

JUST MERCY FOR THOSE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

John 5:1-15, John 9:1-4



JUST MERCY SERIES

BEFORE

THE LESSON

The book of John is an eyewitness account of Jesus's life from one of his disciples, and the purpose of the book is stated in chapter 20, verse 31: "But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." Keep in mind while reviewing these scriptures that since the emphasis of the book is on Jesus's divinity, what John reveals here about the character of Jesus also speaks to the character of God.

STARTING

THE LESSON

We're in the midst of a sermon series called Just Mercy, and today we'll be looking at two stories of Jesus in the book of John in an effort to practice justice and mercy in our own lives as we encounter those in need. As we read these stories, try to notice not just the behavior of Jesus, but the reactions of those he heals and those who witness his healing.

STARTER

QUESTIONS

- How do you react when you read stories of healing in the Bible?
- Do you think God can or will use you to heal others?

TIPS TO SHARE WITH LEADERS

You don't need to worry about getting to all of the questions asked in this study. Instead, look over them ahead of time, and pick the ones you think could really add to the group discussion. Your goal here isn't to be a professor, or a lecturer. You want to be able to use this guide as a way to facilitate learning and growth for you and your group together.

OPENING PRAYER

Holy Spirit, come in this place and work in our hearts and minds as we study your word. Help us to grow closer to you, and to strengthen our bonds with one another as members of the body of Christ. In your Son's holy and precious name we pray. Amen.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

John 5:1-15

5 Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals. ² Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda^[a] and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. ³ Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. ^[4]^[b] **5** One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. **6** When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, “Do you want to get well?”

7 “Sir,” the invalid replied, “I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.”

8 Then Jesus said to him, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” **9** At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.

The day on which this took place was Sabbath,

- Why do you think Jesus approaches this specific man in the beginning of chapter five?
 - The text notes that the man had been an invalid for a long time; this may have been a factor. Also, it’s notable that Jesus approached the man without the man having asked for help; he may have seen something within this specific man’s heart. We too can ask for the discernment of the Holy Spirit when approaching others to help.
- Why do you think Jesus asked the man if he wanted to get well?
 - On the surface, Jesus may seem to be asking a question with an overly obvious answer, but after being an invalid for so long, it’s possible the man had become used to his life, even complacent. Consider, also, that healing would mean radical change for him.
- What do you think of the man’s reply?
 - The man doesn’t answer the question; instead, he explains why his healing has been prevented

10 and so the Jewish leaders said to the man who had been healed, "It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat."

11 But he replied, "The man who made me well said to me, 'Pick up your mat and walk.' "

12 So they asked him, "Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?"

13 The man who was healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there.

14 Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, "See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you." **15** The man went away and told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who had made him well.

John 9:1-4

1 As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. **2** His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

3 "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. **4** As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work.

thus far. When he thinks of healing, he thinks of a very specific problem and a very specific solution: to him, healing means a physical cure, which can only be found in the pool.

- How open are you to the possibility of Jesus healing you, or the possibility of Jesus using you to heal others?

- We can be short-sighted in the same way the man in this story was, and think that healing will only come in certain forms and certain ways. The invalid was asked about healing by the Son of God himself and was focused on getting into a pool. We may encounter someone with an obvious sickness or condition and decide we know how God wants to work.

- Why do you think Jesus gave the man instructions as he healed him?

- *Jesus could have simply told the man he was healed, but he follows this by telling the man to get up and walk, to move from where he was to somewhere else. Again, healing required radical change; the man was told to get up from the pool where he'd reclined for 38 years and walk into a new phase of his life.*

- How do you feel about the change in your life that would come from the Lord's intervention?
 - *There's no right answer here. You may want to have the group consider if asking for healing, or the ability to heal, might be intimidating because of the change it would require of them.*
- Jesus had to have known the law prohibited the invalid from carrying his mat, yet he specifically instructs the man to pick up his mat and walk. What do you make of this?
 - *Jesus values the work of God over religious regulation, especially when the latter hinders the former. You may want to point out Mark 2:19, when Jesus is asked about fasting: "Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? They cannot, so long as they have him with them."*
- What do you think of Jesus's final instruction to the invalid?
 - *He told the man to stop sinning, now that he was well, or something worse might happen to him. The health of this man's body was not as important to Jesus as the health of his soul.*
- Compare this last statement about sin to what is said about sin in chapter nine. What does the disciples' question about sin say about their understanding of suffering?
 - *They ask who sinned to cause the man's blindness, the supposition being that the blindness had to be as a result of sin.*
- What is Jesus's reply?
 - *"Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him." While Jesus points out the negative power of sin in chapter five, his*

words in chapter nine make it clear that misfortune is not always a consequence of sin.

- The disciples assumed that sin was responsible for a man's blindness, while Jesus said the blindness wasn't a punishment, but an opportunity for God's work to be put on display. When has your view of others' hardship been like that of the disciples? When has it been like that of Jesus?
 - *This is an opportunity to consider how our perspective affects our approach to others in need; we may sometimes view someone's misfortune as an opportunity to help, and sometimes we may tend to think their misfortune is deserved.*
- Jesus's statement about the works of God is immediately followed by a statement about the importance of doing the works of God. We must, he says, do the works of God while we can. How, through you, can the works of God be displayed in your life, and the lives of others?
 - *This question will take us into ministry time. It provides a chance for members of the group to consider how they're being called to regard their own lives, and how they can work in the lives of others.*

PRAYER

MINISTRY

Please choose one of the following options for ministry time, based on your prayerful consideration and knowledge of your group.

1. Have a prayer time with your entire group, in which people can pray out loud or silently for those in need. Open your group up in prayer (example: "Holy Spirit, come in this place and move in our hearts as we pray to you), have others in the group pray as they feel led, and then close the time with a final prayer. Explain that members are welcome to lift requests silently, and that the requests spoken aloud in the group should simply be lifting up a person in prayer, rather than listing his or her problems. For example, pray, "Bless my friend Chris," instead of, "Bless my friend Chris, the alcoholic." God knows the details; the group doesn't need to.
2. Have the group separate into groups of two or three, men with men and women with women, to pray about whatever the Lord might be bringing to their minds and hearts during today's prayer and discussion. Encourage them to make a plan to help someone in need within the coming week, and share that plan with their prayer partner so they can follow up with each other when the group meets again.