

## LESSON 5

\*January 24-30

# The Struggle to Be Real



---

### SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *John 4:43-54.*

**Memory Text:** “Jesus replied, ‘You may go. Your son will live.’ The man took Jesus at his word and departed” (*John 4:50, NIV*).

**Key Thought:** When we encounter Jesus, He challenges us to re-evaluate everything in our lives, even our own self-understanding.

In this lesson we encounter a man whose faith in Jesus is sufficient to propel him to journey 16 miles uphill in order to find Jesus and ask Him to heal his son. If we had observed him, we would have called him a man of faith. Yet, Jesus labels the man's faith as the kind that's merely seeking after miraculous signs and wonders. Jesus exposes his faith as something other than what it seemed to be.

The human heart is deceptive by nature (*Jer. 17:9*). Even at our best we sometimes deceive ourselves and others. But John tells the story of One who not only sees past our image building to the true need of the soul but helps us to a fuller and deeper knowledge of both self and God through His Word.

In this lesson we will examine a living parable of the One whose word is as good as His touch. In the process, we will gain a deeper insight into a more authentic Christian faith.

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

**SUNDAY** *January 25*

## **No Honor at Home** (*John 4:43-45*).

This passage forms the transition between the story about the woman of Samaria and the story about a royal official in Galilee who approaches Jesus in behalf of his son. It is a startling passage in which, at first glance, two separate assertions seem to contradict each other.

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

**How** do the Galileans react upon Jesus' arrival, and why? *John 4:45*.

As Jesus approaches Galilee, He is mindful that "a prophet has no honor in his own country"; yet, the Galileans welcome Jesus. In the original language, the word *then* occurs at the beginning of verse 45, suggesting that verse 45 is somehow the natural result of verse 44, "A prophet has no honor in his own country. When Jesus arrived in Galilee, therefore, the Galileans welcomed Him!" 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 is happening here?

---

---

The welcoming response of the Galileans is just like that of the Judeans, who showed faith in Jesus because they had seen miracles and signs. The Galileans thought they were welcoming Jesus in a positive way. But enthusiasm for Jesus that is based on miracles only is no honor. The Galileans prove to be a people who are awed by miracles and spectacular works but who are slow to believe in Jesus' words. Their excitement about Jesus is based more on selfishness than on faith in who He was.

**In probably all of us, there are some selfish motives in our faith (after all, Why do we want salvation, if not to gain something for ourselves?). Must our motives always be pure in our walk with the Lord? Can the Lord still work with those whose motives might not be exactly what they should be?**

**MONDAY** *January 26*

## **It Is Hard to Be Real** (*John 4:46-49*).

As is so often the case in John's Gospel, this new story functions as an acted parable, demonstrating the truth of the earlier statement. The problematic, Galilean welcome of Jesus (*John 4:43-45*) is illustrated with a story about a royal official who believes in Jesus yet struggles in his expression of that faith.

**What** problem does the royal official bring to Jesus, and what does he want Jesus to do? *John 4:47, 49*.

**Where** did both Jesus and the royal official live? *John 2:12, 4:46*.

Jesus and the royal official had probably spent some time as neighbors in a very small town (Capernaum was little more than one hundred meters across). The man's combination of faith and doubts well illustrates a prophet's difficulty in finding honor at home.

**What** does Jesus say in response to the royal official's first request? *John 4:48*. **What did Jesus mean by this statement? Was not part of the problem the fact that they saw signs and wonders and yet still did not have true faith?**

Jesus' initial response indicates that the man, like Nicodemus before him, was an example of inadequate faith. It seems that the Galileans on the whole welcomed Jesus outwardly but did not really believe in Him (*John 4:43-45*). The miracles Jesus performed actually may have become stumbling blocks to the people on their way to a true appreciation of Jesus.

A Galilean himself, the royal official is confronted by the reality of his partial, inadequate faith. He is not relying on the word of Jesus but requires physical evidence before he would believe. He is startled to discover that he could not hide his unbelief from Jesus (remember the theme of *John 2:23-25*: Jesus knows!). Realizing that he might lose all on account of unbelief, he finally throws himself at the feet of Jesus in desperation.

**What are some helpful ways of dealing with doubt? Is doubt always a negative thing, or can it sometimes play a positive role in a Christian's experience? Why?**

**TUESDAY** January 27

## **The Path to Faith** (*John 4:50-54*).

**What** does Jesus say in response to the man's second and more desperate request, and how does the royal official react? *John 4:50*.

“The nobleman left the Saviour's presence with a peace and joy he had never known before. Not only did he believe that his son would be restored, but with strong confidence he trusted in Christ as the Redeemer.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 198, 199.

The shocking word that Jesus speaks to the man is that He does not need to travel to Capernaum; Jesus can heal at a great distance. This is a living parable of the Gospel's message to the second generation of Christians that Jesus' word is as good as His touch. He does not need to be present physically to meet any need.

The second statement of Jesus is the final piece that brings faith to the royal official. He grasps the word of Christ, and he believes. But belief brings with it a test. Would he act on that newfound faith? Would he head home believing that his son will live, or would he continue to beg Jesus to come to his home and heal his son with a touch? His actions demonstrate his newfound faith.

**What** do these texts say about the relationship between faith and works? *Isa. 58:1-12, John 15:5, James 2:22*.

It was about one o'clock in the afternoon when the royal official encountered Jesus. If he had hurried downhill (Cana is some six hundred meters higher than Capernaum, twenty-five kilometers away), he could have made it back to Capernaum that night (see Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 199). One would think that he would have hurried home to find out whether his son were, in fact, healed. Instead, the fact that the servants were sent out to look for him the day after he met Jesus indicates that he took his time heading home, stopping somewhere for the night. The man not only headed home at Jesus' command; he did so in a manner that indicated he had fully accepted Jesus' word. The evidence of faith is action. If the only reason to hurry was worry about his son, his deliberate journey was the living expression of his confidence in Jesus' word.

**Though we are not saved by works, how do works manifest and express our faith? In your own experience, how have works strengthened your faith in the Lord? What is it about good works that strengthens faith? Also, in your experience, how do sinful works weaken faith and add to doubt?**

**WEDNESDAY** January 28

## **The Solution to Life's Problems** *(Rom. 10:17, Hebrews 11).*

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

Faith came to the royal official by hearing Jesus' word from His own mouth. For the second generation of Christians, faith comes when the word of Christ is grasped in written form or in the oral presentations of those who bring that Written Word to us.

Under the surface of the story in John 4 lies the divine solution to life's problems. The story begins with a point of need. The royal official's son lay dying. When the official heard that Jesus was accessible, he did not linger at home hoping that something good might happen; he brought his problem directly to Jesus. He assumed that if Jesus accompanied him back to Capernaum, His touch would banish the illness that threatened the life of his son.

Instead, Jesus speaks the shocking word that He does not need to travel to Capernaum; He can heal at a great distance. His word is as good as His touch. The man not only takes Jesus at His word; his actions from that time on are a bodily demonstration of his faith in Jesus' word.

**Read Hebrews 11. How does this chapter fit in with these issues regarding the exercise of faith?**

How can we apply this faith lesson to our problems today? Four steps seem to emerge: (1) Acknowledge the problem. This is not as simple as it sounds but will be discussed further in the next day's lesson. (2) Take your problem to Jesus in prayer. (3) Receive the word that your need has been met. The words of Jesus to us are found in the Bible. If we want to hear those words, we need to know the Word. That is why continual Bible study is important. (4) Speak and act out God's answer. It is not enough simply to hear the Word. The Word becomes real to us when we act on it and when we tell others about our faith. Genuine belief results in corresponding action.

But what if we are like the royal official? What if our belief is mixed with unbelief? What if we have doubts? This story suggests that the doubts need to be confronted with words of faith and action. Take God at His word. Do what the Bible says, and faith will come.

**Why is the actual practice and exercise of faith so important for maintaining faith?**

**THURSDAY** January 29

## Steps to Authenticity

**What** is the natural condition of the human heart? *Jer. 17:9*. **What** is Laodicea's fundamental problem? *Rev. 3:17*. **How** do these two factors work together against us?

“Like a flash of light, the Saviour’s words to the nobleman laid bare his heart. He saw that his motives in seeking Jesus were selfish. His vacillating faith appeared to him in its true character.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 198.

The royal official did not know the depths of his unbelief until confronted directly by Jesus. We, too, are often unaware of our sinfulness and unbelief. We are like Laodicea, the church in Revelation whose self-concept is not confirmed by reality (*Rev. 3:17*). How can you bring a problem to Jesus when your heart is deceiving you, when you do not even know that you have a problem?

The most effective path to true authenticity before God is a devotional encounter with Him.

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

2. *Through prayer* we seek to be real with God. God prefers that we be totally honest with Him in prayer. Jesus certainly was. “Why have You forsaken Me?” If Jesus could be that honest with God, it cannot be a sin for us! The Lord wants to hear our deepest needs, our deepest feelings, yes—even our anger.

3. *Through journaling* (a spiritual diary) we can bring both our Bible study and our prayers into sharp focus. The writing process draws out depths of self-understanding that often go untapped without it. The writing process can help us develop a deeper understanding of our need for God in specific areas of life.

4. *Accountability to others* can enhance our accountability to God. Authentic Christians usually can point to specific people who understand and love them yet can share frankly regarding the quality of their behavior.

Through exercises such as the ones above, we can gain a more accurate awareness of the barriers we set up against God in our lives.

**If we know our own hearts are corrupt, if we know our own motives are not pure, if we know we are sinners to the core, why must we place our whole hope only in what Christ did for us at the Cross? See Rom. 5:8, Col. 1:14, 1 Tim. 1:15, 2:6.**

**Further Study:** Many people are troubled by the idea of accountability. They suggest that we should take everything to God in prayer (Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 119). While Ellen White makes statements that support such a concept, she also underlines the importance of being accountable to other Christians.

“It is your duty to counsel with your brethren. This may touch your pride, but the humility of a mind taught by the Holy Spirit will listen to counsel, and will banish all self-confidence.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 315.

“When men’s hearts are softened and subdued by the constraining influence of the Holy Spirit, they will give heed to counsel; but when they turn from admonition until their hearts become hardened, the Lord permits them to be led by other influences.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 425.

“There are souls perplexed with doubt, burdened with infirmities, weak in faith, and unable to grasp the Unseen; but a friend whom they can see, coming to them in Christ’s stead, can be a connecting link to fasten their trembling faith upon Christ.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 297.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Read Hebrews 11:6. Why is it impossible, without faith, to please God? What does that mean, to “please God”?
- 2 How does the attitude of the Galileans toward Christ compare with that of the Samaritans in the same chapter? What lessons should that comparison have for us?
- 3 If faith is a gift from God (*Eph. 2:8*), why is the exercise of faith so important? Why does the Lord not just keep renewing the gift, regardless of what we do?

**Summary:** Jesus returns to Galilee and finds a people who express faith in Him that is based on His ability to do miracles. Using the example of the royal official, the author of the Gospel both exposes the emptiness of such faith and points the way to true faith. Through the words of Jesus, we gain a more authentic understanding of our own sinfulness and of the barriers we erect to avoid intimacy with God. But when faith is actively expressed in words and actions, it enables us to take hold of the solutions to life’s problems that God offers to us through His Word.

## From Disappointment to Discovery

by J. H. ZACHARY

Anna has four daughters. Violeta, the youngest, was engaged to marry a young man, but his parents refused to permit the marriage because the couple were of different faiths. Distressed, and with time on her hands, Violeta decided to study the teachings of different churches. She found a Bible and began to read. Often she stayed up until midnight, and many times her mother heard her weeping.

One day Violeta received an invitation to attend an evangelistic meeting. She did not know what church was conducting the meeting, but she went and was thrilled that the speaker based his message upon the Bible.

Violeta offered to tell her mother what the Bible teachers were saying, but her mother refused to listen, for she wanted to follow only what her own church taught. But one day Anna happened to hear Violeta reading aloud from the Bible. As she listened, Anna felt something tugging at her heart. She realized that she was not following the Bible.

Anna found an old Bible and began reading it. She realized that it was the same as the Bible her daughter was reading. Anna began reading from it every day, searching for God.

Violeta began attending the Seventh-day Adventist church. Anna allowed her to go, thinking that going to any church was better than going to the discos. Violeta often talked to her mother about what she was learning in church. While Anna would not attend the meetings, she did listen as Violeta told her what the pastor had said.

Through Violeta's testimony, Anna heard the truths of the Bible that had been hidden from her for so long. She decided to follow the truth and began attending the Adventist church with her daughter, even though her husband opposed her. Finally he agreed to attend a series of meetings with Anna and Violeta, and he was baptized. Anna's other three daughters are also studying the Bible in preparation for baptism.



ANNA BONDORETZ (left). J. H. ZACHARY is coordinator of international evangelism for *The Quiet Hour*.