a heavy burden on the people, robbing the Sabbath of it's original purpose. Jesus used this healing to challenge the Jewish religious leaders. It was intentional.

For the man who was healed, picking up and carrying away his mat was important because it showed the finality of his healing. There was not going to be a relapse. The man could have left his mat to hedge his bets. His place would be saved in case the healing didn't last and he had to come back to the pool later. Carrying away his mat was a visible sign that he was leaving his old way of life. He made no provision to go back to his old life.

Sabbath – Given in the Law of Moses, the *Sabbath* was the practice of observing one day in seven as a time for rest and worship. It was intended to be a day of celebration and rejoicing for all of God's gifts and provision. It was also a

day when work was to cease based on God ceasing from his work and resting during the creation of the world (**Genesis 1**). Over the centuries, in their eagerness to keep God's Law, Jewish rabbis spelled out thirty-nine different ways by which the Sabbath could be violated by certain types of work. As a result, the Sabbath was, in Jesus' day, a dreary institution of following rules and regulations instead of enjoying rest, relaxation and relationship with God.

- ♥ How can we still celebrate the principle of Sabbath rest today? Do you think this important for a Christ-follower to do? Why or why not?
- ♥ Which is *easier*: Following rules and regulations in order to obey God **OR** learning to obey by developing a meaningful relationship with God? Why?

Following rules seems to be the easier thing to do. It has little risk and you don't have to think and figure things out. Building a relationship involves more effort and time and always carries the risk of uncertainty and giving up control. Developing a relationship, however, is far more satisfying and fulfilling. Relationship brings much joy; rules are a joy-killer.

8. Read what Jesus said to the healed man in **5:14**. Did Jesus say this to everyone he healed? Why would Jesus say this to this man? What are the implications for us?

Jesus did not say this to everyone he healed, but he did something similar to some. In this case, the man's sin and condition are linked. Scripture indicates that some tragedies may be the result of specific sins (1 Cor. 11:30) and this could be why Jesus chose this man for healing. God wanted to work in him on two levels.

It is important to say that those who are sick have not necessarily sinned, and those who sin do not necessarily endure suffering and the consequences of sickness. Luke 13:1-5 and John 9:3 show this to be true. Suffering is NOT an index of a person's sin. But having said that, specific suffering may still come from specific sins. We can assume that Jesus is pointing the man to repentance (stop sinning) because in his case there was a link between his sin and his sickness.

Read **John 5:16-47**.

- ♥ Does Jesus' lengthy speech about himself and his identity (**5:19-47**) change your previous concept of him in any way? If so, how?

9. For what reasons were the Jewish religious leaders opposed to Jesus (**5:16-17**)?

First, Jesus was breaking the Sabbath tradition. Jesus was not breaking the Sabbath law as given in the Law of Moses or the 10 Commandments. He was correctly using the Sabbath as a day of rest to honor and worship God. Even God continues to do good "works" on the Sabbath by healing people. This was acceptable "work." Jesus demonstrates that the heart motives is what God looks at, not the outward keeping of rules and regulations. What kind of God would condemn a man who has just been miraculously healed for carrying his mat home? The Pharisees focused on the law and totally ignored the incredible work of God that healed a man who had been paralyzed for 38 years!

Secondly, the religious leaders tried to kill Jesus because he called God his own Father, making himself equal with God. Jesus was not saying he was the Father, but that he was in relationship with the Father as a Son and that he did not act independently apart from God the Father's will and purpose. Jesus describes this relationship more in 5:20. The Son is loved by the Father. The relationship is not that of master and slave nor of employer and employee, but Father and Son united in love. The Father has revealed to the Son the purpose and plan of his activity, much as the head of a family discusses with the others the plan he wished to follow.

- ♥ Jesus was persecuted for his statements about himself. Might we be persecuted for making the same claims about him? **As the heart question below suggests, it might be okay to say Jesus is one way to God, but not the only way.**

What kind of persecution could we experience?

On one hand, we might be called narrow-minded or bigoted; on the other hand, our relationship with Jesus could cause difficulty and misunderstanding in our friend/family relationships. Ask you group if anyone has actually suffered or been persecuted because they would not compromise in their relationship to Jesus.

♥ Jesus was eventually crucified because of his claims about himself. We are fortunate to experience very little religious persecution in this country. But if we did, as many Christ-followers do all over the globe, how far would you go for Christ? How strongly do you believe that he is who he says he is? How much does he mean to you?

10. From the following verses, in what ways does Jesus claim to be equal with God the Father?

5:17	He calls God Father and says that he (Jesus) is doing divine work along with God. Everyone recognized that God had continued to work since creation, sustaining the world even on the Sabbath. Jesus reasons that what was right for God was also right for him.
5:19	Jesus said he did not work in his own power; he could "see" what the Father was doing and he joined the Father in his work. It was common wisdom of the day that the son imitated their fathers. But Jesus claims to be God's Son in a unique way that does not involve any other human.
5:20	The Father, in love, shows Jesus everything he is doing. The Son will do even greater things than just healing this man who was sick for 38 years.
5:21	Jesus is equal with God because both have the power to give life (zoe; the life of God)
5:22-23	The Father has given the Son the right to judge and to be honored just as God the Father is honored. (For the Jews, raising and judging the dead was something that only God could do.)
5:24	Belief in Jesus gets a person eternal life; they have crossed from death to life! Only God has this power. Eternal life (the life of the world to come) was supposed to be available only when the dead were raised at the last judgment. Jesus claims to give this life now to anyone who believes.
5:26	The Father and the Son (Jesus) contain the life of God. The Jews believed God to be the only one with life "of himself" (uncreated). Jesus is claiming this life for himself.

♥ Agree or disagree? *In our culture, it is fine to make Jesus one way to God, but not **the** Way. It is fine to affirm Jesus as one version of the truth, but not **the** Truth against which all other truths are weighed.*

11. According to 5:24, *when* does a person receive eternal life and cross over from death to life? Eternal life (the life that never ends) does not start after we die. Eternal life continues after we physically die. It begins at the moment we believe in our heart in who Jesus is and what he has done for us (paying the penalty for our personal sin when he died on the cross). At the moment of belief, we cross over from spiritual death (separation from God) to life. We are born again (John 3) because the life of God enters us and brings our spirits to life.

2Corinthians 5:17

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

♥ What area of your life would see the most change if you lived all your life with the same motives that Jesus did (5:30)? All of us would experience some pretty radical changes in our lives if we truly lived to please God and not ourselves.

♥ How could Bible study become a dangerous activity (5:39-40)?

The Bible can actually become an idol if we put the study of it in a place of more importance than our personal relationship with God. Bible information doesn't really gain us anything unless it leads us to a deeper, more personal relationship to Jesus. It is possible to know a lot about the

Bible – to even know the truth – and miss Jesus completely. If we miss Jesus, we miss eternal life and that can be very dangerous!

12. What witnesses does Jesus name that testify to his identity?

5:33-35 - John the Baptist

5:36 – Jesus works or miracles

5:37 - The Father testifies to who Jesus is

5:39 – The scriptures reveal Jesus' identity

5:46 – Moses and the scripture he wrote

How do *you* know Jesus is who he says he is? What convinced you?

Have several share!

response

♥ Who is Jesus? Discuss with your small group C.S. Lewis' well-known quote from *Mere Christianity* about the identity of Jesus. Do you think Lewis makes a useful argument? Why or why not?
A good quote to discuss with your group. Would this be a useful argument for anyone you know?

I am trying to prevent anyone saying the really foolish things that people often say about Him: "I am ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God." That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God; or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher.

C.S. Lewis

Encounter with Jesus

When Jesus asks, "Do you want to be well?", he is really asking, "Do you want to change?" Are you willing to change as you are healed? Are you willing to think differently, act differently and relate to God and others differently? Are you willing to learn new patterns for living, thinking, feeling and relating? Healing of the body or heart is never done in isolation, unrelated to other parts of our lives. Healing means change. We desire healing to get relief in one area of our life, but we may not realize that healing in one area will also mean change for other areas of our lives. Do you want to be well? Are you willing to change? **Write a letter** to Jesus telling him what is on your heart concerning healing and change. **Listen and look** for what he might say back to you. Write down anything you want to remember.

When Jesus works in our lives to heal and bring wholeness to any part, he does not just wave a magic wand over us. We must cooperate with what God is doing in us. We have work to do too and it begins with being willing to change and let our whole life be shaped into the image of Christ. When we come to the end of our physical life, what is important is not what we have accomplished or the good works we have done, but rather, what kind of person we have become?