

LESSON 6

*January 31–February 6

Putting *the* Past Behind You



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 5.*

Memory Text: “Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, ‘See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you’” (*John 5:14, NIV*).

Key Thought: Jesus is not satisfied to heal only physically or spiritually. He wants to restore the entire person. Genuine faith involves every part of life: mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual.

New life in Christ includes “putting the past behind you.” In John 5 we read a story about a man who had sunk as low as a human being could go and still be alive. Paralyzed in body, sin-stricken in mind and heart, he doesn’t even appeal to Jesus for healing. Jesus chooses to make the man a Sabbath-day example of His awesome power to bring life to those as good as dead. Not only does He restore the man physically, He challenges the man to cooperate in extending that healing to his whole person.

When confronted by the religious leaders regarding His “desecration” of the Sabbath, Jesus reveals the Godlike nature of His action. In healing the man at the pool on the Sabbath, Jesus offers stunning testimony with regard to His divine origin and mission. He is more than just a man, more than even a Messiah; He is the creative Life-Giver Himself. So, the story of the healing at the Pool of Bethesda becomes another living parable of the divine Creator who became flesh and dwelt among us.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 7.*

SUNDAY *February 1*

The Pool of Bethesda *(John 5:1-4).*

Read the first four verses of John 5. In what ways is this scene symbolic of fallen humanity? What is the condition of these people, and where are they looking for help?

The name *Bethesda* may be interpreted as “House of Mercy,” so Jesus shows mercy at the place where people looked for mercy. The Pool of Bethesda was located just north of the temple complex. The pool was fed by an intermittent stream, which may explain the troubling of the waters from time to time.

What happens at the pool? *John 5:3, 4.*

Your answer to this question may depend on the version of the Bible you use. In English, many older translations, such as the King James Version, state that an angel of the Lord stirred up the healing waters, but the more ancient biblical manuscripts leave out that element of the story (hence, no verse 4 in many translations). Although Ellen White generally used the King James Bible, she apparently rejected the implication that angels were involved in the troubling of the waters.

“At certain seasons the waters of this pool were agitated, and *it was commonly believed that this was the result of supernatural power*, and that whoever first after the troubling of the pool stepped into the waters, would be healed of whatever disease he had.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 201 (emphasis supplied). If the traditional reading were to prove correct, it certainly would be a strange thing for God to arrange a healing mechanism in which the least sick are favored over the truly needy. In direct contrast, Jesus enters a place of merciless mercy and picks out the least-likely candidate to achieve healing along the lines of the popular tradition.

All around us we see vast multitudes such as those at the Pool of Bethesda, sick, damaged, hurt by the warfare of life, and waiting in vain for help from sources that really cannot give it. As Christians, what is the one thing that we, perhaps just as damaged, have been given that they need, as well? See Rom. 8:24, Col. 1:5, Titus 2:13.

MONDAY February 2

Healing the Paralytic *(John 5:5-15)*.

Review the story of Jesus healing the paralytic, as presented in John 5:5-15. Summarize the essence of what happened, dwelling specifically on what this story tells us about the character of God.

Several aspects of this story cry out for attention. First of all, Jesus healed the man arbitrarily. He picked one man out of a whole crowd of people—a man who had not sought Jesus out, a man who did not even know Him, a man who expressed no faith in Him before being healed. His only claim to Jesus' attention may have been that he was the most pitiful of all the cases present.

How typical of God to act this way! To act in this way at decisive points in our lives, God's hand often is felt in ways we have not asked for and do not deserve. God does things such as this, not to excuse sin but so we can experience His grace, which reminds us of our total dependence on Him.

A second startling aspect to the story is that Jesus chose to heal the man on the Sabbath. The rabbis allowed for special acts on the Sabbath in emergencies, but this was no emergency. After all, the man had been crippled for 38 years; surely a day's delay for the sake of the Sabbath would not have made a major difference. Jesus was deliberately making a point here. " 'It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath,' " Jesus had said in Matthew 12:12 *(NIV)*. What was said there is acted here. "The Sabbath is not intended to be a period of useless inactivity. . . . The work of Christ in healing the sick was in perfect accord with the law."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 207.

The story in John 5 became a living parable illustrating the truth of John 5:21: " 'The Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it' " *(NIV)*. Jesus can give life to anyone He wishes, because there are no limits to His life-giving power.

After healing the paralytic, Jesus tells him not just to arise and walk but to take up his bed, as well, knowing that this action would arouse the indignation of the religious leaders. What do you think Christ's motives were in that command, and what message could that have for us, we who take the Sabbath command seriously?

TUESDAY February 3

Dealing With Sin and Its Consequences

(John 5:14).

What does Jesus tell the former invalid when He meets him later in the temple? *John 5:14.*

When Jesus tells the man to “stop sinning” (*NIV*), He implies, first of all, that the man’s illness was caused by sin in some sense. Continued sin might result in a relapse of the paralysis.

There is, however, an even deeper element here. The form of the word translated “sinning” is extremely continuous. Jesus commands the man to stop something that he had been doing continuously, right up to the time of this encounter in the temple. This implies that the man had somehow been continuing in sin, even in a paralyzed state. What kind of sin was Jesus talking about? A paralyzed man cannot rob banks, commit adultery, or kill anyone. Jesus must have been referring to sin of the mind—his thoughts, his attitudes, his imagination.

After extending grace to the paralytic, Jesus tells him to “sin no more.” Look up the following texts: How do they reveal the same principle manifested in Christ’s words to the healed man? *John 8:10, 11; Rom. 6:1-6; Gal. 2:16, 17.*

But while the healing of the man’s body was totally an act of grace on Jesus’ part, there was a part for him to play in his recovery, as well. Sin not only separates us from God; it produces ongoing consequences that eventually destroy the quality of all aspects of a person’s life.

The consequences of sin include not only physical injuries and disease; there are emotional, spiritual, and psychological effects, as well. All these can and should be addressed by a relationship with Jesus. All other things being equal, a genuine walk with Jesus brightens the facial expressions, soothes the emotions, warms the heart, and brings renewed energy to the body. This is why Seventh-day Adventist Christianity is so concerned with things such as diet, exercise, and attitude. Genuine faith involves every part of life—mental, physical, and emotional—as well as spiritual.

Nevertheless, most Christians readily acknowledge that their inner lives, particularly the emotional aspect, can be quite unstable even after conversion. This passage tells us we have an active role to play in cooperating with Jesus in our recovery from sin and its effects on our life.

Jesus, the Life-Giver (*John 5:16-30*).

How does Jesus justify His act of healing on the Sabbath? *John 5:16-18*.

In response to the persecution He experienced, Jesus says He is simply following the example of His Father, who is “always” at work on the Sabbath. God’s action provides the model for human activity on the Sabbath.

Jewish writers of the time recognized that God’s work on the Sabbath could be detected in births, deaths, sunshine, rain, and the continued flowing of rivers (see William Barclay, *The Gospel of John* [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975], vol. 1, p. 183). The Jews, therefore, recognized that Jesus was claiming the same privileges on the Sabbath that God has claimed. By healing on the Sabbath, Jesus was claiming equality with God.

“Should God forbid the sun to perform its office upon the Sabbath? . . . Must the wheat and corn stop growing, and the ripening cluster defer its purple bloom? . . . In such a case, men would miss the fruits of the earth, and the blessings that make life desirable. . . . He will not be held guiltless who neglects to relieve suffering on the Sabbath. God’s holy rest day was made for man, and acts of mercy are in perfect harmony with its intent. God does not desire His creatures to suffer an hour’s pain that may be relieved upon the Sabbath or any other day.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 206, 207.

List the various ways *John 5:16-30* portrays Jesus as equal with the Father.

In *John 5:19-30* Jesus demonstrates that He is doing the same work as His Father, the work of giving life (*vss. 20, 21, 26, 28, 29*) and the work of judging (*vss. 22, 27, 30*). By doing what His Father says on this earth, He not only shows that the Father is life but demonstrates the truth of His own claim to divinity (*vss. 19-23*). He does not leave anyone the option of believing in the Father while ignoring His claims about Himself (*vs. 23*).

Here is Jesus, who performs an incredible miracle; however, so caught up in their own religious forms and customs, the leaders focus, instead, on the “minor” things, missing the bigger picture. In what ways could we be focusing on “minors” while missing the important principle unfolding before our eyes?

THURSDAY *February 5*

The Greatest Witnesses to Jesus *(John 5:31-47).*

In yesterday's study, we saw that Jesus made some powerful claims about Himself, claims that would ring false in the mouth of every other human being who ever lived. Jesus, obviously, saw the need to justify the kind of testimony He gave about Himself.

List all who offer a testimony in favor of Jesus in John 5:31-47. Which of these witnesses does Jesus seem to consider the most important?

Jesus acknowledges that uncorroborated testimony about oneself is inadequate (5:31). One of the fundamental principles of Judaism is that truth can be established only in the mouths of at least two witnesses (*Deut. 19:15; see also Rev. 11:3-13*). So, Jesus adds to His own testimony the testimony of John the Baptist, His works, His Father, and the Scriptures, thereby doubling the minimum testimony needed to establish truthfulness within Judaism (*John 5:31-40*).

Read John 5:38. What powerful rebuke is Jesus giving to those leaders?

When it is clear the religious leaders are not willing to accept the testimony of these witnesses (*vss. 43, 44; see also 8:13, 14*), Jesus calls forth the ultimate witness within Judaism, Moses. Moses had served as an intercessor with God in behalf of Israel (*Exod. 32:7-14*). But in the mouth of Jesus, Moses is transformed into a judge (*John 5:45-47*). The words of Moses will condemn those who reject Jesus, because Moses wrote about Jesus and prepared the way for Him. Jesus closes with the parting shot, “ ‘Since you do not believe what [Moses] wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?’ ” (*vs. 47, NIV*).

With this encounter, the battle is joined between Jesus and some of the leaders of Israel, a battle that continues in the Gospel until Jesus is arrested, suffers, and dies on the cross. In the hostility of these people, John portrays the hostility of all who reject the gospel, regardless of their background.

How is your perception of Jesus shaped by the attitudes of believers whom you know and admire? How would your life be different if you did not know these people? And what about the people who admire and look up to you? How do your attitudes toward the Lord impact their lives?

Futher Study: As pointed out in Tuesday's section, most Christians readily acknowledge that their inner lives, particularly the emotional aspect, can be quite unstable, even after conversion. Christians, as well as others, struggle with unhappy memories, flashes of anger, and unmentionable thoughts. The story of the paralytic at Bethesda tells us that Jesus cares at least as much about the inner life as He does about the outward circumstances.

Unwelcome thoughts and emotions can revolve around both things we have done and things that have been done to us. Things we have done cause feelings of remorse, regret, and failure. Things others have done to us can cause feelings of anger, grief, and deep resentment. Fullness in Christ involves dealing with issues of the past such as these. For practical suggestions about the process of mental and emotional healing, see chapter 6 in the companion volume by the author of these lessons.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Why do many Christians believe that accepting Jesus should put an end to all emotional difficulties? To what degree do you think this idea is true?**
- 2 Forgiveness is a major component in dealing with sin and its consequences. Why, then, do most people find it so hard to forgive?**
- 3 The paralytic evidently suffered as a consequence of his own sinful actions. What do you think Jesus would have told the victim of rape or of abuse? What would He say to one who causes others to suffer?**
- 4 Jesus violated human-made rules about Sabbath keeping to heal a man. To what degree are your personal rules for living God-made or man-made? How can you know the difference?**

Summary: Jesus came to this earth to show how God would act within the human context of this world. By healing the paralytic at the pool of Bethesda, Jesus demonstrated that He is not limited by time or by the quality of the material He has to work with. He also showed that He is not satisfied to heal only the physical or spiritual side of a person. He wants to restore the entire person.

The Stolen Book

MARTIAL RAKOTONIAINA

Martial learned about a charismatic church that claimed to be able to heal people and chase out demons. He did not need healing, but he was attracted to the group by their charismatic activities. He began attending the church.

When a church member invited him to study in the seminary to become a pastor, he agreed. While at the seminary he found a book that sounded interesting to him. He took the book home, and when he left the seminary he did not return the book. When he completed his studies he was given a church to pastor.

One day he began to read the book he had taken from the seminary library. It was *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*. As he read it he began to question what he had been taught in the seminary and what he had been teaching his congregation.

He talked to his family about what he had learned from the stolen book. The family agreed that the Adventist Church has the truth, but Martial knew no Adventists or where he could find an Adventist church.

When he stopped attending church for several weeks, members of his congregation asked him what was wrong. He explained what he had learned about the Bible and told them he could no longer pastor a Sunday-keeping church. The church members loved their pastor and wept when he told them he was leaving. He invited his members to join him in honoring the seventh-day Sabbath.

An Adventist believer learned that this charismatic pastor had accepted the Sabbath. He visited the family and told them about a congregation that worshiped a short distance from their home. The former pastor and his family began attending the Adventist church, and, in time, were baptized.



The former pastor returned to hold evangelistic meetings in the area where he had once pastored. Most of his former members came and listened, but none of them followed him.

One day he met a fellow seminarian and shared the stolen book with him. "I hope the stolen book will do for him what it did for me," Martial said.

MARTIAL RAKOTONIAINA (left) is a farmer and lay worker in Madagascar.

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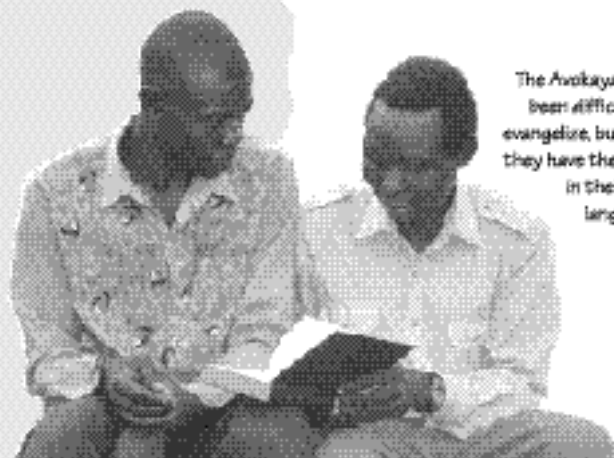
Sudan

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