

Leader's Guide
Sports in Focus Guide Five

Below are some additional insights for
John 5:1-6:71
Source for answers: MacArthur New Testament Commentary

KEYS to the PASSAGE:

John 1:19–12:50 The Signs of the Messiah. The first half of John's Gospel features Jesus' demonstration of his messianic identity by way of several selected "signs" (cf. 20:30–31), such as the changing of water into wine (2:1–11), many signs in Jerusalem (2:23; cf. 7:31; 9:16; 11:47), the healing of the official's son (4:46–54), the healing of the invalid (5:1–15), the feeding of the multitude (6:1–15), the healing of the man born blind (9:1–41), and the raising of Lazarus (11:1–44; cf. 12:18). (Regarding John's use of the word "signs," see Introduction: Literary Features.) This section ends with a reference to the Jewish nation's rejection of the Messiah (12:36b–37). John 5:1–10:42 Mounting Jewish Opposition, Additional Signs. The "festival cycle" in John's Gospel, which spans chs. 5–10, is characterized by escalating conflict between Jesus and the Jewish authorities. In the course of Jesus' defense of his ministry, he cites several major witnesses on his behalf (see note on 5:31–47).

Read John 5:1-6:71

1. How did Jesus cure the paralytic man? What is important about this?

Among those gathered at the pool hoping for a miracle was a man who had been ill for thirty-eight years. The exact nature of his illness is not stated, but he was either paralyzed or too weak to move freely on his own. Having been incurably ill for nearly four decades, this man provided Jesus with an opportunity to display His divine power.

Jesus saw this man lying near the pool, knew (supernaturally) that he had already been a long time in that condition, and said to him, "Do you wish to get well?" The Lord's question seems strange; obviously the man wanted to be cured, or he would not have been at the pool in the first place. But Jesus never engaged in flippant, idle conversation. His question served several purposes: it secured the man's full attention, focused on his need, offered him healing, and communicated to him the depth of Christ's love and concern.

The possibility that Jesus might heal him never entered his mind; in fact, he did not even know who Jesus was (v. 13). His only concern was finding a way to be the first one into the pool when the water began stirring. Maybe he thought that Jesus could help him by waiting there with him and carrying him into the water when the time was right. But he certainly never considered that, in a moment, Jesus could miraculously make him completely well. No doubt years of failing to make it first into the water had left him embittered and hopeless. Thus, "v. 7 reads less as an apt and subtle response to Jesus' question than as the crotchety grumblings of an old and not very perceptive man who thinks he is answering a stupid question" (D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John, The Pillar New Testament Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991], 243). Like many people, his expectations of what Jesus could do for him were limited to what he believed was possible.

But Jesus gave the crippled man far more than he could have ever expected, commanding him authoritatively, "Get up, pick up your pallet and walk" (cf. Mark 2:11). Three imperative verbs express the completeness of the healing: the man was to stand, carry the straw mat he was lying on, and walk away. Just as Jesus spoke and the world was created (Gen. 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26; cf. John 1:3;

Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2), so also His words had the power to create a new body (cf. Matt. 8:16; 9:6; Mark 2:11; Luke 6:10; 13:12). Unlike many alleged modern healings, Jesus' healings were complete and instantaneous, with or without faith. This one proves the point, since the man exhibited no faith in Jesus at all. Yet he was healed instantly and wholly. John records that he immediately ... became well, and picked up his pallet and began to walk.

One of the cruelest lies of contemporary "faith healers" is that the people they fail to heal are guilty of sinful unbelief, a lack of faith, or a "negative confession." In contrast, those whom Jesus healed did not always manifest faith beforehand (cf. Matt. 8:14–15; 9:32–33; 12:10–13, 22; Mark 7:32–35; 8:22–25; Luke 14:1–4; 22:50–51; John 9:1–7), and this man is a prime example.

2. How did the Jews respond to this amazing miracle? Why?

John's seemingly incidental note that the healing took place on the Sabbath is in reality the key to this incident. It sets the stage for the open hostility that the Jewish authorities manifested toward Christ. The fury of their opposition, fueled at this pool, would only escalate throughout the remainder of His earthly ministry, finally culminating in His death.

Jesus' refusal to observe the legalistic and man-made Sabbath regulations of rabbinic tradition was a major point of contention between Him and Israel's religious establishment (cf. Matt. 12:1–14; Mark 2:23–3:6; Luke 6:1–11; 13:10–17; 14:1–6; John 7:21–23; 9:14–16). In fact, the Lord deliberately chose to heal this man on the Sabbath to confront superficial and bankrupt Jewish legalism. The man's condition was not life threatening, and he was constantly at the pool. Jesus could have easily chosen another day to heal him. But the Lord not only wanted to show mercy to this man; He also wanted to call the nation to repentance by confronting the self-righteous and unbiblical stipulations that led to their illusion of spiritual life. They had become experts at substituting their traditions for God's commands (Matt. 15:9).

Observing the Sabbath regulations was central to the legalistic Judaism of Jesus' day. Gerald L. Borchert observes,

The Sabbath had become a pervading theme in Jewish life.... So significant was the Sabbath that a major section of the Mishna was devoted to Sabbath rules. Sabbath obedience became in fact an eschatological issue because it was thought at least minimally that the coming of the Messiah was linked to the perfect keeping of one Sabbath. The actions of Jesus were thus regarded by Sabbath-oriented Jews as being diametrically opposed to the expectations of the rabbis who probably would have categorized Jesus as an antinomian libertarian. He did not seem to be concerned for the precious rules of the rabbis.

Not only in John, but also in the Synoptics is Jesus portrayed as seemingly unconcerned for the rabbinic traditions about the Sabbath.... The rules of the rabbis were a misunderstanding of God's design for the Sabbath. The Sabbath was not the means to God's approval, as the rabbis seem to have suggested. The Sabbath was not merely a rule for humans, but a gift to humans (cf. Mark 2:27). It was to be used to honor God and to benefit his people. More importantly, Jesus was Lord of the Sabbath (cf. Mark 2:28). If, therefore, anyone would have a right to act on Sabbath, it was Jesus. (John 1–11, *The New American Commentary* [Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2002], 228–29. Italics in original.)

3. What four witnesses did Jesus cite as testifying to His identity as the Messiah/Son of God? (see 5:31-47)

The Forerunner's Witness

The purpose of John the Baptist's ministry was to prepare the nation for the Messiah (1:23), and to identify Him when He came (1:31). Therefore "John testified about Him and cried out, saying, 'This was He of whom I said, "He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me" ' " (1:15)

The Finished Works

John the Baptist's testimony carried considerable weight; after all, he was the greatest man who had ever lived up to his time (Luke 7:28). But the testimony which Jesus was about to introduce was far greater than the testimony of John. More convincing than the greatest prophet's testimony to Christ were the very works that He did (cf. Acts 2:22). For instance, Jesus' miracles prompted Nicodemus to confess, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him" (3:2). John 7:31 records that "many of the crowd believed in Him; and they were saying, 'When the Christ comes, He will not perform more signs than those which this man has, will He?' " Even Jesus' bitter enemies "the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, 'What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs' " (11:47). As He did here, the Lord Himself repeatedly pointed to His miraculous works as confirmation of His claim to be the Son of God and the Messiah (cf. 10:25, 37–38; 14:11; Matt. 11:3–5). The gospels record at least three dozen of those miracles, and Jesus performed countless others that Scripture does not record (20:30).

The Father's Word

In addition to the witness of John the Baptist and the evidence of Jesus' works, there is another who testifies that He is the Son of God and the Messiah. Moreover, the testimony He gives about Jesus is infallibly true. That the Father who sent Jesus has testified of Him is of infinitely greater importance than any human testimony. The gospels record two specific instances in which the Father gave verbal testimony to the Son: at His baptism and at His transfiguration, when "a voice out of the heavens said, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased' " (Matt. 3:17; 17:5; cf. 2 Peter 1:17).

The Faithful Writings

The Jewish religious teachers and authorities would express their ultimate rejection of both Moses and Jesus when they used their perverted understanding of the law to justify His execution: "The Jews answered [Pilate], 'We have a law, and by that law He ought to die because He made Himself out to be the Son of God' " (John 19:7). **They rejected the fourfold testimony of John the Baptist, Jesus' works, the Father, and the Scriptures to Christ's deity. As a result, in the most heinous act of apostasy in history, they crucified their own Messiah (Acts 2:23).**

4. What was the reaction of the masses to Christ's feeding of the five thousand? How is this still a common response today?

The feeding of the five thousand is the fourth sign that John recorded to prove that Jesus is the Messiah and Son of God (cf. 2:11; 4:54; 5:1–17). It is the only miracle (apart from Christ's resurrection) recorded by John that also appears in the Synoptic Gospels (Matt. 14:13–20; Mark 6:30–44; Luke 9:10–17)—a fact that emphasizes its importance, since most of what John wrote supplements the other gospels, providing material they did not include. Although all of Jesus' miracles were astonish-

ing, the feeding of the five thousand demonstrated His creative power more clearly and impressively than any other miracle. In fact, in terms of the number of people affected, it was the largest of His miracles (exceeding His later feeding of four thousand, recorded in Matt. 15:32–39; Mark 8:1–9). The feeding of the five thousand also sets the stage for the Lord’s discourse on the bread of life that follows (vv. 22ff.).

The narrative unfolds in four scenes: the fickle crowd, the faithless disciples, the fulfilling dinner, and the false coronation.

5. Summarize in your own words what Christ meant when he said, “I am the bread of life.” How have you experienced this?

6:32 true bread out of heaven. The manna God gave was temporary and perished and was only a meager shadow of what God offered them in the true bread, Jesus Christ, who gives spiritual and eternal life to mankind (“world”).

6:33 bread of God. This phrase is synonymous with the phrase “bread out of heaven” (v. 32).

6:34 Lord, always give us this bread. This statement once again demonstrated the blindness of the crowd, for they were thinking of some physical bread and failed to understand the spiritual implication that Jesus was that “bread” (cf. 4:15).

6:35 I am the bread of life. The obtuseness in v. 34 prompted Jesus to speak very plainly that He was referring to Himself.

6. Recount the time when you first came to Jesus and believed. How has He satisfied your soul?

7. According to John 6:37-44, 65, who is responsible for our salvation? What are the implications of this?

6:37 All that the Father gives Me will come to Me. This verse emphasizes the sovereign will of God in the selection of those who come to Him for salvation (cf. vv. 44, 65; 17:6, 12, 24). The Father has predestined those who would be saved (see notes on Ro 8:29, 30; Eph 1:3–6; 1Pe 1:2). The absolute sovereignty of God is the basis of Jesus’ confidence in the success of His mission (see note on v. 40; cf. Php 1:6). The security of salvation rests in the sovereignty of God, for God is the guarantee that “all” He has chosen will come to Him for salvation. The idea of “gives Me” is that every person chosen by God and drawn by God (v. 44) must be seen as a gift of the Father’s love to the Son. The Son receives each “love gift” (v. 37), holds on to each (v. 39), and will raise each to eternal glory (vv. 39, 40). No one chosen will be lost (see notes on Ro 8:31–39). This saving purpose is the Father’s will which the Son will not fail to do perfectly (v. 38; cf. 4:34; 10:28, 29; 17:6, 12, 24).

8. When in your life have you seen the greatest example of the power of God?

9. How has that strengthened your faith?