



# Bible Study

JOHN 5:1-9



Canadian Lutheran  
World Relief

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## CLWR BIBLE STUDIES

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CLWR's Bible Studies have been designed to help congregations delve deeper into the challenges leading to injustices around the world, to explore related Bible stories, to discuss how these connect and how God calls us to act together.

These studies are meant to be adapted for your congregation's needs and are free to use. Each study includes discussion questions for children to adults, as well as suggestions to connect this discussion to action.

As CLWR continues to grow our resource collection, we would love to hear suggestions and insight from you. Please feel free to contact Heidi Van Schaik, our Church Relations Manager at [heidi@clwr.org](mailto:heidi@clwr.org) with ideas and feedback.

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## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

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- The gospel of John was typically shared orally until it was written down likely about 90 CE
- This would have been written in the later stages of the development of the early Christian beliefs
- The author would have been familiar with the texts of the Synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) but offers different content and details
- It is suspected that there is more than one author contained in this book and it was likely written by a number of Johannine school followers (to read more on this check out this link:
  - [www.biblegateway.com/resources/encyclopedia-of-the-bible/Johannine-Theology](http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/encyclopedia-of-the-bible/Johannine-Theology)
- The author was writing primarily to the Greeks
- In John, Jesus regularly reveals himself as divine, this offers us an understanding of a high Christology in this gospel
- The intention of John's gospel is to legitimize the position on how to live in this time by offering a biography of Jesus that offers examples
- The primary goal of these writings was to persuade the community into a particular pattern of behaviour rather than to recount the story of Christ

- This passage is only found in the gospel of John and is believed to be a combination of multiple healing stories combined from the other gospels
- It is believed that these pools were Mikveh – a ritual bathing pool used for ritual cleansing
- For more information on the Pool of Bethzatha check out this link:
  - [www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-sites-places/jerusalem/the-bethesda-pool-site-of-one-of-jesus-miracles/](http://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-sites-places/jerusalem/the-bethesda-pool-site-of-one-of-jesus-miracles/)
- Here is a great video with archeological views of the site:
  - [www.youtube.com/watch?v=uH6GrNKJy\\_o](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uH6GrNKJy_o)
- The name of the pool is different depending on which source you read, some say Bethzatha, some Bethesda, some Bethsaida – but they are all the same pool
- Bethzatha/Bethesda/Bethsaida is Aramaic for “house of mercy” or “house of grace”
- It is important to note that the PLACE Bethsaida is NOT the location of the pool, the pool of the same name is located in Jerusalem. Bethsaida, the village, is located near where the Jordan River enters the Sea of Galilee
- See this map link for some of Jesus early movements:
  - [www.thebiblejourney.org/biblejourney1/4-jesus-journeys-around-galilee33795/jesus-travels-to-jerusalem/](http://www.thebiblejourney.org/biblejourney1/4-jesus-journeys-around-galilee33795/jesus-travels-to-jerusalem/)

- It is interesting to note that in some ancient texts there is a reason given for the cause of the waters to be stirred up. Depending on your Biblical translation verse 4 may be omitted in your text which reads, “4 For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and stirred up the water; then whoever stepped in first, after the stirring of the water, was made well of whatever disease he had.” (New King James Version)
- We are not told what festival Jesus was going to although based on John’s timeline it has been supposed he was on his way to Jerusalem for the Festival of the Booths (Sukkot). Read Deuteronomy 16:16
- For more information on Sukkot check out these websites:
  - [www.gotquestions.org/Feast-of-Tabernacles.html](http://www.gotquestions.org/Feast-of-Tabernacles.html)
  - [www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/4784/jewish/What-Is-Sukkot.htm](http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/4784/jewish/What-Is-Sukkot.htm)
- We are not told what specific illness the man had although many suggest he was paralyzed, which is why he couldn’t get to the pool
- The Sheep Gate in Jerusalem was the Temple compound entrance where the sheep that were being sold for sacrifice or washed before being sacrificed were led in

## John 5:1-9

After this there was a festival of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

2 Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Beth-zatha, which has five porticoes. 3 In these lay many invalids—blind, lame, and paralysed. (4 For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and stirred up the water; then whoever stepped in first, after the stirring of the water, was made well of whatever disease he had.) 5 One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. 6 When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been there a long time, he said to him, “Do you want to be made well?” 7 The sick man answered him, “Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; and while I am making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me.” 8 Jesus said to him, “Stand up, take your mat and walk.” 9 At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk.

*Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem, why?*

- To attend the Sukkot festival

John notes that the pool of Bethesda is located by the sheep gate.

*Why might that be important information for us as Christians?*

- The sheep gate is where sheep are led in for sacrifice – Jesus is referred to as a sacrificial lamb
- Bethesda means house of grace – through Jesus we are offered unlimited, unconditional grace
- The sacrificial lamb comes to the house of grace to heal a man who can't heal himself

John tells us that the man near the pool has been ill for 38 years.

*Why might that be important information?*

- Read Deuteronomy 2:14 (story of the Israelites in the wilderness)

*How might we connect the experience of the Israelites in the wilderness with the man near the pool?*

*Why might verse 4 be omitted in some texts?*

- It's not found in early transcriptions

*Is verse 4 important to the story?*

*Jesus asks the man, "Do you want to be made well?" What is your reaction to this question?*

*Knowing that we are not told of what illness the man suffers from, do you think Jesus might have been referring to a different kind of wellness?*

- Mental wellness
- Spiritual wellness
- Acceptance into the temple (needs to be ritually pure)

*Why does the man think he has been unable to be made well?*

- He can't get to the pool fast enough
- He has no help

*Do you think the healing Jesus offered was different than the healing offered by the stirred-up pool?*

- Consider the house of grace
- Consider the sheep gate

Read John 5:1-9 again.

*Have you ever been ill and in need of help? What was that like? Who helped you?*

*Have you ever been spiritually ill? What was that like? What was your experience of healing?*



**Did You Know:**

- 1.4 million people die each year as a result of inadequate drinking-water, sanitation, and hygiene.
- Benefits of improved sanitation extend well beyond reducing the risk of diarrhoea. These include:
  - reducing the spread of intestinal worms, schistosomiasis and trachoma, which are neglected tropical diseases that cause suffering for millions;
  - reducing the severity and impact of malnutrition;
  - promoting dignity and boosting safety, particularly among women and girls;
  - promoting school attendance: girls' school attendance is particularly boosted by the provision of separate sanitary facilities;
  - reducing the spread of antimicrobial resistance;
  - potential safe recovery of water, nutrients and renewable energy from wastewater and sludge; and
  - potential to increase overall community resilience to climate shocks, for example through safe use of wastewater for irrigation to mitigate water scarcity. [i]
- Proper sanitation and hygiene help us to live healthy lives and be well in so many ways.
- In 2015, the UN declared sanitation to be a human right [ii]
- In certain contexts, refugees from different households may share a communal toilet with a total of up to 50 people! [iii]
- Over 1.5 billion people (globally) still do not have basic sanitation services, such as private toilets or latrines. [iv]
- World Toilet Day this year is on Tuesday, November 19, 2024.

1. htt

ps://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/sanitation

2. htt

ps://www.unwater.org/water-facts/human-rights-water-and-sanitation

3. htt

ps://www.unhcr.org/in/what-we-do/safeguard-human-rights/public-health/water-sanitation-and-hygiene

4. htt

ps://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/sanitation

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## WONDERINGS

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*Consider your local community, who might need help to become well?*

*Consider Canada, who might need help to become well?*

*Consider the world, who might need help to become well?*

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## ACTION BRAINSTORM

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*How can you/your parish be the hands and feet of Jesus to help people become well in your community?*

*How can you/your congregation be the hands and feet of Jesus to help people become well nationally?*

*How can you/your church be the hands and feet of Jesus to help people become well globally?*

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## ACTION SUGGESTIONS

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Read and learn more. One suggestion is *Waste and the City: The Crisis of Sanitation and the Right to Citylife* by Colin McFarlane.

Connect with your local sanitation department and either visit or invite a speaker to come in to talk about how sanitation works for us in Canada (or in your community).

Use a (clean) bed pan and challenge your parishioners to fill it with Toonies and Loonies, or spare change, or simply make a donation with the proceeds going to a CLWR initiative.

Host a fundraiser to support CLWR initiatives to address hygiene concerns, such as building a latrine for a refugee family (\$200) or providing hygiene kits for infants, children or adults (\$20).

November 19 is World Toilet Day – consider an event around this day and take advantage of the resources offered by the UN.

This text appears on Easter 6C in the revised common lectionary. Consider including this Bible Study in your learnings that day.

Kids love to talk about poop! Be ready! This one is not for the squeamish or faint of heart!

Ask children:

*Have you ever had to go to the bathroom really badly, and there wasn't one around? Or what about there was one, but someone else was in it? How did that make you feel?*

*Did you know that there are places in the world where people have to share one toilet with 50 other people? Maybe even people they don't know?*

*Did you know that in some places, there aren't even toilets available?*

*What do we do when we finish using a toilet? – wash our hands*  
*Why do we wash our hands?*

Talk to them about how to stay healthy and to have good hygiene. That means good toileting and hand-washing habits, because without them we can get sick.

Ask them:

*What happens when people get really sick?*

- They need help, doctors, hospitals, etc.

*When we know people are sick and we aren't doctors, how can we help?*

- Bring food, watch children, pray, etc.

Remind the children that when people get sick, there is lots that we can do to help them with medicines, but even if we can't give medicine like a doctor, we can give medicine differently, with prayer.

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## PRAYER

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Healing God,

We thank you for taking care of us.  
We know that you are always working  
to help us stay healthy,  
and you especially look after us  
when we are sick.

We know that not everyone  
has clean, safe water.  
We know not everyone  
has access to good sanitation  
and that staying healthy can be hard.

Be with those who especially need your help  
and help us to do all we can to help them too.

We pray this in the name of your Son,  
our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Amen.

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## RESOURCES

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- United Nations. (2022). Human Rights to Water and Sanitation. UN-Water; United Nations.
  - <https://www.unwater.org/water-facts/human-rights-water-and-sanitation>
- Water, Sanitation and Hygiene | UNHCR India. (2021). UNHCR India.
  - <https://www.unhcr.org/in/what-we-do/safeguard-human-rights/public-health/water-sanitation-and-hygiene>
- World Health Organization. (2023, October 3). Sanitation. WHO; World Health Organization: WHO.
  - <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/sanitation>