

SESSION 2

THE SIGN OF HIS GRACE

Leader pages on pp. 106-109

THE POINT:
JESUS WORKS ON BEHALF OF ALL WHO COME TO HIM.

JOHN 4:46-54

⁴⁶ He went again to Cana of Galilee, where he had turned the water into wine. There was a certain royal official whose son was ill at Capernaum.

⁴⁷ When this man heard that Jesus had come from Judea into Galilee, he went to him and pleaded with him to come down and heal his son, since he was about to die.

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⁴⁸ Jesus told him, "Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will not believe."

⁴⁹ "Sir," the official said to him, "come down before my boy dies."

⁵⁰ **"Go," Jesus told him, "your son will live." The man believed what Jesus said to him and departed.**

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⁵¹ While he was still going down, his servants met him saying that his boy was alive.

⁵² He asked them at what time he got better. "Yesterday at one in the afternoon the fever left him," they answered.

⁵³ The father realized this was the very hour at which Jesus had told him, "Your son will live." So he himself believed, along with his whole household.

⁵⁴ Now this was also the second sign Jesus performed after he came from Judea to Galilee.

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MEMORY VERSE

KEYWORDS

Signs and wonders (v. 48)—Referring to Jesus’s miracles, John used the word *signs*. It typically referred to supernatural acts that revealed Jesus’s divinity.

The man believed (v. 50)—Unlike other Galileans who demanded to see a sign, the boy’s father took Jesus at His word.

One in the afternoon (v. 52)—The Greek is literally "the seventh hour." This reflects the Jewish reckoning of time. The seventh hour would have been one in the afternoon. The tracking of time began at sunrise, meaning about 6:00 a.m. Hearing the time validated what the father had believed when he left Jesus.

HOW DO WE RECOGNIZE GOD'S GRACIOUS ACTS?

Singer and dancer Chris Brown was ascending the pop charts with his 2005 hit "Run It!" and was in a high-profile relationship with the beautiful Rihanna when things took a drastic turn for the worse. In February 2009, an incident left Rihanna bruised and battered on the side of the road. As a result, Brown was charged with felony assault and making threats. He eventually pleaded guilty to these charges. Instead of asking for help with his anger issues, he ignored them. How bad does it have to get before we ask for help?

In our culture, we celebrate independence, especially when it comes to receiving help. But it's sad to see when someone maintains their independence to the point where they're willing to experience pain before asking for help. Pride then is on full display to maintain the perception of being independent. The situation may change, though, when someone else is involved, like a spouse, child, parent, or friend. In those moments, we're willing to get whatever help we can to see someone we love receive the help and care they need.

In this session, we'll read about a moment when someone was willing to break down his personal pride to receive help for his child. In this particular

time period and culture, it would have been unexpected for this person to come to Jesus for help. Yet, the news had begun to spread about Jesus and His ability to help those in need, even to this official. Jesus stands ready to help us also.

Believe He is Gracious //

John 4:46-47

Similar to what happened in previous encounters with Jesus in John's gospel, someone brought a problem to Jesus. This time, the issue was with a royal official's ill son (v. 46). The royal official in this passage was someone appointed by Rome to serve as an overseer in the city. This appointment often meant that the officials carried a level of prestige and respect with them, even among the Jewish people. If nothing else, they were feared, as going against them could be perceived as dishonoring Rome.

However, this royal official was desperate to take action for his son. His need was so great that he was willing to overlook societal barriers to receive care for his son. So, when the royal official came to Jesus, we can read his desperation as he "pleaded with [Jesus] to come down and heal his son, since he was about to die" (v. 47).



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In this interaction, a couple of things reveal the nature of Jesus and how His grace is shown.

- **First, there was the question of grace.** How would Jesus respond to this person of Gentile nationality? In the Jewish mindset, since the royal official wasn't Jewish but a Gentile by nationality, they were viewed as undeserving of any blessing to be provided, even in the most desperate of circumstances. Yet, just as Jesus had earlier shared the gospel with both Jews and Gentiles alike (see the stories of Nicodemus in John 3, and the Samaritan woman in John 4), He again showed how anyone can bring their needs to Him, no matter their background, nationality, race, gender, or status. Jesus's grace is for all people.
- **Second, there was the question of power.** Could Jesus heal someone who wasn't even physically present? In the Old Testament, there are examples of miracles that were done without the immediate presence of a prophet. The healing would later be confirmed by other people's accounts. Similarly, in this case, Jesus would demonstrate His power over sickness without being immediately in the person's presence. This act would require a power that those around Him had not explicitly seen before.
- **Finally, there was the question of faith.** Was Jesus going to accept the faith of a royal official the same as that of a person of Jewish nationality? Up to this time, people performed religious ceremonies and rituals as a means to demonstrate their faith in God. Yet, here was an individual who put his faith in the person of Jesus Christ.

We wrestle with the same questions in our own lives. Who deserves grace? Is God's power sufficient? And where (or with whom) is my faith resting today? These questions cause us to struggle. When it comes to grace, we can sometimes become skeptical of those who bring requests for needs to the church. We look at their appearances, inquire about their lifestyle choices, and quickly surmise that Jesus should only be about meeting the needs of those who deserve it—those like us. Yet, Jesus's grace isn't dependent on us, nor is it defined by us. He came to meet all our needs, as well as give grace to all (Mark 2:17). Regarding power, we sometimes live as though God's power is sufficient only for salvation, and that we must figure other things out on our own apart from the Lord. Then, when it comes to faith, we find it easier at times to just take matters into our own hands rather than trust in God's provision. Still, God stands ready and able to meet our needs.

WHY DO WE HESITATE TO TAKE OUR NEEDS TO JESUS?



DIGGING DEEPER ROYALTY

Royal officials in the 1st century played pivotal roles within governance structures. Often appointed by the monarch, these officials were tasked with upholding the sovereign's authority and ensuring the smooth administration of their authority. Responsibilities typically included managing finances, collecting taxes, maintaining law and order, and supervising public works. In many societies, such as the Roman Empire, positions like procurators and prefects were crucial, overseeing regions and reporting directly to the emperor. They exercised significant power, impacting everything from justice and military operations to urban development and trade regulation. They often acted as intermediaries between the king and the populace, interpreting royal commandments and ensuring local compliance. Their influence extended to the judicial jurisdiction, where they might arbitrate disputes or oversee trials, ensuring decisions aligned with the ruler's interests.

Considering the authority of the royal official, how did humility play a part in the healing of his son?

See His Grace // John 4:48-50

Jesus seemed to use a similar tone with the royal official that He used with His mother highlighted in John 2. This time His answer was in response to the request from the royal official to heal his dying son (John 4:48). Instead of immediately providing healing to the child, Jesus used this opportunity to clarify the purpose of miracles further. For the royal official, Jesus's response challenged his beliefs, that perhaps would have been based on the practices of Roman pagan practices.

In Roman culture, the act of healing was tied to the healer's presence. Furthermore, the understanding of miracles was heavily given to signs in more of a magical sense than a religious significance. So, Jesus's response showed that just because a miracle was performed, it wasn't the only reason to demonstrate belief.

The gravity of this particular situation was evident, however, in the tone of the royal official (v. 49), as death was imminent for the young boy. Therefore, when Jesus heard the pleading of the royal official for Him to do something that only Jesus could do, He carried out an amazing miracle not by physical touch, but by His own words: "'Go,' Jesus told him, 'your son will live'" (v. 50). The foreshadowing of the cross and resurrection can't be missed here. The One who stands over the path that gives life is Jesus Christ. After all, He gave His own life. And He took it up again (John 10:18).



The royal official heard what he needed to hear, and he believed; he displayed total faith in the words and works of Jesus at that moment. There was nothing else to debate, plead, or discuss. He took Jesus at his word and went on his way. What an amazing picture of faith and trust in the person of Jesus Christ!

It's amazing to see how Jesus calls us to show the same type of faith today. We aren't called to prove our worth to receive His blessing. We aren't called to believe only when we get what we want. We are simply called to be desperate for Jesus and to come with open hands of surrender—and lives that respond with faith in the One who gives all good things.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BELIEVING IN GOD AND BELIEVING GOD?

Acknowledge His Grace //

John 4:51-54

In session one, we read about Jesus changing water into wine (John 2:5-8). We didn't read the miracle's spiritual effect on those present; however, in this passage, we see a glimpse into the impact made both to the son and the royal official.

For the son, he was a recipient of the grace and mercy of God in being healed at the words of Jesus Christ! With the lack of medicine offered at this time, the change in his condition would have been evident among those who cared for him. The complete healing was so distinguishable to those around him, that they were able to remember the time when the events occurred.

This miracle was a transformational experience for the royal official, impacting his faith and that of his family. There were factors that were out of his control, and the only One who could provide the answers was Jesus.

The result was the affirmation of the royal official's faith and the declaration of the power and grace of God to his entire household. This confirmed again how the miracle was a sign of the person and work of Jesus Christ (v. 54).

THE POINT: JESUS WORKS ON BEHALF OF ALL WHO COME TO HIM.

In our own lives, the royal official's life provides us with a picture of what it means to have transformational faith. First, we see how we all can have the faith to take Jesus at His word—His word that is given to us in the Bible. Accepting Jesus at His word doesn't mean we won't ask questions or express our doubts sometimes. Yet, if we claim to know Jesus as our personal Savior and Lord, we will study and obey His Word.

Also, our faith can be transformed by the supernatural work of the Lord. This faith should be founded upon the person of Jesus Christ. To have this kind of perspective, we don't look at the results of miracles but keep our eyes focused on Jesus Christ, no matter the results. As Dr. Adrian Rogers used to say often: "Believe in miracles, but trust in Jesus."³

Finally, our faith is transformed and strengthened by realizing that we are not in control but know the One who is. Thus, we are simply called to declare His truth and rest in His power and presence. And when a struggle or challenge presents itself, our response will speak volumes to those who need to know Jesus too.

HOW DOES KNOWING THAT GOD IS NOT LIMITED BY TIME OR DISTANCE STRENGTHEN YOUR FAITH?

DID YOU KNOW?

Faith in Jesus Christ offers a transformative path that can effectively help us overcome pride. Central to Christian teaching is the example of Jesus's humility, from His birth to His sacrificial death on the cross. By focusing on Jesus' life and teachings, we are reminded that true greatness in God's kingdom is achieved not through self-exaltation but through servanthood and humility. Faith in Jesus Christ makes us shift our reliance from our own abilities and accomplishments to God's grace and provision, recognizing that all we have is a gift from Him. The Holy Spirit, working within believers, gently convicts and transforms the heart, revealing areas of hidden pride and prompting genuine repentance. Through faith in Jesus Christ, we learn to see ourselves more accurately, value humility, and live lives that honor God rather than our own ego.

Biblical Truth: "Pride comes before destruction, and an arrogant spirit before a fall" (Prov. 16:18).

Are there hidden areas of pride that you need to address?

LIVE IT

How can we eliminate pride in our lives?

Pride and ego lead us to rely on ourselves to solve our problems, fostering the false belief that our achievements and accomplishments are enough. However, there are moments in life when our own efforts fall short and can't provide the solutions we need. To receive God's help, we must let go of our self-reliance and humbly come to Him, acknowledging that our trust in ourselves is insufficient.

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- **Respond.** If you haven't placed your faith in Christ, there's no better time than right now to begin your journey with Christ. Talk to a pastor or group leader about next steps. Some help is provided on the inside front cover of this book.
- **Reflect.** Write down how your faith is similar or different from the royal servant's faith and how it has experienced transformation. Identify steps you can take that will help you grow in your walk with God.
- **Share.** Take a moment to share with someone in your group or church how you have seen your faith grow in both answered and unanswered prayer. Ask that person about his or her own journey with the Lord.

DAILY READINGS

1. GRACE FOR ALL // JOHN 4:13-14

No matter who you are or where you are from, salvation and grace are available to all. After leaving Judea, Jesus went to Samaria, where he met a woman at a well. He asked her for a drink, and she wanted to know why since the Jews and Samaritans have no dealings. He made an exchange about His living water in which she replied he has nothing in which to draw. These verses outline Jesus's response to her question about Him being greater than their father Jacob. He told her that anyone that drinks from this water will thirst again, but those who drink from His water shall never thirst but have abundant life.

Master, help me choose what You have to offer; that which promises an everlasting and abundant life.

2. A GRACIOUS GOD // ISAIAH 45:5

Grace is defined as an undeserved favor. While we all desire and need it, we find it difficult to extend grace to others when needed. We should think about the Lord's grace towards us when we feel compelled to withhold grace towards others. As this chapter opens, the Lord speaks to Cyrus, his chosen one. He tells him that he will open doors before him and go before him. He will give him the treasures of darkness – all for the sake of Israel, his chosen ones. In this verse, he makes it clear that he is the Lord, and there is no other God aside from him. And even though Cyrus has not acknowledged him, he will strengthen him.

Thank you, Lord, for being a gracious God to your unfaithful people.

3. EXPECT HIS HAND OF GRACE // 2 SAMUEL 12:22

What do you know to be true about God? What are you currently trusting Him to do in your life? Are you praying and living with expectation? As long as we live, there is always a chance for God's grace. Because of David's sin, Nathan informs him that the Lord will bring calamity on David. That

calamity will be the death of his son. David pleads with the Lord concerning his child's illness. Shown in this verse, David explains to the attendants why his countenance has changed for the better since the boy has died. He states that while the boy was alive, there was a chance that the Lord's graciousness would come through.

We should remain optimistic, expecting God's hand of grace to show up at any time.

4. HE HAS ALL AUTHORITY // MATTHEW 28:18

After the Sabbath, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary view the tomb, and an angel of the Lord comes from heaven to approach the tomb. The stone is rolled away, and he is sitting there. The guards are so fearful that they become like dead men. The angel tells them not to be afraid. Jesus has been crucified and raised from the dead. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary are to tell His disciples to meet Him in Galilee. When they see Him, they worship Him but some doubt. This verse provides Jesus's first words to them. He tells them that He has been given all authority in heaven and earth. Nothing in the physical or spiritual is beyond the reach of Christ.

Since Christ has all authority, we should honor and look to Him in all things.

5. KNOW THAT HE IS LORD // 1 KINGS 20:28

Ahab summons 232 junior officers to set out at noon to attack Ben-Hadad and 32 kings while they are in their tents getting drunk. The king of Israel advances and overpowers the horses and chariots, inflicting heavy losses on the Arameans. The officials of the king of Aram tell him their God is the God of the hills and advises that they fight them on the plains. In this verse, we see the king being told the truth: God is a God of the hills and valleys. Thus, He will deliver this army into his hands so that they will know that He is LORD. Awesome Ruler, thank you for being in control of all things.

Lord, You are with us everywhere we go. May we acknowledge Your supremacy over and in all.