



Word to Life studies are sermon-aligned study guides, created to help the church dive even deeper into the passages we study together on Sundays.

Each week there will be five studies to help you prepare for the upcoming weekend sermon. This will also be a great discussion tool at your next LifeGroup meeting.

We hope you enjoy and grow deeper in your faith!

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- **Question:** Why do you think that Jesus told the healed man to *“not tell anyone, but to go and show himself to the priest?”*¹

- **Activity:** Read the following passages and consider the following question. Why might these Old Testament passages help us appreciate what Jesus did in vv. 1-4?
 - 2 Chronicles 26:23 reads, *“When Uzziah died, he was buried with his ancestors; his grave was in a nearby burial field belonging to the kings, for the people said, “He had leprosy.”*
 - 2 Kings 5:9-10 *“So Naaman went with his horses and chariots and waited at the door of Elisha’s house. But Elisha sent a messenger out to him with this message: “Go and wash yourself seven times in the Jordan River. Then your skin will be restored, and you will be healed of your leprosy.”*

- **Optional Activity:** Leviticus 14:1-32 establishes some laws pertaining to people who suffer with leprosy. It would be helpful to read this passage to understand the context of Matthew 8:1-4

¹ We will discuss this question later during the study and in the weekend’s sermon.

Week 1: Matthew 8:1-4

Day 2: No Arrogance in His Ministry

READ: Matthew 8:1-4

EXPLORE:

Maybe it was a famous athlete, a public figure, or a well-known artist, but I (Stephen) wonder if you've ever met a celebrity in everyday life. The experience of meeting a celebrity usually engenders one of two dynamics. For some, there is an ordinary appearance and a humble disposition. For others, there is an heir of superiority and cold arrogance. We might characterize the latter as those whose fame has unfortunately gone to their head. They may entertain the masses, but they are not so great when the cameras stop rolling.

One of the beautiful, but subtle characteristics of Jesus that we will continually notice in the Gospel Accounts is how He is not only good with the masses, but with individuals as well. Remember that the start of Jesus' ministry in Matthew 8 flows directly from His teaching in Matthew 5-7. We are told that a great crowd followed Him after His teaching. This is relatively unsurprising. His authority and excellence were visible before, during, and after the Sermon. Notice a small, but incredibly significant detail. Jesus moved from captivating the crowds to caring for a leper.

His ministry was certainly public, but it was not aimed at publicity. Even though His teaching was nothing short of incredible and His momentum was nothing short of exponential, He was not too busy to stop and care for the one in need. He was not too occupied. He was not unavailable. Think about it! One of Jesus' great early "followings" in His earthly ministry was immediately followed by a sacrificial and costly act of care for a leper in need. In a culture that prized cleanliness and also possessed strict rules

around purification. Christ's caring actions toward the leper would have been nothing short of scandalous!

In many ways, the opening few verses of Matthew 8 set the stage for what will continually unfold in this portion of Jesus's ministry which extend through Matthew 12. In miracle after miracle, Jesus was not only giving profound indicators of His power, but also of the manner in which that power would be manifested. Jesus had every reason to demand all attention and yet we will be consistently graced with the opportunity to see Him stop, sit, stoop, serve, and save.

I don't know about you, but when I meditate about the way Jesus ministered, I am consistently left asking, "Am I interruptible for the important stuff? Do I serve faithfully with large groups and with inconspicuous individuals? Jesus certainly was the perfect example, but in what way does my life look like His?"

In the subtle, but significant details of Scripture like Matthew 8:1-4, I am reminded that there was no arrogance in the life and ministry of Jesus. There ought not be in ours as well!

BIG IDEA: Jesus was faithful with the many and He was faithful with the one.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Jesus moved seamlessly from serving the masses to caring for the leper. Is it easy for you to value each individual in the way that Christ did? Why or why not?

Week 1: Matthew 8:1-4

Day 3: A Day at the Beach

READ: Matthew 8:1-4 and Leviticus 13-14

EXPLORE:

I'm (Michael) writing this from a beach house that we rented with some friends over the week of Thanksgiving. The beach has many wonderful qualities. It's fun, it's relaxing, and it's beautiful. But let's face it, the beach is a dirty place. My youngest son and I just spent hours digging and piling sand to create a speed bump to force the "crazy golf carts to slow down" and we are both filthy. As I'm typing this, I've rinsed, I've showered, and yet I can still feel sand in my teeth.

When we think of clean vs. unclean in our society, it's the presence vs. lack of dirt and germs. To the ancient Israelite, cleanliness took on a more spiritual meaning. In the book of Leviticus, the Lord provides Moses and Aaron with a list of things that are spiritually unclean and unacceptable to God. When the Israelites did something that made them unclean, it required separation from others until they had taken the steps to become clean again and offer the required sacrifice.

There are several things in this interaction between Jesus and the man with leprosy that would have been countercultural to those who witnessed it: According to Leviticus 13, once this man had been declared by a priest to be unclean with leprosy, he was required to wear torn clothes, constantly warn others so they could avoid contact by crying out 'unclean, unclean' and live totally separated from others until the priest declared him leprosy free. In the culture of the day, it would have been unacceptable for someone with leprosy to walk up to a crowd of people. Even worse, would be to do so without shouting warnings of how unclean you were. This man not only walked up to Jesus and failed to shout the required 'unclean' warning, but he also made a request for Jesus to make him 'clean'.

Back then, if some unclean dude went rogue and walked up to you in the street, then an acceptable reaction would have been to beat him away with the closest staff and then burn the staff. Who would be reckless enough to reach out and touch him? We've already established

the level of ostracism that occurred once a person was labeled unclean. They certainly didn't invite intentional skin to skin contact with an unclean person. I'm sure anyone that saw Jesus reach out and touch this leprous man was shocked and horrified.

The final shock had to be when Jesus instructed the man to follow the cleansing laws of Leviticus 14. After someone had recovered from their leprosy, the priest had to go out and verify he was leprosy free, and then the newly healed individual had to conduct a series of cleansing rituals and sacrifices. At this point, Jesus had not made his ultimate sacrifice so all the Levitical laws were still in place. Jesus was on a campaign to discredit the corrupt rules of the religious leaders. He modeled perfect obedience to God's laws during His ministry which resulted in Him telling the man to go to the priest and offer the appropriate gift.

Much like my experience at the beach with the sand, I'm sure Jesus looked out and saw a people covered in sin. It covered everything and could be found hiding in every crevice. He could even see it in their hearts. Lucky for the leper and for us, He reaches out and offers to cleanse us, and like the leper, all we have to do is ask for Him to make us clean.

BIG IDEA: Through our sinful nature we are all spiritually unclean without the cleansing sacrifice of Jesus.

APPLY:

- **Activity:** Determine where in you are struggling with spiritual uncleanliness. Ask for the Lord's will to forgive and cleanse you.

Week 1: Matthew 8:1-4

Day 4: The Messianic Secret

READ: Matthew 8:1-4

EXPLORE:

What are we to make of Jesus' command to the leper to not say anything to anyone except the priest about the healing he received? While reading through the Gospel Accounts, you might notice that the leper in our passage was not the only person to whom Jesus gave the command not to disclose His identity. He also at times gave the same command to His disciples and to demons. Jesus came to earth to be lifted up and to draw all men to Himself, so keeping His identity as the Messiah and Savior of the world confidential might seem like the exact opposite of what He would want. The fact that Jesus labored to control the spread of His wondrous works and identity is sometimes referred to today as the Messianic Secret. A Bible student would be right to ask, "What could be the purpose of Jesus not wanting news of His miracles to spread and to keep His identity a secret?"

For an answer, we don't have to look any further than Mark's telling of this same story.² We find there that the leper disobeyed Jesus' injunction to remain silent, and that because of his eagerness to share what Jesus had done for him, crowds began to seek after Jesus in numbers that made His mission more difficult. Jesus knew the publicity about the healing would hinder His ability to minister in the area, which is exactly what happened when the leper disobeyed. What seems like a good thing to do can become a bad thing when it is done in disobedience to the Lord.

Jesus took on flesh with a mission. He came to reveal Himself as Israel's promised Messiah. Ultimately, His mission was to die on the cross as the propitiation for our sins. The timing of that death was important. Jesus needed time to teach and train up His disciples. The

² See Mark 1:40-45 for reference.

Jews of Jesus' day were expecting their Messiah to come as a warrior-king who would deliver them from the Roman occupation. If the news that he was the Messiah spread too quickly and widely, people would have rallied behind him and tried to make Him king. The Romans would be forced to eliminate him and his disciples out of fear of an insurrection before Jesus could finish training the disciples to the level of maturity they needed.

The days for quietness concerning Jesus' lordship are over. We, post-crucifixion, have no imperative to remain silent. In fact, the commission we have been given by our Lord is to cross the street and to cross the oceans to make disciples, share what Jesus taught, and to baptize those who believe.

Tomorrow, we will explore one way we can easily and effectively share the story of Jesus with others.

BIG IDEA: Jesus commanded secrecy about His identity from certain people at certain times for good and logical reasons. At the end of His ministry, however, there was no doubt that He was God in flesh who came to save His people from their sins.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Do you feel an eagerness to share the story of Jesus? Spend time in prayer asking God to increase your desire to share how God has changed you.

Week 1: Matthew 8:1-4

Day 5: A Day to Share

READ TOGETHER: Matthew

EXPLORE TOGETHER:

Instructions: We believe that biblical study and spiritual growth are meant to be shared. This Word to Life has that exact focus in mind. For some, Day 5 might be a good opportunity to lead your family in a devotional. For others, this study might serve as a simple reminder to tactfully communicate your faith with those around you. Regardless, this study is designed to help you grow in your faith by sharing it with others.

EXPLORE TOGETHER:

The leper was eager to testify about what Jesus had done for him. Every believer has a story to share about how Jesus ransomed, redeemed, adopted, renewed, and justified us. A testimony can be as simple as sharing a personal experience we've had with God such as how he has answered prayer, a lesson He taught us, a trial he helped us through, or a longer account of how we became a follower of Jesus.

The story of how God has transformed your life is a powerful way to give glory to Him. The easiest way to organize and share your conversion story is by simply expounding upon three points: my life before Christ, how I came to know Christ, and my life since becoming a follower of Jesus.

We share our testimony not only to give information, but to create interest in the listener about becoming a follower of Jesus. We can build some connection with the listener to our own story by sharing emotion and experience alongside solid facts. Your listener may not have the same experiences as you, but they probably have had similar emotions. Instead of just listing your sins before following Jesus, also talk about how you felt. Did you

feel helpless, hopeless, or have no peace? Instead of just giving the facts about how you decided to follow Christ, share *why* you have followed Him. Finally, instead of just listing the sins you quit doing, share how Jesus changed your heart and made a difference in your daily life.

BIG IDEA: Skeptics might argue the validity of Scripture or the divinity of Jesus, but your personal experience with God's grace is a powerful tool in sharing the Gospel.

- **ACTIVITY:** Write down the names of three people you could share your testimony with.

- **ACTIVITY:** Consider using the template below by completing the following sentences. Plan and pray.
 - I first sensed my need for Jesus when...
 - What made me most interested in Jesus was...
 - I finally decided to trust Jesus and follow Him when I realized that...
 - Since I entered into a relationship with Jesus, I have changed...
 - Jesus helps me in my daily life by...
 - I have seen God answer my prayers, like the time...
 - a. _____, have you ever considered learning about how to follow Jesus?

- **Question:** When you think about this week's study compared to last week's study of verses 1-4, what similarities and differences do you notice?
- **Question:** How did Peter's mother-in-law respond to her miraculous healing? In what way(s) might this be an example for us today?
- **Activity:** Rewrite verse 17. Using an online or physical concordance, find the original prophetic reference in Isaiah's writing.
- **Question:** Why do you think it is important for us to see Jesus once again fulfilling prophetic expectations?
- **Activity:** Sometimes healing occurs instantly. On other occasions, it occurs over time. Still on other occasions, healing is only experienced in eternity for those who have trusted in Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Spend time seeking the Lord in prayer. Journal thoughts below in light of this reality.

Week 2: Matthew 8:5-17

Day 2: A Closer Look at Centurions

READ: Matthew 8:5-17; 27:54; Mark 15:39-45

EXPLORE:

Centurions have a long history in the Roman Republic. During the reign of Julius Caesar, centurions were highly trusted leaders who were known for their loyalty, efficiency, and management. Although the size of their respective commands would vary over time, it is estimated that the centurions of Jesus' day would command around 100 soldiers. According to ancient historical record, the majority of centurions rose through ranks after more than a decade of military service.

They were respected. They were revered. For those under the oppressive rule of Rome, however, the perception of centurions was not quite this simple. On a small scale, centurions represented the far larger sweep of Roman control and authority. Their position, allegiances, influence, and more would not make them prime candidates to respond positively to Jesus...or so it would seem!

Contrary to our best guesses, on numerous occasions, centurions are presented in the Bible with positive responses to the person, message, and ministry of Jesus. We will start in Matthew 8, but certainly other references will help further paint this picture.

In Matthew 8:5-13, the centurion has either directly or indirectly witnessed the great works of Jesus when he came in humility and faith. As one who would have personally and professionally known a great deal about "authority," we need to notice how he humbly spoke of a power which was not his own. It is no accident, and it is no small thing that a professional whose position was predicated on leadership, command, influence, and authority saw the supremacy of Jesus in precisely these arenas. This is certainly

a significant undercurrent in Matthew 8 that sends ripple effects throughout the Gospel Accounts. In front of the cross, as Jesus was breathing His last, it was a centurion who looked at the Suffering Savior and gave one of the most profound theological statements at Calvary. The centurion said, *“Truly this man was the Son of God!”*³ In Acts 10, it was a centurion named Cornelius who was described as an *upright, and God-fearing man, who was well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation.*⁴ When we see the largely optimistic portrayal of centurions, the question is not simply, Why do they respond so positively? A deeper question is, why do the Scriptures so often incorporate their positive response?

In the response of the centurions, we are reminded of the graciousness of God toward the seemingly unlikely. There is nothing that screams humility or meekness in the life of a military leader who has led dozens. Yet, it was a centurion who spoke to Jesus with unpretentiousness and faith. It was the seemingly least likely whom God had positioned to respond positively to Jesus. Could it not be the same today? Biblical texts like this one call us to wonder. They call us to question. Who is it that I have written off? Where have I lost a sense of eager expectancy and trust that the Gospel can still transform? If a centurion can rise and respond with such genuine belief, could it be that my trust of God and His work in this world needs to rise as well?

BIG IDEA: Centurions respond positively and that should challenge us all.

- **Activity:** Consider the centurion. Spend time in prayer.

³ See Matthew 27:54 and Mark 15:39 for reference.

⁴ See Acts 10:22 for reference. Additionally, it was the centurions who accompanied and protected the Apostle Paul on his way to see Felix the Governor in Acts 23.

Week 2: Matthew 8:5-17

Day 3: Should we believe in the miraculous?

READ: John 2:23; 6:2; 20:29; Luke 11:16

EXPLORE:

Miracles and the supernatural events that surround Jesus in the Gospel Accounts are often cited as some of the most outlandish things about Christianity. Our modern western culture tries to teach us that science is the only way to know the truth and asserts anything that cannot be proven by empirical methodology is hokey. Naturalism is the belief system that assumes the physical world (nature) is all that exists. The people who adhere to this worldview discount any action that cannot be explained in a scientific or naturalistic way. Therefore, many people outright reject Christianity based on a cursory reading of the Bible. Admittedly, encountering stories of Jonah in the fish or talking donkeys should give one pause. What makes these stories different from other mythological tales of old? Why should we believe miracles can even happen?

It is important to define the word miracle. Many people will flippantly comment that life is a miracle, but what they actually mean is that life is amazing and complex. However, life regularly occurs in our natural environment and therefore shouldn't be labeled a miracle. Miracle, in its most basic meaning, is an extraordinary occurrence that can only be attributed to the supernatural work of God. It is a transgression of the law of nature and defies common expectation. Naturalists do not believe in the supernatural simply because they presuppose there is no God.⁵ However, in doing so, they are left without an explanation for rationality, desire, meaning, value, and purpose. In a practical sense, people simply cannot live this way, so it would behoove us not to dismiss outrageous stories even if they seem far-fetched.

⁵ See John 4:48 for reference.

The Bible does not readily use the word miracle as we do. A more accurate translation is “signs and wonders.” The miracles described in the Bible are purposeful and intentional. They point to God’s presence and power in the world which is why these “signs and wonders” are heavily concentrated in Jesus’ ministry time on earth. When God performed miracles, He did so with the primary purpose of authenticating one of His messengers.⁶ The miracles of the Old Testament authenticated Moses and the prophets as being sent by the one true God. The miracles of the New Testament authenticated Jesus as the Messiah and the apostles as His spokesmen.

Creation, the incarnation, and Jesus’ resurrection are some of the biggest and most documented miracles that have occurred in human history. This is because they are the most substantial and pivotal. The creation of time, space, and matter reveal to us that there is a powerful and intelligent God who exists. The incarnation shows us that God so loved the world He created, that He willingly entered into the problem to fix the problem, and the resurrection reminds us that Jesus has power over life and death.

Do miracles still occur today? You bet. I would point you to Craig Keener’s books in which he documents many ancient and modern miracles. However, we must be careful not to seek after signs without seeking the One to whom those signs point.⁷

BIG IDEA: Miracles are rare and serve as signposts that point to Jesus.

APPLY:

- **Questions:** Are you or someone you know opposed to the supernatural? How do the miraculous occurrences in Scripture differ from mythological stories?

⁶ See Hebrews 2:3-4 for reference.

⁷ See Matthew 12:38-39 for reference.

Week 2: Matthew 8:5-17

Day 4: The Authority of Jesus

READ: Matthew 8:5-17; Matthew 4:18-20

EXPLORE:

One of the benefits of studying Scripture slowly is that we can prayerfully invite God's Holy Spirit to help us meditate upon and be transformed by His Word in connection with His people! One of the few downsides of this slower, more meticulous approach is that it can sometimes make it harder to see connections from one passage to another. For example, if you read the Sermon on the Mount in one sitting, there might be connections you notice which would otherwise remain unexplored if you went verse-by-verse. Matthew 8 gives us a chance to explore this dynamic further in regard to Jesus' authority!

Let me (Stephen) briefly remind you of a scene which was in your assigned reading above. Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee when He saw brothers in their place of work. Jesus certainly seemed to command them in and from their place of familiarity to follow. That was the case this day. Jesus called out to Peter and Andrew. He said to them, *"Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."* This command to follow has been described as an imperial summons. It is no mere invitation from a candidate, it is a command from a king! From the very outset of His public ministry with the disciples, Jesus is one who possesses authority. He has authority to call and, as we are reminded in this week's passage, He has authority to heal. Think again about where we were in last week's study and where we are now. Immediately following His most famous teaching, Jesus moved from the masses to care for the leper. Jesus did not merely speak to the man; He did not merely notice faith in the man; He willingly touched the man and commanded that purity be restored. Matthew 8:3 reads, *"And Jesus stretched out His hand and touched him, saying, 'I will; be clean.'"*

The scene with the centurion might very well be the opposite. Think about all the contrasts. The centurion was not externally powerless. The centurion was not sick. The sick person was not even where Jesus was. There was no touch involved. Even still, the encounter ended with another command from Jesus who said to the centurion, *“Go; let it be done for you as you have believed.”*⁸

In the final scene we have been studying, there is no detailed conversation at all. Jesus entered Peter’s house. He saw Peter’s feverish mother-in-law. He touched her hand, and she was immediately made healthy enough to serve Him in return. We are told in verse 16 that this process continued for physically and spiritually hurting people throughout the night.

On the one hand, each of scenes share a connection of healing. On the other, it seems as though they couldn’t be more different. Here is a truth that seems clear from the biblical text. When Jesus healed, He did not have to do it the same way each time. The power of His healing was not in the method, it was in the man! He had, has, and will continue to have authority. The Scripture is clear, and we would do well to meditate upon the power and might of our authoritative God in flesh, Jesus.

BIG IDEA: The same Jesus who held authority to call people into discipling relationship was the same exact Jesus who could call diseases to cease and demons to flee.

APPLY:

- **Question:** How and when are you reminded of the authority of Jesus? Spend time in prayer and in thanks.

⁸ See Matthew 8:13 for reference.

Week 2: Matthew 8:5-17

Day 5: A Day to Share

READ TOGETHER: Matthew 8:5-17

***Instructions:** We believe that biblical study and spiritual growth are meant to be shared. This Word to Life has that exact focus in mind. For some, Day 5 might be a good opportunity to lead your family in a devotional. For others, this study might serve as a simple reminder to tactfully communicate your faith with those around you. Regardless, this study is designed to help you grow in your faith by sharing it with others.*

EXPLORE TOGETHER:

Let us start today with a little bit of trivia. Do your best to read the question below without skipping ahead to the answer. Take a guess and trust me (Stephen). This is going somewhere!

***Trivia Questions:** Without looking it up online or in the paragraph below, answer the following questions. In hours, how long would it take a person to read the whole Bible? In hours, how long would it take a person to read the New Testament?*

For some who may find reading to be a challenge, you might have answered with a million hours. For others, you might have made a more legitimate guess. Regardless, the best estimate for the average reader is that it would take about seventy-five hours to read the whole Bible and about nineteen hours to read the New Testament. This may seem like a long time, but it really is not. For example, if you replaced the time that the average American spent on their phone with a daily reading of God's Word, the Bible could be read from cover-to-cover in only nineteen days.

Regardless of whether the Bible seems daunting or not, it is an incredible gift that we can read the prophetic expectations of the Old Testament and their prophetic fulfillments in the New Testament in the same day! What a gift! We ought to be reminded of this truth in

none other than Matthew 8:17. In reference to Jesus' ministry of healing, The biblical text reads, *"This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: "He took our illnesses and bore our diseases."*⁹

Let me explain it like this. A prophecy written by Isaiah which was seven hundred years in the making takes about seven seconds for us to read in Matthew. We have taken the weightiness and significance of this prophecy and others like it for granted. Written seven centuries before the birth of Christ, God cultivated a prophetic sense of expectancy through the message of Isaiah. Seventy-five hours may seem like a long time until it is compared to more than seven hundred years of waiting. It is far too easy for us to underappreciate the weightiness of Matthew 8:17.

The one who was despised, rejected, afflicted, and acquainted with grief—this is Jesus, the promised one. The one who bore our griefs, carried our sorrows, was pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities—He had come, and His name is Jesus. Seven centuries of waiting in seven seconds of reading. It is far too easy for us to read this truth and go back to our tasks. The value of this text is far too easily overlooked. This should not be so! The prophetic hope having been fulfilled by Christ ought to mark all of life!

BIG IDEA: The prophetic fulfillment of Jesus ought to mark every aspect of our lives.

- **Question:** Do you ever find yourself underappreciating the significance of something? If so, explain. What would it look like to rightly appreciate the truth of Matthew 8:17?

⁹ See Isaiah 53 for reference to this concept and the following paragraph.

- **Question:** What are some things revealed about Jesus in verses 23-27?

- **Question:** How did the demons respond to the presence of Jesus?

- **Activity:** List as many things as you notice about how the herdsmen responded once their pigs were lost.

- **Question:** Are you surprised by the response of the city to the work of Jesus? Why or why not?

- **Questions:** Our passage this week covers a few different moments in time. Is there a common thread or shared theme between them? If so, what are some points of connection?

Week 3: Matthew 8:18-22

Day 2: The Communicated Cost of Following Jesus

READ: Matthew 8:18-22

EXPLORE:

Christmas shoppers are very cognizant of the cost of items and how they must save to buy gifts for their loved ones. A married person overcome by lust and on the cusp of infidelity may ask themselves, "But at what cost?" In both scenarios, the person must consider the consequence of the costly. Satan, who comes to steal, kill, and destroy, tempted Eve by deceiving her into thinking disobeying God would be worth the cost of separation. Evil is still present, and there are many sinful things, disguised as good, that people unwisely pay the price for. Jesus did not attempt to coerce people into following Him, nor did He downplay the weight of what it would cost them. In Matthew chapter 8 we see how Jesus responded to two men who were ready to follow Him without understanding the full magnitude of sacrifice and responsibility.

Matthew 8:19-20 reads, 'And a scribe came up and said to Him, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."' The scribes in biblical times were highly educated and esteemed men, who interpreted, transcribed, and preserved the Hebrew law by vocation. They could also draft legal documents such as inheritances, mortgages, or divorce papers. They knew the law of the Old Testament backward and forward but were admonished by Jesus later in Matthew for completely ignoring its spirit. There is some speculation around whether the scribe pledging to follow Jesus was motivated to do so because he thought he would receive a position of authority or status in Jesus' entourage. Jesus' response to him shows how well He knew the man and his desires. Scripture states, "And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account" (Hebrews 4:13). Jesus knew that giving up comfort and status would be difficult for the scribe, and possibly even deter him from following Him. The heart posture that one should have when deciding to follow Jesus is one that says "less of me and more of You."

Matthew 8:21-22 reads, '*Another of the disciples said to him, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father."* And Jesus said to him, "*Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead.*"' This answer, at first glance, seems unnecessarily harsh and devoid of compassion. However, Jesus knew this disciple just like he knew the scribe. It is more than likely that the man's father was not dead, but that the prospect of following Jesus looked attractive to the disciple—just not immediately. In other words, he wanted to procrastinate and follow Jesus

when it was most convenient to him, after his father's passing when he would no longer have a family to be with and attend to. Following Jesus, for this man, was simply an add-on to his life, something he could do in the next season. The reality is that our love for Jesus and His teaching should far outweigh our love for temporary things here on earth. This truth expressed in Jesus's words reads like this: *Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him* (John 12:24-26). When Jesus responded to the two prospective followers in Matthew 8, he communicated the cost to them. I believe that the differences between the two answers are important and that they were purposefully directed toward what the two individuals were motivated by. Their "why" for following Jesus was not strong enough to garner immediate responses to the difficult call to ministry. Looking back at Matthew chapter 4 when Jesus called His first disciples, we see that their reaction is distinct from the two men we have read about today. Matthew 4:18-20 states: *While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." Immediately they left their nets and followed him.*

They did not hesitate to turn away from their occupation or leave familiarity. Greater than the cost of following Jesus is the reward. Eternal life, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and future glory are all things that are promised to us. Paul writes this beautifully in Romans 8:18: "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us." I want to close by encouraging my fellow believers to rest in these promises and be comforted by the Holy Spirit amid trials.

BIG IDEA: The call to ministry is not for the faint of heart, and although it is costly, the reward is infinite.

APPLY:

- **Reflection:** Think about a time when you felt Jesus calling you to do something. How did you respond? Was it immediate?
- **Reflection:** Read Philippians 2:5-8. Think about how this life of sacrifice contrasts the lives the scribe and disciple in our passage may have been expecting.

Week 3: Matthew 8:18-34

Day 3: A Temporary Trial and Eternal God

READ: Matthew 8:18-34; Romans 5:1-5

EXPLORE:

It is natural for things to change. Our circumstances and surroundings are never truly set in stone, and this account of Jesus calming the storm in Matthew demonstrates this. The disciples of Jesus have seen Him preach sermons, perform miracles, and proclaim the cost of following Him. Yet, they are about to see what they look like when their faith is put to the test. The storms simultaneously reveal the character of Jesus and their own shortcomings.

Faith is often easy when there is no perceived cost to it. It is easy to believe in Jesus while you sit upon a mountain acknowledging His words, but faith is truly tested when you stand upon a rocking boat in the midst of difficulty. The storm arises for the disciples, and they rush to wake Jesus. When they wake Him, Jesus says, "Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?" He then rises and rebukes the storms. In this rebuke, Jesus demonstrates His power over His creation, and the disciples marvel. They wonder how the winds and water obey Him. We see God's power revealed, and the disciples desperate need to hold fast to Jesus.

Trials are difficult by their very nature. We often avoid them and pray for deliverance from the storms of life, but often it is in the times of difficulty where we learn and grow the most. When we focus on how big the storms can be, we miss how much greater is our God! Through the storm ridden circumstance awestruck wonder occurs. Without the trial of a storm, the disciples need for faith in Jesus would have not been comprehended. There is a beautiful intersection of God revealing His glory and the disciples being further sanctified.

This is an intersection that is beautifully portrayed in Romans 5. Paul says that we rejoice in hope of the glory of God, which even allows us to rejoice in our storms. Not only that, but Paul also says that *“suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”* We should not keep our eyes solely upon the temporary circumstances, but look to how they reveal God’s eternal nature and glory. Our hearts and lives should be focused upon the Lord, and we should rest in His promises.

BIG IDEA: Trials, while difficult, should be seen as an opportunity to learn more about God and to be further sanctified by Him. We should not be consumed by the temporary trials, but by the eternal God.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Trials and storms are often revealing. What has God revealed about Himself to you in your trials? What have you observed about yourself?

- **Question:** Would looking at trials through the lens of eternal hope change how you live through them? If so, what would be different in your life?

Week 3: Matthew 8:18-34

Day 4: Demonic Oppression and Demonic Possession

READ: Matthew 8:18-34

EXPLORE:

An intellectually honest study of Matthew 8 cannot be done without talking about the supernatural. From miraculous healing to demonic possession, there is no shortage of material in Matthew's Gospel Account to challenge our post-enlightenment leaning toward a naturalism devoid of anything spiritual. Regardless of whether it is countercultural in the western world, the Scriptures are clear. We are not merely physical; we are spiritual creatures.

With that in mind, Jesus' ministry in Galilee calls some questions into mind. Namely, how should we understand the nature of demonic possession? Is there a difference between what is called demonic possession and demonic oppression? Moreover, can a believer be demonically possessed? It is to these important questions that we now turn to God's Word together.

First, it is important to lay out a bit of a foundation for how Scripture refers to demonic possession. Scripturally speaking, possession involves a demon or demons having undeviating control over the actions of a person. For example, later in Matthew 17 we will meet a young man whose demonic possession sent him into convulsions, fire, and nearby bodies of water beyond his control. Luke 4 tells the story of a possessed man whose demon spoke through him and for him. Sometimes possession involves the complete control of the individual, but not always. Consistently, demonic possession refers to a direct control which is exercised on an individual.

Second, it is important to briefly set a framework for how Scripture refers to demonic oppression. They sound similar, but they are quite distinct. Oppression involves a more indirect influence of a demon or demons upon a person or group of people. Often, this oppression materializes through an increased temptation to sin or a corrosive attack on the purity of the church among other things. We need to remember that when a Christian is indwelt by the Holy Spirit by grace

through faith, he or she is made a new creation and cannot be possessed by a demon. There are no instructions concerning when and how a person should cast a demon out of a believer, but only encouragements to actively resist the devil and his schemes.¹⁰

Third, it does not seem scripturally possible for a believer to experience an indwelling demonic possession although he or she may experience external demonic oppression. We should be quick to filter our experiences through the lens of Scripture and proper theology. While we do not read of Christians being possessed in the Bible, they can be oppressed. For this reason, the believer is exhorted to put on the full armor of God which readies them for spiritual attack which will inevitably come.¹¹

Finally, our analysis of this important question would not be complete without one additional note. Although demonic power is real, it would be an inappropriate response by immediately denying any and all legitimate psychological problems. Everything that is broken is a result of sin's effects on creation. It certainly could be that a genuine believer struggles deeply with psychological challenges. Similarly, it could be that a psychological problem is a misdiagnosed spiritual issue. Again, our experience must meet the test of Scripture, and we should proceed wisely in all things.¹²

BIG IDEA: Scripture depicts believers who experience demonic oppression and not demonic possession.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Do you think you're more likely to label everything as spiritual or everything as purely physical?

¹⁰ See James 4:7, I Peter 5:8-9, and Romans 8:9-11 for reference.

¹¹ See Ephesians 6:10-18 for reference.

¹² If you or someone you know needs help, please don't hesitate to reach out to info@golpc.org for more information about biblical counseling.

Week 3: Matthew 8:18-34

Day 5: Reactions to Christ

READ: Matthew 8:18-34

EXPLORE:

Today we will discuss the reactions to Christ in Mathew 8:18-34. Starting in Mathew 8:18-22 we see two people interacting with Jesus, a scribe and a disciple. The scribe said to Jesus, *“Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.”* Traditionally, scribes or Bible teachers would choose a Rabbi they wished to follow and that is what the scribe seems to be doing here. In response, Jesus highlights the costs of discipleship, the itinerant lifestyle and ministry. Next a disciple asks to *“first let me bury my father”* to which Jesus responds, *“Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead.”* These interactions highlight the cost of following Jesus as a disciple. As followers of Christ, we should recognize that Christ has the authority, we are called to make radical changes in our lifestyle as followers and disciples of Christ.

In Mathew 8:18-22 we see the disciples in a boat beset by a storm while Jesus sleeps. *“They went and woke him, saying “Save us Lord; we are perishing.”* Jesus then asks them, *“Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?”* Then he calms the storm, and the disciples marveled *“saying, “What sort of man is this that even winds and see obey him?”* This interaction highlights that the correct response to fear is faith. Even though the disciples were afraid and marveled when Jesus calmed the storm, they still sought Jesus as the one who could help them through the storm. Jesus models trust in God to the point where He could sleep through the storm. We can take this as a lesson to trust in God during difficult times, but also should remember to marvel and give thanks when God provides aid to us in times of struggle.

In Matthew 8:28-34 Jesus interacts with two demon-possessed men and a Gentile town. The demons then plead with him to send them into a herd of pigs. Jesus commands them to “Go”, and they went into the pigs and the pigs ran off a steep bank into the sea. When the people of the city see Jesus and hear of the events, they “begged him to leave their region.” They are fearful of Jesus and reject Him. This is reminder that people can witness the power of God and still reject His authority. Jesus faced rejection, and His followers will similarly face rejection in their mission. We must meet rejection with subservience to God, and prayer to continue on mission and faith that Gods plans will be enacted.

BIG IDEA: People in the Bible had different reactions to Christ’s message. We can learn how we should react to the Gospel message, as well as how other people might react when we share the gospel.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Remember a time when you experienced trouble or uncertainty. How did you handle it? What can we learn from this passage about dealing with times of uncertainty?

- **Question:** How can we avoid being like the city who see miracles and are fearful of Jesus’ power? Remember John 3:17.

- **Question:** Jesus gave signs and worked miracles that served as evidence of His power and authority. Where do you see that dynamic on display in this particular story?

Activity: Last week we were introduced to the prophecy of Isaiah concerning the Son of Man. This term is used again in Jesus's self-disclosure in verse 6. Watch the brief online video below and take notes on what you learn (4 Mins).

- **Video Link:** [What does it mean that Jesus is the Son of Man | Gotquestions.org](https://www.gotquestions.org/What-does-it-mean-that-Jesus-is-the-Son-of-Man)
- **Notes:**

Week 4: Matthew 9:1-8

Day 2: Jesus Saw Their Faith

READ: Matthew 9:1-8; James 2:14-26; Hebrews 11:17-19

EXPLORE:

How did Jesus see the faith of the people who brought Him a paralytic? Did he have x-ray vision to see the faith in their hearts? Jesus does see our hearts, but in this passage, it was the actions resulting from faith which Jesus observed. Faith is made visible in the actions it produces. The people believed that Jesus would heal the paralytic, and they acted on it. When Jesus saw their actions, he witnessed their faith.

Faith does not put self on display, it puts the glory of Christ on display. Throughout the Gospel Accounts, Christ highlights people's extraordinary faith in Him. When people's faith resulted in bold requests and actions, Jesus took the opportunity to perform miracles that revealed more of his glory.

James teaches that mere intellectual assent is not true faith if it does not result in a changed life. Just as it would be useless to talk to a cold, hungry person about warmth and food without actually providing these, so a faith that didn't change your life and result in action would also be useless. Invisible faith is not faith but is similar to the way demons believe in God without obeying him. Our works do not save us or produce faith in us, but true faith produces works in our lives.

Abraham passed the ultimate test of faith when he obeyed God. He didn't have God's word in the Bible, but he had God's audible word at various times in his life. These audible promises had come true: Sodom was destroyed, and Abraham and his barren wife had a son in their old age. This is how Abraham recognized God's voice and knew that it was actually God (and not some demon) telling him to sacrifice his promised son. God had promised that through

Isaac, Abraham's offspring would be more numerous than the stars in the sky, but then God told Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. Abraham believed that God would raise Isaac from the dead, so Abraham obeyed until God told him to stop at the last second. This was proof of Abraham's living faith in God.

Our situation is different from Abraham's. Rather than receiving audible promises and instructions from God, we have his words in the Bible. That's what we trust and obey if we have living faith like Abraham. So, if you ever hear a voice telling you to sacrifice your child, don't follow it. Unlike Abraham, you have no evidence that such a voice is God's. Instead, believe and obey the Bible.

Rahab's faith was also demonstrated by her actions. She didn't have the Bible or audible messages from God. All she had was the evidence of recent events that the Lord of Israel was "*God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath.*"¹ That's why she had faith that God would keep his promises to Israel. She demonstrated her faith by showing unusual kindness to the Israelite spies and appealing to them for kindness in return.

BIG IDEA: Faith is visible in the actions it produces, inviting Jesus to display his glory in our lives.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Which comes first, faith or works? Why?

- **Question:** In your life or in the life of someone you know, what is an action that has resulted from faith in Jesus?

Week 4: Matthew 9:1-8

Day 3: Faithful Friends

READ: Matthew 9:1-8; Luke 5:17-26; Mark 2:1-12

EXPLORE:

In this passage, we see a group of men bringing their paralyzed friend before Jesus, seeking healing for him. This story is also told in Mark 2 and Luke 5. In the other gospels, we get a few more details. Mark 2:2-4 says, *“And many were gathered together, so that there was no more room, not even at the door. And he was preaching the word to them. And they came, bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men. And when they could not get near him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him, and when they had made an opening, they let down the bed on which the paralytic lay.”* These friends of the paralytic had such faith that Jesus could heal their friend that they were willing to climb on the roof, take apart the roof and lower their friend down before Jesus since they could not get in through the door.

This passage strikes really close to home as I (Courtney) am writing this. My brother, Colton, was paralyzed in a car accident over a year ago and is currently awaiting surgery due to bone growths in his thighs and hips that are preventing what limited mobility he already has. This week many of us are praying and fasting that during his pre-surgery CT scan they will find that the growths are gone and that no surgery would be required. We are bringing Colton to the Lord, tearing off the roof and laying him at Jesus’ feet asking for healing. But even more than we want his physical healing, we want his spiritual good and the glory of God.

Surely there are many in all of our lives that need to be brought to Jesus physically, emotionally, mentally, spiritually, etc. While our faith and prayers do not always result in the healing of those we pray for, it is still our responsibility to bear one another’s burdens (Gal. 6:2). Ecclesiastes 4:10 states, “If either of them falls down,

one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up.” As believers, we have the unique opportunity to facilitate meetings between believers and non-believers to encounter Jesus, His healing and His forgiveness. In Matthew 9:2 we see that it is when Jesus sees “their faith,” that is the faith of the paralytic’s friends, that He forgives the man’s sins and proceeds to heal his body. This passage reveals to us the importance of having godly friends who encourage us to go to Jesus for forgiveness, direction, and healing but, also, to be that kind of friend to others. We are called to be the friends that when Jesus sees our faith, He is compelled to heal the ones we bring to Him.

BIG IDEA: We are to both have friends and be friends who tear down the roof to seek forgiveness and healing from Jesus.

Apply:

- **Question:** Do you have friends in your life who regularly push you closer to Jesus? Do they pray for and with you; do they bring you to Jesus when you are in sin or in pain? If not, are there any changes you need to make in who you choose to be the most intimate with?

- **Question:** Are you regularly pushing your friends closer to Jesus? Are you praying for and with them; do you bring them to Jesus when they are in sin or pain? If not, what is stopping you? What changes do you need to make in yourself to be a more godly friend?

Week 4: Matthew 9:1-8

Day 4: Heart Check

READ: Mark 2:1-12; Luke 5:17-26

EXPLORE:

I (Sarah) believe it is important to have an overview of the healings thus far to get the most out of our passage today, focusing specifically on the right response to healing. In chapter eight a leper is cleansed of his disease, humbly asking Jesus “if he will”. Next, a humble centurion pleads for healing of his servant but shows great faith stating he believes that it will be done if Jesus only speaks. Peter’s mother-in-law becomes healed and then begins to serve Jesus, and then He calms a storm at the request of His terrified disciples, bringing them to marvel at His authority displayed.

We have already read about the faith of the friends, but what of the paralytic man? What was *his* heart posture? We do not get this information; it does not say Jesus saw *his* faith. What if his friends took him against his will? What if right before his friends picked him up, he said out of anger and hardness of heart “*No way, I don’t want to go...I don’t want to get my hopes up like many times before. Leave me be!*” When he was lowered down, Jesus concerned Himself with the state of this man’s heart, seemingly for three reasons:

1. To teach the crowd about what the Savior prioritizes, furthermore what He came to earth to do, to cleanse us of sin.
2. To personally teach the four men what the fruit of their faith reaps, something greater than what was being sought.
3. To reach into the hearts of the scribes and display His authority over sins.

If you have read the three accounts of this story, and reviewed the response of the people present in the previous miracles in chapter eight, you will see a recurring theme of right response: the fear of God. The people are amazed, filled with awe (or “seized”), they marveled, etc. All of this caused them to glorify God. How do we

respond today when we see God's miracles displayed? The majority of us doubt, justify with science and theories, or maybe we praise God but soon forget. Or, like a kid on Christmas morning, we share a shallow thanks for what was given but are internally disappointed that we didn't get what we *really* wanted, what our neighbors got, and harbor sadness or bitterness against the giver.

The real miracle in the story is not just the paralytic being made to walk; it was the forgiveness of sins. Salvation and righteousness today is still the greatest miracle of all, but we don't "marvel" at it. We tend to get tunnel vision on the physical desires of this world. God cares about it all, however, above all else, He is concerned about our hearts. Sickness, homelessness, disaster, injustice is not what ruins us, it's separation from God, but we have lost our kingdom perspective.

Here is our heart check: Is salvation enough for you? Or do you need more? Would you trade salvation for a pain-free life? Jesus traded in the opposite. He became like a leper, a paralytic, the suffering son, so that we could be healed and have eternal life. We may suffer in our time on earth, in fact we are guaranteed it. Be still and have a God-fearing-faith, become like the paralytic or the leper who simply received total healing: the forgiveness of sin first, and what He wills second. Reflect on what Christ did for you and run rejoicing like you were given new life, because you were!

BIG IDEA: Proper fear of God is to be seized by the awe of salvation and wonder at His mighty works. Desire forgiveness of sins above all else.

APPLY:

- Read the following scripture for greater understanding of the right fear of God: Psalm 33:8, Deuteronomy 10:12 and Luke 5:25-26.

Week 4: Matthew 9:1-8

Day 5: An Accusation of Blasphemy

READ: Matthew 9:1-8

EXPLORE:

Back when I (Tim) was a teenager, I remember one occasion when my dad and I were sitting in the living room of our home listening to my younger brother do his very best to explain what a “nutria” is. If you’ve never heard of nutria, google it. They’re little river-dwelling otter-like rat creatures. Anyway, my dad and I had been listening to my brother’s frantic imagery for a while, entertaining ourselves by pretending that the creature he was describing was so fantastic— so unbelievable— that it could not possibly exist. “I’m telling you!” he exclaimed at one point, “it had the body of a beaver and the tail of a rat!” Something about his description seemed evocative of the Book of Revelation, so I very cleverly responded “Yes, and on each tail it wore a crown...” My dad, continuing the train of thought, added “And the nutria swam around the throne of God, crying ‘holy, holy, holy!’”

We of course thought ourselves very clever at the time, but in reality this was a case of blatant blasphemy. We were making light of the glory of God and the beings worshiping him, all for the sake of our own entertainment.

This week’s passage touches on the concept of blasphemy, but blasphemy of a different sort. Jesus had been teaching inside His home in Capernaum. The sick and oppressed gathered around Him to ask for healing. A disabled man was brought to Him by four friends to ask for physical healing, but Jesus spoke to the paralyzed man saying, “*your sins are forgiven.*” Upon hearing this, the scribes in the crowds around Jesus quietly began making accusations of “*blasphemy*” against Him. But what is blasphemy?

Blasphemy in the Bible falls into two major categories. The first category is speech that attributes some evil to God or denies God some good that should be attributed to Him.¹³ The second is speech that elevates a person up to the level of God or lowers God down to the level of His creation. Outside of Scripture it can be speech that makes light of God or demonstrates a lack of the fear of God. This was the case for my dad and me. We know from Mark and Luke's Gospel Accounts that the scribes accused Jesus because no one but God has the power to forgive sins. Their line of reasoning was pretty straightforward: Jesus claimed to forgive sin, only God can forgive sin, Jesus (in their belief) is not God, therefore Jesus is assuming authority that only God rightly possesses. Thus, blasphemy.

This was a serious accusation. In Leviticus 24, Israel established that anyone found guilty of willful blasphemy was liable to be executed. When Jesus is brought before the Jewish council after His arrest, His prosecutors justify their death sentence by once again accusing Him of blasphemy. It is, after all, a call sign of the enemies of God. Even the Beast of Revelation will be known for his blasphemies against God. And while all of that is true, it's worth highlighting that there is nothing more ironic than accusing Jesus of blasphemy against God.

BIG IDEA: Blasphemy is a serious sin against God. We should take it seriously and guard ourselves against it.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Read Leviticus 24:10-16. It's clear that blasphemy is a grave offense. Why do you think it is such a serious sin in God's eyes?

¹ Unger's Bible Dictionary 1988 ed., pg. 174, entry on "Blasphemy"



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