

## LESSON 6

\*January 31–February 6

# Putting *the* Past Behind You



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### 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?

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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 similar to 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.**

## TEACHERS COMMENTS

**Key Text:** *John 5:14*

### Teachers Aims:

1. To emphasize that as God, Jesus is the only Being who can give new life.
2. To demonstrate that to have this new life it is necessary for us to turn our backs on certain aspects of the old life.
3. To show how the new life Jesus gives to His believers is an important evidence for His claims.

### Lesson Outline:

#### **I. New Life in Christ** (*John 3:5-7*).

- A. Christ as Creator is constantly in the act of creating. Creation was not a one-time, finite event.
- B. People who are, in one way or another, cut off from Christ are also cut off from life.
- C. People who reestablish their connection with Christ are renewed.

#### **II. “Be Not Conformed to This World”** (*Rom. 12:2*).

- A. Sin establishes itself primarily in our attitudes and thoughts.
- B. A change in attitudes, habits, and so forth is necessary to cause sin to release its grip, even after having accepted the new life offered by Christ.
- C. Sanctification is a lifelong process.

#### **III. Life and the Life-Giver** (*John 5:17*).

- A. In claiming the right to heal on Sabbath, Jesus was claiming the prerogatives of God.
- B. Jesus’ claim was verified by the fact that He not only claimed the right to renew life but He actually did renew it in full view of His contemporaries.
- C. Even though Jesus is not physically present among us today, His acts in our lives are equally indicative of His divinity.

**Summary:** Christ, according to the Gospel of John, created all things. As such, He is the only Being who can keep things alive or grant new life. He does this every day, in both a physical and spiritual sense, and the renewed spiritual vitality in the lives of Christians is a visible sign of His presence.

### COMMENTARY.

This week’s lesson begins with a miracle and ends with the affirmation of the greatest miracle: Jesus is God. Bethesda (“the House of Mercy”) reveals not only the Lord of mercy who has come down from heaven to save sinners but One “who is over all” (*Rom. 9:5*). Here, we meet human infirmity, Christ’s sufficiency, and the basis of that sufficiency.



**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.

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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?**

## TEACHERS COMMENTS

### I. Human Infirmity.

Around the pool of Bethesda lay shattered pieces of helplessness. Each suffering human was longing for the stirring of the waters. The first person in at the precise moment—the person who had friends or connections with the powerful—seems to have been made whole. That was the order of Bethesda. However, Jesus' visit changed that order, for where Jesus is, there is change and newness. The man He chose to inaugurate this newness of life was a “case of supreme wretchedness.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 202.

How wretched was he? First, he was sick for 38 years. That is a long time to lie by a pool hoping that somehow the impossible would happen.

Second, he was friendless. At the time of the Passover, when visitors, perhaps even some from his village, thronged the city, there was no one to be his friend. Furthermore, where were those who wore the robes of religion? To this lonely man, Jesus offered to be a friend.

Third, he was a man of hope. “Never give up” was his motto. That type of stubbornness met its answer in the Man who asked him, “Wilt thou be made whole?” (*John 5:6*). The man of infirmity had at last found the Man of all-sufficiency.

### II. Christ's Sufficiency.

Christ's question seems cold and cruel. What other wish would a man have who had been waiting for 38 years to be healed? Yet this question had an eternal purpose: to let humanity know that Christ is at once the question and the answer. The question Jesus asks has an obvious answer. However, because He is a God of choice, He will not force the obvious. God will not violate an individual's free will. Willingly, we must come to Him, face His question, and accept His answer. He is the solution to all our problems. Paul understood this when he wrote, “Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me” (*2 Cor. 12:9*).

Because the man of Bethesda chose to place His trust in Christ, he experienced the divine sufficiency that meets all human infirmities. The same power is available today: “Put your will on the side of Christ. Will to serve Him, and in acting upon His word you will receive strength.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 203.

### III. The Basis of Christ's Sufficiency.

The Bethesda miracle helped a man who had lain helpless for 38 years to dance in the streets and rejoice at what God had done for him. It was the Sabbath, however, and the custodians of the law were enraged. Instead of rejoicing that the Sabbath's promise

**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.

## TEACHERS COMMENTS

of restoration and rest had become a reality, they accused the Miracle Worker of violating the Sabbath law. Thus, they “sought to slay him” (*John 5:16*). Jesus’ answer to this charge is the best explanation in Scripture of (a) the meaning of the Sabbath and (b) Christ’s divinity as the basis for His sufficiency.

First, the Sabbath is not a day for human labor or idleness. It is a day of worship, rest, and fellowship. It is a reminder that “heaven’s work never ceases, and men should never rest from doing good.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 207.

## Inductive Bible Study

**Texts for Discovery:** *Matthew 5:44, 45; John 3:19; 5:39-42; Romans 5:1, 2; Hebrews 10:19-23*

- 1 Some translations of John 5:3, 4 state as fact the common belief of the time that an angel stirred the waters of Bethesda, thus bringing about a limited number of miraculous healings. Can we safely say that this was not true? Why, or why not?
- 2 The paralytic Jesus heals in John 5 is an almost totally passive recipient of grace. What did the paralytic “do” in order to be healed? Why was this important? Why does what he did not negate righteousness by faith? Use texts to support your answer.
- 3 In healing on Sabbath, Jesus followed the example of God, who continues to sustain life even on this holy day. What does it say about the religion of the time that they found this Godlike behavior to be the most scandalous of all? Do we face the same danger today? Explain your answer.
- 4 In telling the former paralytic to stop sinning, Jesus seemingly contradicted other passages in the book of John where He questioned the conventional belief that sickness equals sin. Was He in fact saying the paralytic’s illness was the result of his sin? In what sense is it possible to stop sinning? Explain your answers.
- 5 In John 5:45-47, Jesus states that the leaders who accused Him disbelieved in Moses. This would have come as quite a surprise to them, since they believed they were basing their lives on Moses’ teachings. What were they missing? Are we in danger of missing the same thing? Why, or why not?

**WEDNESDAY** *February 4*

## **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?**

## TEACHERS COMMENTS

Second, the basis of Christ's all-sufficiency is His own divinity. In John 5:17-47, Jesus affirms His deity by claiming five times His equality with God: (1) As a person, He equates Himself with the Father (*vs. 17*), and there is no distinction between the two as far as divine status is concerned. Because the religious leaders understood that, they "sought the more to kill him" (*vs. 18*). (2) Both the Son and the Father are one in work (*vss. 19, 20*). The Son does what the Father does. In healing the man, Jesus claims to have done the will and work of the Father. (3) As the Father is the originator of life, so is the Son (*vss. 21, 24-29*). Thus, Christ established that He is the Creator. (4) Because the Father has given the work of judgment to the Son, so the Son is due all honor, even as the Father is (*vss. 22, 23, 30*). (5) The Father has chosen to reveal through the prophets both who Jesus is and what He came to

## Witnessing

Spiritual healing involves change in every aspect of life. The old man becomes a part of the past. "Forgetting those things which are behind" we reach for the things ahead (*Phil. 3:13*). Change, of course, does not come easily. In fact, it's hard to forget. On the other hand, it can be just as difficult to remember. Why do we seem to remember things we should forget and forget things we want to remember? "For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do" (*Rom. 7:19*).

One of the techniques used for forgetting is referred to as interference. There are two types of interference. Proactive interference occurs when that which was previously learned hinders an individual's ability to learn something new. Retroactive interference is when new information blocks the memory of previously learned material. Our goal as Christians should be retroactive interference.

When speaking to others about changing old behaviors, we can explain how the new lifestyle in Christ should take control so the old lifestyle can be forgotten. One way to accomplish this is to reinforce in one's mind (or memory) the new information learned from the Word of God. "Keep my commandments . . ." and "bind them upon thy fingers, write them upon the table of thine heart" (*Prov. 7:2, 3*).

We should read God's Word daily, repeating Bible verses and promises, putting them on our doorposts and hanging them on our walls (*Deut. 6:9*). We can make the atmosphere of our homes, offices, or wherever we spend our time such that we constantly will be reminded of our new life in Christ. What a witness doing so would be.

**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?**

## TEACHERS COMMENTS

accomplish in this world: to bring eternal life to all people (vss. 37-47).

Jesus is not only the ultimate revelation of God's will and work. He is God Himself in human flesh. Thus, Christ is all-sufficient to minister to every human infirmity brought about by sin. Therefore, "whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life" (*John 3:16*).

## Life-Application Approach

**Icebreaker:** "Hesiod, the Greek poet, said that when a man was about to ford a river, he should pray and wash his hands, for he who wades through a stream with unwashed hands incurs the wrath of the gods. When the Persian king Xerxes came to the Strymon in Thrace his magicians offered white horses and went through other ceremonies before the army ventured to cross. Lucullus, the Roman general, offered a bull to the River Euphrates before he crossed it. To this day in south-east Africa some of the Bantu tribes believe that rivers are inhabited by malignant spirits which must be propitiated by flinging a handful of corn or some other offering into the river before it is crossed. . . . The people who waited for the pool in Jerusalem to be disturbed were children of their age believing in things of their age."—William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible: John 1*, pp. 178, 179.

### Thought Question:

The healing of the man by the pool of Bethesda is a prime example of how Jesus worked in and around the beliefs and superstitions of His day. Being "God," He could have scoffed at their foolish thinking. Instead, He allowed compassion for one sinner's suffering to override everything else. How should the church respond to the obvious erroneous points of view of others? Give specific instances from Christ's life that serve as examples of how we should deal with differences in opinion, theology, and lifestyle?

### Application Question:

The story of the invalid at the pool clearly shows us that Jesus is more interested in developing a relationship with us than He is in keeping a record of our sins. The relationship He seeks is one of partnership. Jesus asked the man to take up his bed and walk. The power of God does not make our effort disposable. What do you have to offer God? Do you think a partnership with God is really necessary to spiritual growth? Explain.

## FRIDAY *February 6*

**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.