

II. Group discussion *Each number below includes questions that relate to the scripture. I offer a few answers, but your perspective may be better. The point is to discuss, not to get 100% agreement. Rule of thumb: the fewer questions you ask, the better. Save time for "the big question."*

Read John 5:1-19 aloud.

1. Ask the group to re-tell this story in their own words.

2. How long had this man been crippled?

Did he want to get well? *Hard to say – see verse 7.*

Why would someone not want to get well?

Perhaps he had grown so accustomed to his handicap that he couldn't imagine life without it.

What can you tell about this man's heart from this passage?

See verses 7 & 14-15.

What do you think of a person who is healed but does not stick around long enough to learn about the one who healed him?

3. What did Jesus tell the man to do? *Take his mat and walk.*

Why did the Jews object to Jesus' instructions?

How would you have felt if you saw a man carrying his pack through Jerusalem on the Sabbath, knowing that it violated the Law? How do you feel if someone runs a red light or violates a building code?

4. What was Jesus' rationale for healing on the Sabbath (17)?

God is at work, so I am working too.

How well did this reply resolve the situation (18)?

How were Jesus' critics like the lame man?

5. Why was it difficult for the Jews to recognize Jesus as being equivalent to God?

How did first-century Jews see God?

Holy, awesome, and hidden. They would not even say his name, and they were highly conscientious about his laws.

How is this view of God different from the Christian perspective Steve shared in his sermon?

Steve said that God can be known, that he is near, and he is love.

6. How do you see God -- distant & mysterious, or near & dear?

7. Which view of God is more accurate – distant & mysterious, or near & dear? *There is scriptural support for both. God is both judge and savior, king and friend.*

What problems might develop if you saw God only as distant and mysterious? *Legalism like 1st century Jews – obey or else.*

What problems might develop if you saw God only as near and dear?

Hypocrisy like 21st century Christians – God loves me so much that he will overlook my sin.

How did Jesus demonstrate both sides of God in John 5?

Compassionate healing for many. Stern warning for the healed man in 14 and tense confrontations with Jewish leaders.

8. Max Lucado has written that "God loves you just the way you are, but he loves you too much to leave you that way." How do you respond to this statement?

† **The big question** *If you ask only one question, let this be it. Allow at least 20 minutes. Go around the circle and give each person an opportunity to answer. It's okay if they pass, but at least they get a chance to respond.*

Which do you need more this week – God's gentle healing or God's firm guidance? Why?

III. Other resources

The point – Look to Jesus to see a pure and complete picture of God. In that picture, you will see that “God loves you just the way you are, but he loves you too much to leave you that way.”

Prayer ideas

Praise God for who he is.

Thank God for what he has done.

Ask for God to increase your hunger for him.

Pray for a person who would enjoy being part of our group.

Ask God to guide our congregation through the process of discerning whom he has prepared to preach at College Hills.

Kid-friendly activity. *An activity designed to help kids and adults grow in faith together. Do this first, then dismiss the kids so the adults can talk.*

What is one rule that doesn't make sense to you?

If you're brave, ask the kids to imitate their parents saying it!

Read John 5:1-13 aloud. Act this story out as you read.

What did Jesus do in this story?

Why did the Jewish leaders fuss at the man who was healed?

He was breaking the Sabbath by doing work.

What do you think of this rule about doing no work? Do you think the Jewish leaders had missed the point?

What did Jesus show people about keeping rules? Would it be possible to follow all the rules but not really love God?

What does this story say about God?

He sees our struggles and he helps, even if he has to break his own rules!

For older kids: In our relationship with God, what role do rules play?

Why should children obey their parents? *See Ephesians 6:1-3.*

Submitting to our parents' rules teaches us a valuable life lesson about following authority, and that helps us learn about submitting to God. But God is concerned about more than just the rules.



December 23, 2007

LIFE Group Guide

John 5 – Jesus reveals God

By John Grant (jgrant@collegehills.org)

The theme: When we look at Jesus, we see a picture of God. But look closely – it's a complicated picture.

On December 23, Steve's sermon reflected on how the birth of Jesus teaches us about God. God can be known, he is near, and he is love. While these thoughts are familiar and comforting, they were shocking and unsettling to Jesus' contemporaries.

First-century Jews had forgotten God's identity in the Old Testament: “the compassionate and gracious God, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.” They focused on Exodus 34:7 and forgot 34:6. They saw God as good and pure but distant and mysterious, a distortion of OT teaching.

Christians sometimes have the opposite blind spot. We see the gentle, compassionate side of God and forget that he is so holy that he cannot tolerate sin. Jesus, the Old Testament, and Paul reveal the same God, who is both distant & mysterious and near & dear.

Leadership tip: Recognize the value of a secret life with God. You will be limited as a spiritual leader if you are not first a spiritual follower. LIFE group is more than a great conversation among friends; it's a great conversation where friends draw one another closer to God.

I. Relate *Use a few to introduce the theme, check everyone's spiritual pulse, and “break the ice.” No right or wrong answers – maybe goofy but not wrong! Look for opportunities to affirm and encourage through these questions.*

- ❖ What was the highlight of last Christmas?
- ❖ All I want for Christmas is...
- ❖ What is the best bargain you've found recently?