

Faith Can Heal

Bible Background • LUKE 7:1–10

Printed Text • LUKE 7:1–10 | Devotional Reading • JAMES 5:13–18

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: EXPLORE the faith of the centurion who sought healing for his servant, ENDEAVOR to demonstrate the same kind of faith in Jesus as the centurion when we experience trouble, and REJOICE in the power of God to reward the faithfulness of God’s people.

In Focus

Melissa was the primary caregiver for her mother, who suffered from Parkinson’s disease. Just as Melissa felt she had begun to find her footing in her post-college life, she found herself shaping her work, church schedule, and personal life around her mother’s increasing physical needs. At her doctor’s insistence, Melissa sought counseling to manage both her mother’s needs and her own as a caregiver.

While filling out the registration form at the therapist’s office, Melissa checked off a list of things she wanted to discuss. She hadn’t realized how many stressful concerns she was holding inside. Melissa knew therapy would help; she just hoped she had followed God to the right therapist. She prayed silently as the therapist approached her.

Melissa followed Dr. Shelley into her office. Dr. Shelley skimmed the information Melissa had written down on her chart and began the conversation. “I see you you’re experiencing some losses and dealing with caregiving issues. I’d like to help you find constructive ways to deal with these losses and guide you toward the experience of new life,” she said. “It won’t be the same life you had before you began to deal with these stresses, but your life will move forward and can still be a very joyful experience.” Melissa let out a heavy sigh and quietly said, “Thank you, God.” Relief was on the way.

How did Melissa’s faith reassure her? In what ways is therapy helpful? God provides care, wisdom, prayer, and resources to assist us and others in times of trouble.

Keep in Mind

“I am not even worthy to come and meet you. Just say the word from where you are, and my servant will be healed” (Luke 7:7, NLT)

Words You Should Know

A. Dear (v. 2) entimos (Gk.) — Honored, esteemed

B. Besought (v. 4) parakaleo (Gk.) — To beg, entreat

Say It Correctly

Capernaum. kuh-PERR-nay-uhm

Centurion. sehn-TOOR-ee-uhn

Gentile. JIN-tile

Hellenistic. hel-lin-ISS-tik

Synagogue. SIN-uh-gog

KJV

Luke 7:1 Now when he had ended all his sayings in the audience of the people, he entered into Capernaum.² And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear unto him, was sick, and ready to die.
3 And when he heard of Jesus, he sent unto him the elders of the Jews, beseeching him that he would come and heal his servant.
4 And when they came to Jesus, they besought him instantly, saying, That he was worthy for whom he should do this:
5 For he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue.
6 Then Jesus went with them. And when he was now not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying unto him, Lord, trouble not thyself: for I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof:
7 Wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee: but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed.
8 For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.
9 When Jesus heard these things, he marvelled at him, and turned him about, and said unto the people that followed him, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.
10 And they that were sent, returning to the house, found the servant whole that had been sick.

NLT

Luke 7:1 When Jesus had finished saying all this to the people, he returned to Capernaum.² At that time the highly valued slave of a Roman officer was sick and near death.
3 When the officer heard about Jesus, he sent some respected Jewish elders to ask him to come and heal his slave.
4 So they earnestly begged Jesus to help the man. "If anyone deserves your help, he does," they said,
5 "for he loves the Jewish people and even built a synagogue for us."
6 So Jesus went with them. But just before they arrived at the house, the officer sent some friends to say, "Lord, don't trouble yourself by coming to my home, for I am not worthy of such an honor.
7 I am not even worthy to come and meet you. Just say the word from where you are, and my servant will be healed.
8 I know this because I am under the authority of my superior officers, and I have authority over my soldiers. I only need to say, 'Go,' and they go, or 'Come,' and they come. And if I say to my slaves, 'Do this,' they do it."
9 When Jesus heard this, he was amazed. Turning to the crowd that was following him, he said, "I tell you, I haven't seen faith like this in all Israel!"
10 And when the officer's friends returned to his house, they found the slave completely healed.

The People, Places, and Times

Capernaum. Capernaum, meaning "a village of Nahum [comfort]," was a city on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee in the region of Gennesaret. The city was on the road from Damascus to Acco and Tyre, in a heavily populated and commercially prosperous district of Galilee. It is considered the home base of Jesus' ministry and was the home of Matthew, Peter, Andrew, James, and John. Many important events in the Gospel narrative took place in the city of Capernaum where Jesus healed the nobleman's son (John 4:46), Peter's mother-in-law (Mark 1:31), and the paralytic (Matthew 9:6). Jesus prophesied the downfall of Capernaum due to the people's lack of repentance, even though so many mighty works were done there (Matthew 11:23, Luke 10:15).

Synagogue. A synagogue was a building that housed gatherings of Jews for prayers and the worship services. These buildings began to be constructed during the time of the Babylonian exile in the absence of the temple. Ten Jewish males were required to form a synagogue, as they served as a Jewish meeting place throughout the Diaspora. In New Testament times, synagogue services were held on feast days and every Sabbath day. As an observing Jew, Jesus frequented the synagogue, which became the site for healing and miracles. Paul also frequented the synagogue in an effort to convince the attendees that Jesus was the Messiah.

Background

Jesus' public ministry brought Him fame as word spread about His doing miracles, healing those who were diseased and afflicted. People sought to touch Jesus and to hear Him teach. Luke gives an account of Jesus teaching a crowd of people following Him what would be known as the Beatitudes (Matthew 5). Christ shared instruction on how people were to relate to God and to each other. He called people to love and forgive. He taught the principle of reaping what we sow. He further teaches that He would know people who do the will of the Father intimately. People who performed outwardly but did not bear His fruit inwardly gained no special favor. Jesus shared how a person is known by what comes from the heart (Luke 6:45), which leads to an interesting transition to Jesus' next display of power

At-A-Glance

1. Jesus' Reputation Precedes Him (Luke 7:1–3)
2. Jesus Shows Mercy and Moves (vv. 4–8)
3. Jesus Is Moved by Faith (vv. 9–10)

In Depth

1. Jesus' Reputation Precedes Him (Luke 7:1–3)

Jesus concludes His teaching time with the crowd and makes His way into Capernaum, where He frequently returns. Luke introduces readers to a centurion, a Roman soldier assigned to police occupied territory. This centurion did more than his duty to become a part of the community. The centurion had a servant who was ill to the point of death, and the officer was very concerned for his wellbeing. It is noteworthy that Luke would share how this centurion valued his servant. The centurion heard of Jesus' reputation for healing the sick and sent Jewish elders to ask for Jesus to come heal his servant. The text does not tell us if his servant was Jewish or Gentile.

How does your life help promote Jesus' reputation?

2. Jesus Shows Mercy and Moves (vv. 4–8)

The Jewish elders reach Jesus and, with a sense of urgency, ask Him to come with them to heal the centurion's servant. They plead with Jesus, giving Him reasons He should follow them and comply with their request. The centurion loved their nation, he was good to their community, he built their synagogue, and he was not like soldiers who were brutal and oppressive. The elders were seeking to use their cultural influence to persuade Jesus to come. Jesus with a heart of compassion agrees to come with them. He was not far off from the centurion's house when the centurion sent friends out to stop Him. Speaking on the centurion's behalf, they express his heart in receiving Jesus into his home. In humility, the centurion acknowledges that he is not worthy to have someone who has such power to enter his home. He further states that he did not presume or ask Jesus to come personally to lay hands on his servant but that Jesus could speak the word and he would be healed. The centurion (through his friends) shared how he understood authority, as a person who was under the authority of

higher power (Caesar) as well as being a man in authority (as representative of Caesar) to Roman occupied territory.

When did you seek Jesus' mercy?

3. Jesus Moved by Faith (vv. 9–10)

Jesus admires the faith of this centurion—a Gentile. With his actions, the centurion acknowledges Jesus' power and authority based on what he heard about Him, and he humbles himself before Jesus. Jesus turns to the crowd following Him and says in short that He has not seen anyone express this level of faith in all of Israel. Even though the Jews had the Torah (the Old Testament Law) with stories that were passed down to them of God's salvation, power, and the promise of the Messiah, it is a Gentile Roman soldier who says to Him, "If You just speak the word, I know it is done." When those who were sent by the centurion return inside the house, they find the servant healed. Jesus did exactly what the centurion soldier believed He would do.

How would Jesus assess your level of faith?

Search the Scriptures

1. Why did the centurion call for Jesus? (Luke 7:1–2)
2. What did the Jewish elders say to Jesus about the centurion? (vv. 3–5)
3. Why did the centurion send friends to halt Jesus' arrival to his home? (vv. 6–8)

Discuss the Meaning

The centurion stepped out on faith and believed that Jesus could heal his servant by asking for help. From the moment the Jewish elders approached and shared the story of the centurion's love and service, Jesus already determined He was going to intervene. He displayed even greater faith when he sent friends to let Jesus know that he was not expecting special privileges because of his position but he respected Jesus' power. Jesus marveled at his faith, and all who were around him were witnesses of the power of His spoken word. How can we be effective witnesses in our sphere of influence to the power of faith in Jesus? Why was it so significant to Jesus that this centurion showed such great faith?

Liberating Lesson

The world needs to see Christians who are faithful in their beliefs. As we trust in God through adversity and trials, our steadfastness ought to provoke unbelievers to ask the source of our strength. We have only to respond that while we have this treasure in earthen vessels, the surpassing greatness of power is of God and not us (2 Corinthians 4:7). Our faith in God's ability to use us changes situations. Whether we face oppressive laws, unscrupulous politicians, or injustice in the workplace, we have the assurance that God can deliver and has given us the power to stand for Him in the midst of our situations. If we believe and speak the word He has given us, we realize that faith is not for our personal piety alone but is the avenue through which God will transform broken systems. God's way of doing and being in the earth enables us to have a positive impact on the culture and communities.

Application for Activation

Is there an area in your life where you sense God calling you to radical faith to go on His Word? Seek God's purpose in your situation as you reflect on what He would have you to do to effectively translate His truth to draw others to Him. Brainstorm ideas on how the church (local and universal) can be more effective at using the available tools of this age to love people. Emphasize reaching across generational, social, and ethnic barriers.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Luke 7:1–10

In Luke 7, Jesus ministers to a centurion, a widow with one child, and a sinful woman. On the whole, the chapter shows that Jesus cares for those who are deemed as outsiders. In this lesson, Luke narrates the miracle of the healing of a centurion's servant. The narrative is not so much concerned with the miracle itself as with the faith of the centurion who recognized the authority Jesus has to heal in the name of God. The passage illustrates Gentile involvement in Jesus' ministry, as well as Gentile responsiveness to Jesus' reputation. It also shows that racial or ethnic differences should not be an obstacle to seeking the Lord's favor. In this text, Jews intercede for a Gentile, and Jesus responds to the request. The centurion's story is an example that God is willing to accept all people (2 Peter 3:9). It also demonstrates that commendable faith is faith that reaches out in trust to Jesus.

1 Now when he had ended all his sayings in the audience of the people, he entered into Capernaum.

Luke transitions into the account of the centurion by explaining that Jesus enters Capernaum after speaking to the people. The reference to the "people" is important because it refers back to the audience of Jesus' message and forward to the people accompanying Jesus during His encounter with the centurion's household (7:9).

2 And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear unto him, was sick, and ready to die.

This verse reveals the central figure of the narrative: a centurion who had a slave. A centurion was the term used for a man who commanded roughly a hundred soldiers. The story shows this man to have been humane, wealthy, and pious. Although Luke does not provide the details of the servant's illness, its seriousness is clear; the life of the servant could be described as hanging by a thread, near death. The centurion was concerned, for the slave was dear to him (Gk. entimos, EN-tee-moce, honored, esteemed). The centurion's love and high estimation of his servant shows that he considers him not only in his function but also as a person. Here we see faith and love mingled together. It is important that, like the centurion, we esteem people based on who they are as people rather than the functions they perform or their social status. Jesus' love, which reaches both the nearest and the farthest, responds to this double affection.

3 And when he heard of Jesus, he sent unto him the elders of the Jews, beseeching him that he would come and heal his servant.

Because the servant's situation is a serious one, the centurion decides to take action. The centurion has heard about Jesus and His ministry as a miracle worker (Luke 4:37). His faith leads him to action. However, he

appeared to be hesitant to ask Jesus directly for help. This may be because he is a Gentile and Jesus is a Jewish teacher. Sensitive to Jewish sentiment, he does not himself approach Jesus. The centurion feels his unworthiness in the presence of the great Jewish teacher and worker of miracles and thus requests his Jewish friends, who are important people in the community, to intercede for him, which they do most readily. Army officers, as a rule, bear themselves proudly and feel their dignity, yet this commander shows the deepest and most honest humility. The emissaries are described as “elders of the Jews.” It may be implied that the centurion being a benefactor (v. 4), the Jewish elders were not ordered but went as grateful recipients of his patronage. The Greek word *presbuteros* (pres- BOO-te-roce) may refer either to elders of the synagogue or civic leaders. Each synagogue had its board of elders that administered the affairs of the community. These leaders came with a simple request: they wish Jesus to come and heal the servant. The Gentile soldier believes that Jesus can heal his servant, and so he appeals for his aid.

4 And when they came to Jesus, they besought him instantly, saying, That he was worthy for whom he should do this:

In verse 3 we learn what the centurion wanted the Jewish elders to ask, but verse 4 records what they really said. They did more than present the centurion’s request. They went on beseeching Jesus earnestly for this man who was their benefactor. The emissaries brought the centurion’s request and lobbied vigorously on his behalf. The adverb, *spoudaios* (spoo- DIE-oce) “quickly” (KJV: instantly) indicates an eagerness in their efforts, and the word *parakaleo* (Gk. pa-ra-ka-LEH-oh) “besought,” or beg and entreat, indicates emphatically the length to which these Jews labored on behalf of this Gentile. They implore Jesus by offering a commendation. They describe the centurion as worthy of benefiting from Jesus’ power. It is also important to note that the elders’ confidence contrasts with the centurion’s own evaluation of himself since he sent others to speak for him.

5 For he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue.

The elders give the reason they think this man is worthy of Jesus’ attention; this was no ordinary centurion. They specify two things: the centurion had goodwill for the conquered people (“he loveth our nation”), and he had given expression to that goodwill by aiding local worship (“he hath built us a synagogue”). Here is a Gentile who respects Jewish worship and has affection for the people. In addition to showing his heart for the Jewish people, this detail also gives insight into the centurion’s economic status. The centurion clearly is a man of means and generosity.

6 Then Jesus went with them. And when he was now not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying unto him, Lord, trouble not thyself: for I am not worthy that thou shouldst enter under my roof:

Jesus accepted the invitation of the elders to go with them. In so doing, He demonstrates that His compassion transcends all racial boundaries and that all are worthy of His mercy regardless of status or ethnicity. Now, when the centurion believes that Jesus is on His way to his dwelling, he holds himself bound not only to await the Lord, but also to receive Him (v. 7). Yet he sends in his place intimate friends of his family, who can in some measure take his place in greeting the highly honored guest. For those who wielded power in Hellenistic society, which was the dominant culture in the time of Jesus, friends were usually political allies or associates. The centurion declares his unworthiness. As such, the centurion sent friends to stop Him and implores Jesus not to trouble Himself to enter the house. In addition to showing his humility, this also shows the centurion’s awareness of Jewish culture. As Jews would be considered unclean if they ate together with Gentiles, most Jews would not even enter a Gentile’s house to avoid becoming unclean. The centurion’s humility stops Jesus from having to confront this social expectation.

7 Wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee: but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed.

The messengers' report of the centurion's humility continues. He is not worthy to have Jesus come into his home, but neither is he worthy to go to Jesus. However, the centurion has not given up asking for Jesus' help. He trusts in Jesus' authority. He recognizes that Jesus has access to God and that this powerful figure simply needed to speak, and healing would occur. He has faith that Jesus' command is all that is needed. He trusts Jesus to such an extent that he believes His mere word will suffice to heal his servant. It is important to remember that, in antiquity, miraculous healings were expected to involve direct contact (cf. 6:19). The centurion, however, believes in the divine efficacy of Jesus' word, a conception of language not impossible in antiquity. It is not so much the difference in the transmission of divine power (language instead of action) that amazes Jesus, but the fundamental trust in the power of Jesus' word. In the faith of the centurion, the word of Jesus, given unseen and from a distance, can deliver the precious servant from his illness. It is a profound insight that the centurion possesses and expresses: even though physically absent, Jesus can show His presence effectively. The lesson is a key one for us today who do not have Jesus' physical, visible presence with us.

8 For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.

The centurion explains through his messengers why he knows the servant will be healed by the power and authority of Jesus' word. The centurion makes a minor-to-major comparison. Surely if he, as a member of the government's army, is obeyed, so also the spiritual forces subject to Jesus will obey Him. The centurion is under another's authority, but nonetheless is in charge of his own forces. The picture parallels Jesus, who ministers for God, serving Him with a clear sphere of authority. Just as the soldiers and servant obey the centurion, so will those forces afflicting the centurion's slave obey Jesus. In his reference to his place in a graded hierarchy and subordination to others when he might well have spoken only of his superiority to those beneath him, the centurion demonstrates his humility.

9 When Jesus heard these things, he marvelled at him, and turned him about, and said unto the people that followed him, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.

Jesus' response to the request is one of admiration and commendation, especially for the centurion's confident declaration of Jesus' authority. Jesus' reaction is emotional: He is amazed at the soldier. Jesus takes note of the quality of a Gentile's response to him. This unique faith recognizes Jesus' authority and the power of his word, not only over the illness but also in the face of his physical absence and distance. Neither His presence nor His touch is required for healing, only the power of Jesus' command and will. The centurion recognizes that God's power works through Jesus without spatial limitations. Jesus is entrusted with great authority. In addition, there is a resultant recognition of personal unworthiness. Jesus praises the centurion's humility mixed with deep faith. The soldier approaches the man of God on the proper terms. Through His commendation, Jesus calls us to trust him in a similar way. The question is, "Will you trust as the centurion has?" Such faith brings Jesus' approval.

10 And they that were sent, returning to the house, found the servant whole that had been sick.

Luke's report simply notes that when the messengers returned, they found the sick servant "whole"; that is, they found him well. Notably, the slave's healing is reported without any indication of Jesus' command to be healed. This lack of command is probably to accentuate the focus on the centurion's faith rather than the healing. The faith of the centurion and the power of Jesus exercised from a distance saved the slave from the jaws of death.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

The Prayer of Faith Is Powerful
(James 5:13–18)

TUESDAY

Your Faith Has Made You Well
(Mark 5:25–34)

WEDNESDAY

Believers Are Blessed
(Galatians 3:6–9)

THURSDAY

Bartimaeus Healed by Faith
(Mark 10:46–52)

FRIDAY

Faith Is Expressed Through Actions
(Luke 6:46–49)

SATURDAY

Jesus Raises Widow's Son
(Luke 7:11–17)

SUNDAY

Jesus Heralds the Centurion's Healing Faith
(Luke 7:1–10)