



# Are You the One?

## *Jesus Heals*

### About the Story

As we continue in the season of Epiphany, our reading takes us into a part of Luke's Gospel focused on healing and forgiveness. For the Gospel writer, those two ideas go hand-in-hand. We may remember that in Luke 5:17-26, when a man with paralysis is brought to Jesus, Jesus' first words are not "Stand up and walk" but "Your sins are forgiven," suggesting a connection between the two.

### The Point:

**Jesus is the Messiah, who proclaims God's kingdom as John did.** To be the Messiah, God's anointed, is not to assert a kingdom of political power or military might. Instead, God's anointed goes about the world serving others through healing, forgiving, freeing, and transforming lives. Just as Jesus' identity is shown by the freedom he offers, we are invited and empowered by the Spirit to show Jesus' identity to the world around us.

Throughout Luke's Gospel, Jesus is credited with saving people and lives. The angels proclaimed to the shepherds: "to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior" (Luke 2:11). When the Pharisees challenge Jesus' healing on the Sabbath, he asks if they think it is lawful "to save life or to destroy it?" (Luke 6:9). For us, the word "save" might only mean a spiritual removal of sins. But the Greek word meaning "to save" also means to heal or make whole. Whether Jesus is healing a body or saving one from sin, the acts are inseparable.

Luke's Gospel clearly identifies Jesus as the Messiah. But Jesus challenges what his followers and the crowds think that means. At this time, the Messiah was a grand hope for the oppressed people of Israel, a leader who would restore the kingdom of David and drive out the cruel Roman army. But Jesus declares that his mission is not to overthrow the Roman government as a warrior, but to "bring good news to the poor...to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind" (Luke 4:18). Perhaps John, shut up in prison by corrupt rulers, may have been disappointed that Jesus had not taken political power yet. Is this really the Messiah?

Jesus reminds us that he has not come only to create spiritual transformations. His kingdom is peopled by those who can finally—because of his healing touch—live their life to the fullest.

### Opening Prayer

Begin your time together with this or another prayer:

Mighty God, We give you thanks that today you have brought us in from whatever worries and distracts us so that we can sit, rest, and be with each other. May your wisdom dwell among us. May all that is shaken within us be healed by your presence. May the words of the faithful fill us with hope. In your name we pray. Amen.

Last Week/Next Week

Last week, we heard the story of two miracles performed by Jesus. This week's reading begins with John the Baptist hearing of these miracles, and sending his messengers to investigate—is Jesus the one they have been waiting for, or is there another to come? Jesus' healings are a clear sign of his divine power and mission. This will continue in next week's reading when a woman comes to Jesus to show him the hospitality his host forgot.

Into the Story

When has someone asked you an obvious question? They can be frustrating, but also illuminating. What we think is obvious may be completely hidden to others. To open today's story, practice asking each other obvious questions, like What color is your shirt? Where are we? Can I have your car? Feel free to make the questions as absurd as possible! After a few minutes, talk about what kinds of questions would you expect people to ask you, because of how you look or what you do? What do you think is obvious and yet others totally miss?

Learning the Story

*After his miraculous healings in Capernaum and Nain, Jesus is met by the disciples of John the Baptist, who are intrigued and puzzled by his power.*

**Read Luke 7:18-23 – Are You The One?**

- ❓ What are “these things” that John's disciples have reported to him?
- ❓ Why does John have to send messengers? (See Luke 3:18-20.)
- ❓ What are some of the reasons that John may not have been sure Jesus was “the one”?
- ❓ When have you been the go-between with an important message? How did it feel?

**Read Luke 7:24-31 – A Messenger Sent Ahead**

- ❓ What are Jesus' rhetorical questions all about? What is he really trying to ask the crowd?
- ❓ Jesus uses the prophet Malachi's words to explain who John is. When else have prophets been used to understand people and actions in the New Testament?
- ❓ What great message or sign would bring you to go out into the desert to see a prophet?
- ❓ What do you think Jesus means that the least in the kingdom is greater than John?

**Read Luke 7:31-35 – Quips and Questions**

- ❓ Jesus points out the unfair expectations of those who question both him and John. When have you felt that others had unfair expectations of you?
- ❓ Why were the people so critical of John and of Jesus? What were they afraid of?
- ❓ Which do you think makes someone look more holy: fasting from food and drink (like John) or being categorized as a partier (like Jesus)?

## Living the Story: Prayer

From the Gospels and the Book of the Acts, we know that the early church practiced prayer and the laying on of hands in order to cast out demons and cure illness. Most modern Christian communities, regardless of other differences, recognize the importance of prayer and the significance of the physical act of the laying on of hands.

Stand in a circle with each group member being given the option to take a turn being prayed for in the center. Ask each participant if they would like the others to place their hands on their shoulders, arms, back, or head, or if they would prefer the others stand a few feet back with their hands raised towards them. The prayer receiver may ask for prayers for a particular issue or concern, or for general prayer. A designated leader may begin with the following or similar prayer:

Holy God, healer of our every ill, we come before you in prayer. We are many parts but all one body in Christ, and we lift up to you (name). We pray for wisdom and peace. We pray for courage and power. We pray especially for (share specific prayer requests if there are any). In the name of your Son Jesus, sent to us to bring healing and freedom, we ask that your healing hand may be on (them). Amen.

That leader or another participant may then make the sign of the cross on the recipient's forehead, saying, "You are a beloved child of God."

## Closing Prayer

End your time together with the following or another prayer:

Jesus, you make a difference in our lives, transforming us with your unconditional love. Open our eyes to see those around us who are struggling or in pain. Empower us by your Spirit to bring healing, freedom, and love to those around us who are suffering. Give us the strength to serve others as you have served us. In your wonderful name we pray. Amen.

## Bible Connections

- ✝ Jesus quotes the prophet Malachi about a great sorting of the world by God's messenger (Malachi 3:1).
- ✝ Jesus declares that he has come to fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah (Isaiah 61:1-2).
- ✝ Jesus' message about wisdom being vindicated by her deeds reflects Proverbs 8:32-36.

## Bible Nuts & Bolts: Images of God

The writers of Scripture use metaphors and image to discuss who and what God is. Many of these images arise in the Psalms, such as a shield (Psalm 3:3; 119:114), a rock (Psalm 18:2; 42:9), and a shepherd (Psalm 23:1; 80:1). Other images include fire (Deuteronomy 4:24) and an eagle (Deuteronomy 32:11). Isaiah uses the image of a mother multiple times (Isaiah 42:14; 49:15; 66:13). Jesus refers to God as Father (Luke 11:2). God is not fully explained by any of these images but each reveals something about God and God's relationship with us.

At Home

- ✚ Continue today's prayer practice throughout the week. Each morning and evening, when you brush your teeth, look into the mirror and remind yourself, "You are a beloved child of God."
- ✚ John the Baptist is identified by Jesus as one meant to "prepare the way." We can imagine this as a host cleaning their home before an honored guest arrives! Return to Luke 3 and consider: what was John trying to "clean up" before the Messiah came?
- ✚ Jesus criticizes the crowds for finding reasons to discredit both himself and John the Baptist, even though the reasons are completely different. When have you disliked someone's actions or popularity and therefore found reasons to ignore their message? This week, when you have the impulse to discredit someone, pause to consider what you are really distrustful of.

Daily Readings**Sunday—Read Luke 7:18-35**

Jesus reminds John and his followers that the purpose of the Messiah is to bring healing and freedom to those who need them. How does your church community follow Jesus' example?

**Monday—Read Proverbs 8:32-36**

A personified Wisdom speaks, telling her hearers that seeking knowledge leads to life. Who in your circle of friends and family is wise? What gifts do they offer through their understanding of the world?

**Tuesday—Read Luke 8:4-10**

Jesus tells the Parable of the Sower, and promises to explain it to the disciples but not the crowds. When has a message been so important you could only share it with a few close friends?

**Wednesday—Read Luke 8:11-15**

Jesus explains the Parable of the Sower. Take some time to till the soil (literally or metaphorically) in your life. What around your home or in your life needs tending? How can you help prepare for growth?

**Thursday—Read Luke 8:16-18**

Jesus promises that nothing secret will be secret for long. Is there anyone in your life who has missed out on something? Could you offer them a second chance?

**Friday—Read Luke 8:19-21**

Jesus declares that his family is those who try to hear and do the word of God. Send a note to someone who has believed in you, thanking them for their support

**Saturday—Read Luke 8:22-25**

While crossing a lake, the disciples and Jesus are caught in a storm, which Jesus quickly calms. What in your life feels stormy today? What would make it calm?