



## LEADER GUIDE

### THE SIGN OF HIS AUTHORITY

**BIG IDEA:** Jesus works in a way that goes beyond our expectations.

**DATE:** Sunday, January 25 and Wednesday, January 28, 2026

**SCRIPTURE:** John 5:1-11; 17-20

### OPENING QUESTION

**What gimmick, infomercial or sales pitch did you buy into but later regretted?** Remind your group of some of the popular ones like Sham Wow, George Forman Grill, The Clapper or even The Snuggie. Remember the Ginsu Steak Knives promised to cut through a tin can? Or maybe it was some exercise equipment or workout like the Thighmaster or P90X – promising “total” transformation.

There is something about that late night infomercial that draws you in and gets you to believe whatever they are selling. In Jesus' day the gimmick was found in a pool of water believed to have special healing powers. In today's passage we will read about a man who believed in this and yet, when he met Jesus, his life was truly changed forever. This man's healing became one of the signs used to demonstrate the nature of Jesus's relationship with God the Father.

### SETTING THE STAGE

Jesus's first two miracles recorded by John were somewhat private in nature. The servants and the disciples knew that He transformed the water into wine, and the servants and the nobleman's family knew that He had healed the sick son. The miracles recorded in John 5 was not only public; but it was performed on the Sabbath Day and incited the opposition of the religious leaders. We see here the beginning of “official persecution” against the Savior. (Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*).

Leaders, for more background information on The Pool of Bethesda watch this video as you prepare the lesson. Ctrl + click on the link below to open it.

[https://players.brightcove.net/6250720255001/sIHH32cls\\_default/index.html?videoId=6369743544112](https://players.brightcove.net/6250720255001/sIHH32cls_default/index.html?videoId=6369743544112)

### SCRIPTURE READING

#### **John 5:1-11; 17-20 (CSB)**

After this, a Jewish festival took place, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.<sup>2</sup> By the Sheep Gate in Jerusalem there is a pool, called Bethesda in Aramaic, which has five colonnades.<sup>3</sup> Within these lay a large number of the disabled—blind, lame, and paralyzed.<sup>5</sup> One man was there who had been

disabled for thirty-eight years. <sup>6</sup> When Jesus saw him lying there and realized he had already been there a long time, he said to him, "Do you want to get well?" <sup>7</sup> "Sir," the disabled man answered, "I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, but while I'm coming, someone goes down ahead of me."

<sup>8</sup> "Get up," Jesus told him, "pick up your mat and walk." <sup>9</sup> Instantly the man got well, picked up his mat, and started to walk. Now that day was the Sabbath, <sup>10</sup> and so the Jews said to the man who had been healed, "This is the Sabbath. The law prohibits you from picking up your mat." <sup>11</sup> He replied, "The man who made me well told me, 'Pick up your mat and walk.'"

<sup>17</sup> Jesus responded to them, "My Father is still working, and I am working also." <sup>18</sup> This is why the Jews began trying all the more to kill him: Not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal to God. <sup>19</sup> Jesus replied, "Truly I tell you, the Son is not able to do anything on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, the Son likewise does these things. <sup>20</sup> For the Father loves the Son and shows him everything he is doing, and he will show him greater works than these so that you will be amazed."

## DISCUSSION

### READ JOHN 5:1-7

Why were people drawn to this particular pool for healing?

**SUMMARIZE:** The pool's name carried significance, as Bethesda means "house of mercy."

They believed that the waters contained healing powers. When the waters moved, people sought to enter them and receive healing.

**RECAP:** In our own lives, we sometimes do the same thing as this man. When we are struggling through a situation that doesn't seem to have an immediate answer, we might think Jesus doesn't see us. So, we begin to search for everything else in our lives to make us well. When presented with opportunities that we think will make us better - the next job, the next relationship, or the next possession - we put our faith in those things instead. However, we soon find ourselves in a place of paralysis because we are unwilling to look to the One who can save us - Jesus.

What is a modern day "pool"? Where do desperate people go today hoping for a miracle to happen?

**TRANSITION:** Jesus steps in to do what no one else will do. In the next verses, we see that Jesus goes beyond what we expect.

### READ: JOHN 5:8-11

**ASK:** Who in here has ever left a review online? Maybe for a restaurant or a movie? Did your review reflect the expectations you had walking in?

**RECAP:** With this man's blinded view of the power of God and being able to heal him, we would think when Jesus calls for him to stand, he would have been skeptical. However, when Jesus called the man to action, it was a call to heal and have purpose. The call to "get up" points to Jesus's healing power, and then for the man to "pick up your mat and walk" would have been far beyond what anyone expected, especially the man. After all, his mat gave him purpose. We read

that the man didn't sit there and mull over what people would think if he stood up. The Bible says that "instantly the man got well, picked up his mat, and started to walk." (v. 9) The man no longer had to worry about getting into the water. He also didn't have to worry about what people would say because he had a testimony to declare how he had lain there for 38 years and no longer needed his mat. He truly was healed and transformed!

**GUIDE:** Use the commentary to explain the significance of Jesus healing on the Sabbath.

**RECAP:** When confronted about it, the man simply stated he was following Jesus's commands. The message was clear, though, that Jesus had indeed healed on the Sabbath, which was considered a radical action which ought to be punished. Little did they understand that Jesus's radical actions were going to make their path to heaven possible!

**DISCUSS:**

Why do we often respond to human authority over Christ's authority?  
When has Jesus met your needs in a surprising way?

**TRANSITION:** In the next verses, we see that Jesus has the authority to do what only God can do.

**READ: JOHN 5:17-20**

**Great Expectations.** We all have expectations - from the dinner we are served at a restaurant to a family vacation to how our life will pan out. To engage in this lesson, let's do some reflection. The man Jesus encountered had been disabled for 38 years. Subtract that number from your own age. If you are 40 or under, subtract 18 years rather than 38. Then turn to your neighbor and answer these questions.

- What were your biggest hopes during this period of your life?
- What were your biggest challenges?
- What do you hope God does with the rest of your life?

When the Jews began persecuting Jesus, he shared a message with the crowd that communicated his purpose in healing; He was simply doing the work of the father. The nature of this statement would have been radical for the Jews to hear, as was seeing Jesus heal on the Sabbath. It would also have been considered contradictory to God's statement regarding rest on the Sabbath. However, what they missed about the Sabbath was that it was to be a day of worship, reflection, and dependence on the Lord. What better way to celebrate that moment than to see people express worship of their Messiah as never before!

What does Jesus's life show us about the character of God?

In what ways do people reject Christ's authority?

**ASK:** What do we learn about Jesus from his comments in v. 19? How does that shape what we do?

Use the commentary for these verses to explain Jesus's comments about His relationship with His Father.

**REFLECT:** What are some lessons we can learn from this third sign from Jesus?

**RECAP:** Rather than seeing healing as something to be skeptical about, this passage calls us to see

it as an act of God's compassion and mercy shown to His people. And while we may not understand God's ways and healing one and not another physically, the greater truth is to see the power and purpose of God that was shown ultimately in our healing of the sickness of sin. We can rest in the finished work of Jesus on the cross and have victory today as we share in the life we have in Jesus's resurrection!

## RESPONSE

**Lead your group to reflect on these parts of the lesson:** What is holding you back? For this man it was a physical disability. Maybe yours is doubt, fear, guilt, etc. What is your "Pool of Bethesda"? What false place have you looked for help? And finally, what's your mat? What does Jesus want you to take with you from this experience?

## READING PLAN

WEEK 4: 1/25-Exodus 1; 1/26-Exodus 11; 1/27-Exodus 12; 1/28-Exodus 13; 1/29-Exodus 14; 1/30-Luke 22; 1/31-1 Peter 1

LifeWay: Bible Studies for Life, "All Signs Point to Jesus," Spring 2025.

## COMMENTARY

**JOHN 5:1-7** *A disabled man assumed that, if Jesus helped him, it would be nothing more than assisting him into the water.*

**A Jewish festival (v. 1).** People have debated which festival is intended. Some believe it was one of the three primary feasts (Passover, Tabernacles, and Pentecost.) Others suggest the feast of Purim, celebrating God's use of Esther to rescue the Jews from being killed by the Persians. Any attempt to identify the festival with certainty, though, is speculation. John's emphasis was not on the festival, but on what occurred at the pool.

**Went up to Jerusalem (v. 1).** This phrase describes Jerusalem's higher elevation than the surrounding area and spotlights the city's significance; Jews believed Jerusalem was the center of the world.

**The Sheep Gate (v. 2).** Nehemiah mentioned the sheep gate being rebuilt and rededicated to God in Nehemiah 3:1. Through this gate came sheep that were to be sacrificed in the nearby temple. The gate was the connection between ancient Jerusalem and the Kidron Valley. Even today, an open-air sheep market operates one day a week just outside this gate.

**Bethesda (v. 2).** The name of a pool, coming from a combination of two Hebrew words: *beth*, which means "house" and *hesed*, which means "mercy." "House" suggests the presence of a structure. People came to this "House of Mercy" for healing. The pool collected rainwater and had two basins: the northern one measured about 174 by 131 feet, and the southern, 154 by 171 feet.

**Blind, lame, and paralyzed (v. 3).** John could not have picked people with more hopeless circumstances. The blind couldn't see the water stir. The lame and paralyzed couldn't get to it when it did.

**Stirred up water (vv. 3b-4).** Many translations omit these verses or include them as a note. They are not in the earliest Greek manuscripts and are possibly a later edition. The Bible accurately reflects the belief among the Jews of healing powers in the water once it was agitated by an Angel. However, the Bible does not suggest that such belief was valid, much as one can acknowledge A contemporary urban legend without holding it to be true.

**Disabled for thirty-eight years (v. 5).** Whereas the official's son from last session was at the point of death, this man's seemingly never-ending condition forced him into what he might have perceived as a living death existence. His having been disabled so long helped authenticate Jesus's miracle as being genuine; no one could say that the man had simply gotten over a temporary difficulty.

**Jesus saw him lying there (v. 6).** John focused on Jesus's habit of ministering to the weak and wounded, sick and sore rather than giving his attention to elite, wealthy, and religiously powerful people. He went to the place where those seen as the most hopeless and helpless, the pitiful and pathetic, found themselves day after day.

**"Do you want to get well?" (v. 6).** Rarely do we see Jesus asking someone if they wanted a miracle. Jesus's question reminds us some people become comfortable in their misery. For Jesus this was not a pointless question; it certainly got the man's full attention. The man did not see, though, that Jesus was offering to put his compassion into action. The word translated as *well* occurs in John's Gospel only concerning this man's healing. It carries the idea of having a sound body. (Note that in biblical times if someone was disabled it was not looked down upon for someone to beg for food and help – it was seen as their profession. So, when Jesus asks "Do you really want to get well?" this could imply, "Are you ready to find a different job and start working?")

**"No one to put me into the pool" (v. 7).** John did not describe the man's condition. Verse 5 indicates he had a disability. This verse says he would have needed assistance getting to the water. This reveals two things: first, the man's focus was on to help this condition – his ailment eclipsed any hope this man had. Second, the man imagined only that Jesus might lower him into the water. But Jesus worked far beyond and better than the man ever expected.

**"When the water stirred up" (v. 7).** What caused the water to stir? Archaeology tells us the two pools were connected by a gated channel and an underground pipe. Neither was visible from above. These helped control the overflow from the upper to the lower pool. When the slice opened, the water would stir.

**JOHN 5:8-11 *Jesus healed the man, going beyond what the man expected.***

**"Pick up" (v. 8).** Jesus completely ignored the man's statement about having no help to enter the pool and did nothing to correct the man's superstitious thinking. He knew debate would have been pointless. Jesus's words show he gave no credence to the popular claims that the pool had healing powers. The Greek verb used here is an imperative (that is, a command); the tense applied to a one-time action, not one that would need to be repeated. Never again would the man need to gather up the mat intended to ease his discomfort while waiting for healing from his infirmed condition.

**"Get up . . . and walk" (v. 8).** These are again imperative verbs; however, they appear in a different tense and speak of continuous actions. The man would repeatedly need to arise from his resting position, and he would need to keep on walking. He would not be returning to his customary place poolside tomorrow and would no longer have constraints on his moving about.

**Got well . . . picked up . . . started to walk (v. 9)** were not the actions of someone infirmed, crippled, blind, or paralyzed; but they were the obedient responses of the now able-bodied man. The man gained these abilities because of the power in Jesus's spoken words. As God had spoken at creation, here Jesus spoke at the re-creation of this formerly infirmed man. As John had said of Jesus, "In him was life" (1:4).

**His mat (v. 9).** The word translated as *mat* typically refers to inexpensive bedding made of straw. This type of pallet, which any person in relatively good health could easily roll up and transport, was commonly used by destitute people.

**That day was the Sabbath (v. 9).** In Hebrew the word *shabbath* and in Greek *sabbaton* each means to cease or halt. All four Gospels highlight the conflict between Jesus and the Jewish authorities because of his views and activities related to the Sabbath. This escalating tension contributed to the religious authorities' determination to have Jesus killed.

**The Jews said to the man (v. 10).** Although various translations differ in their count, John's Gospel uses the phrase the Jews or something similar significantly more times than the other three Gospels. John employs the phrase around 60 times; the other three Gospels use the term fewer than 10 times each. Although the term can refer simply to followers of Judaism, John often employed it to describe the religious authorities who actively opposed Jesus. It is in that sense we encounter it here. Interestingly, the religious leaders in this instance directed their ire at the man whom Jesus had healed rather than at Jesus himself, who had healed the man. Soon enough, the focus of their attention would shift.

**"The law prohibits you" (v. 10).** The fourth commandment prohibits working on the Sabbath, but the text does not define "work." Honoring the Sabbath was an externally identifying trait for the Jews, setting them apart from other people around them. Thus, through the years, Jewish leaders amassed thirty-nine types of work that they considered prohibited on the Sabbath. These laws, including in "the tradition of the elders" were passed down orally through the generations before eventually being put into written form in about AD 100. These laws included the prohibition of moving an article from one place to another on the Sabbath. The law specifically stated that a bed could be moved on the Sabbath only if a disabled person was lying on it and as a means of relocating that person. Thus, the now healed man was violating an oral law or tradition but not one of the 10 commandments.

**"The man . . . told me" (v. 11).** This man's response echoes Adams and Eve's efforts at redirecting blame away from themselves. The healed man did not call Jesus by name because at that time he did not know who it was who had healed him, he simply called his benefactor *the man*. Only later did he learn Jesus's identity.

**JOHN 5:17-20 Jesus has the authority to do what only God can do.**

**"My Father is still working" (v. 17).** Despite the traditions of the elders, God did not cease His work on the Sabbath. The Jews believed that although God rested on the seventh day upon the

completion of creation, He allowed himself to work in some limited way on later Sabbaths. Evidence included people being born and dying on the Sabbath and the fact that creation was consistently being sustained year-round, including on the Sabbath - God did not take days off from that work.

**"And I am working also" (v. 17).** Just as the Father continued his work on the Sabbath, if even in a limited capacity, so the Son's compassion would not be rendered inoperable by the day of the week. With this statement Jesus put himself on the same level as the Father, and in healing the man on the Sabbath, He was doing work only God was "permitted" to do.

**Trying all the more to kill him (v. 18).** This is the first reference in John's Gospel to the Jewish leaders wanting to kill Jesus. This wording, though, indicates this was a growing plan of action. In their minds, they would have been justified in doing so; they would have seen themselves as obeying Old Testament law in two respects. First, in healing the man when He did, Jesus was perceived to have dishonored the Sabbath. The Torah declared that violators were to be executed and contained an example of that happening. Second, in their minds, in calling God "My Father" Jesus had dishonored or blasphemed God's name. Rarely did Old Testament people refer to God as "Father." For Jesus to use the title so familiarly, so personally, without some qualifier (such as "in heaven" or "my eternal Father") seemed disrespectful and blasphemous to the ears of the religious elite. The law instructed the Hebrews to stone to death anyone who uttered blasphemies against the Lord. Blasphemy was the ultimate charge the Jews leveled against Jesus before Pilot.

**Making himself equal to God (v. 18).** Jesus's two actions, which He knew were not offensive to God and did not intend to be offensive to people, meant He was elevating Himself to divine status. What the religious leaders did not grasp was that *they* were the ones who misunderstood Jesus's divine status. He was fully aware of who He was - the Word who became flesh. They, though, couldn't see it.

**"Truly" (v. 19).** The transliteration of the Greek word is *amen*. For emphasis, it occurs twice in the Greek text. Hence, some versions have "Verily, verily" or "Truly, truly" or something similar. John alone used this double quote, and with it, he alerted the reader that Jesus was about to say something especially significant.

**"The Son is not able . . . on his own" (v. 19).** Being unable to do anything under one's own power is a recurring theme in John's Gospel. Jesus did not mean he was incapable and powerless to act; He was saying he could not do anything under his own initiative. To do so would have been contrary to His divine and submissive nature.

**"The Son likewise does these things (v. 19).** If, as Jesus claimed, He was able to do whatever He saw His Father doing, that would mean Jesus was indeed divine. For Jesus, this was a clear declaration of His divinity. The apostle Paul echoed this understanding: "for the entire fullness of God's nature dwells bodily in Christ" (Col. 2:9).

**"The Father loves . . . shows . . . is doing (v. 20).** These verbs are in a tense that indicates ongoing and continual action. This emphasizes both the then-current and the forward-continuing intimate relationship Jesus had with His Father. God would be showing Jesus things no one else had ever seen.

**"Greater works . . . so that you will be amazed (v. 20).** The "you" is plural. Jesus knew these Jewish leaders would be astonished by what they saw. He did not say, though, that they would believe or be pleased - only that they would be *amazed*. In the next verse, Jesus spoke of the dead being raised to life. The Jews would see that with Lazarus. Rather than faith, though, they responded with anger, as we will soon see.