

SESSION 7

Every Life Valued

MATTHEW 8:1-4,14-17; 9:1-8

JESUS VALUES EVERY PERSON.



You might think it would be unnecessary to ask the question, “Does God care for everyone?” Yes, absolutely, would be most people’s answer. God cares for and values every person regardless of age, nationality, ethnicity, or social status. Since that is so, a corollary question must be asked: “Should followers of Jesus care about and value every person?” The answer is yes, but what should that look like?

*WHAT ARE SOME THINGS THAT MAKE PEOPLE FEEL VALUED?
WHAT MIGHT MAKE THEM FEEL UNVALUED?*

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Matthew’s Gospel is organized around two major activities of Jesus—teaching and healing. An example of that organization is found in Matthew 4:23–9:35. This section begins with a broad statement that “Jesus began to go all over Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people” (4:23). It concludes with a very similar statement in 9:35, stating almost the same thing that Jesus was going throughout the villages, teaching in the synagogues and preaching the good news of God’s kingdom and healing various diseases.

Between those two bookends, the text first gives to us a body of teaching called the Sermon on the Mount (5:1–7:29). Next, comes the healing ministry of Jesus, beginning in 8:1. In this section, Matthew recorded various healing miracles performed by Jesus. These miracles would include the healing of a leper (8:1–4). Matthew also relayed the story of the healing of a Roman centurion’s servant, which further enforced the authority of Jesus as

Messiah (vv. 5–13). Peter’s mother-in-law was cured of a fever that led to numerous healings in the town of Capernaum (vv. 14–17). In addition to healing various diseases, Jesus encountered people who suffered from demon possession, and He cast out the demons inflicting these people (vv. 28–34).

Within this healing narrative, Matthew included the accounts of two would-be followers of Jesus who drew back from making the commitment to follow Him because they considered the cost too high (vv. 18–22). Also included is the account of Jesus calming a storm on the Sea of Galilee, leading the disciples to ask, “What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the sea obey him” (vv. 23–27).



Matthew 8:1-4,14-17; 9:1-8

8:1 When he came down **from the mountain**, **A** large crowds followed him. **2** Right away a man with leprosy came up and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, if you are willing, you can make me **clean**.” **B 3** Reaching out his hand, **Jesus touched him**, **C** saying, “I am willing; be made clean.” Immediately his leprosy was cleansed. **4** Then Jesus told him, “See that you don’t tell anyone; but go, show yourself to **the priest**, **D** and offer the gift that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.” [. . .] **14** Jesus went into Peter’s house and saw his mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever. **15** So he touched her hand, and the fever left her. Then she got up and began to serve him. **16** When evening came, they brought to him many who were **demon-possessed**. **E** He drove out the spirits with a word and healed all who were sick, **17** so that what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: He himself took our weaknesses and carried our diseases. [. . .]

9:1 So he got into a boat, crossed over, and came to **his own town**. **F 2** Just then some men brought to him a paralytic lying on a stretcher. Seeing their faith, Jesus told the paralytic, “Have courage, son, your sins are forgiven.” **3** At this, some of the scribes said to themselves, “He’s **blaspheming!**” **G 4** Perceiving their thoughts, Jesus said, “Why are you thinking evil things in your hearts? **5** For which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk’? **6** But so that you may know that the Son of Man has **authority** **H** on earth to forgive sins”—then he told the paralytic, “Get up, take your stretcher, and go home.” **7** So he got up and went home. **8** When the crowds saw this, they were awestruck and gave glory to God, who had given such authority to men.

Key Words

A. The events described happened after Jesus finished His Sermon on the Mount.

B. To be “unclean” means being separated from community and religious life. Essentially, the man was asking Jesus to give him his life back.

C. Anyone touching an unclean person would also be deemed unclean. This did not stop Jesus from healing the man in this personal way.

D. According to the law, the priests were responsible for declaring a leper “clean.” An elaborate cleansing ritual also involved grain offerings and animal sacrifices (Lev. 14:1-20).

E. Demons are fallen angels loyal to Satan; but, as Jesus demonstrated, they are ultimately subject to God’s authority.

F. Though born in Bethlehem and raised in Nazareth, Jesus’s town was Capernaum.

G. Profane or contemptuous speech or action toward God. The leaders believed Jesus was assuming God’s role by trying to forgive sins.

H. The right to exercise power. By healing the paralyzed man, Jesus proved that He also had the power to forgive sin.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. Leprosy

(Matt. 8:1-4)

We should value those whom some consider to be outcasts.

- **Who are the outcasts in our society and what are some typical reactions to them?**

2. Fever and Demon-Possession

(Matt. 8:14-17)

We should value people at all stages of life.

- **In what ways can we show that we value the most vulnerable members of society? How do these verses in Matthew provide a model for us?**

3. Paralysis

(Matt. 9:1-8)

We should care for and value persons with physical handicaps.

- **Why do you think Jesus addressed spiritual needs before He addressed physical needs?**

Apply the Text

- **As a group, create a list of those in your community who might be considered outcasts or of lesser value than others in your area. Plan a group project to minister to them in a tangible way.**

KEY DOCTRINE:

Man

The sacredness of human personality is evident in that God created man in His own image, and in that Christ died for man; therefore, every person of every race possesses full dignity and is worthy of respect and Christian love. (See Genesis 1:26-30; Psalm 8:3-6.)

BIBLE SKILL:

Connect Old Testament prophecy to New Testament fulfillment.

Matthew 8:17 indicates that Jesus's healing ministry was a fulfillment of Isaiah 53:4. Matthew 9:6 quotes Jesus referring to Himself as the Son of Man, a reference from Daniel 7:13-14. Read Isaiah 53. List all the descriptions related to the Messiah. Next, search for the phrase "Son of Man" using a concordance. Take note of how and when the term is used. Finally, think about how Jesus could fulfill Isaiah 53 only by being the Son of Man—both divine and human.

TALK IT OUT

Focus on Matthew 8:2-3, noting the difference between “willing” and “can.”

Jesus had concluded His Sermon on the Mount and traveled down the mountain. A man with leprosy approached Him saying “Lord, if you are willing you can make me clean” (Matt. 8:2). Jesus touched the man and his leprosy was immediately cleansed, demonstrating both Jesus’s power and compassion. Jesus could have healed by command and from a distance, without touching the leper. Choosing to touch him was an act of compassion.

The leper said “if you are willing” and found that Jesus was indeed willing. Would people question your willingness to help? Why or why not?

Society considered the leper an outcast, but Jesus loved him. He demonstrated His love by “reaching out his hand” and touching him. Love is not a mere emotion but an action verb; it must be acted out. Love is demonstrated through actions (1 John 3:18), just as faith is demonstrated through works (Jas. 2:17).

What are some ways we can follow Jesus's example to reach out and touch vulnerable and hurting people? Who is someone specifically we can help?

Place Matthew 8:3 on your phones or on cards and agree to memorize it together.

Prayer Requests / Notes

DAILY EXPLORATION



Day 1: Matthew 8:1-2

Identify the two elements in the leper's request.

Following His Sermon on the Mount in chapters 5–7, large crowds followed Jesus down from the mountain. Many followed only out of curiosity.

As Jesus came down from the mountain, right away He encountered a man with leprosy. To prevent the potential spread of leprosy, lepers were isolated from society. They were required to live alone (Lev. 13:46) or to live in colonies with other leprosy people. The disease rendered a person both physically and ritually unclean. So for this man to appear among people and approach Jesus was unusual.

The leper knelt in respect before Jesus, addressing him as “Lord.” In that term was respect, reverence, and acknowledgment of the authority of Jesus.

The leper stated his request: “If you are willing, you can make me clean.” There are two elements in the leper's request. First, there was a belief in Jesus's divine sovereignty—“if you are willing.” This was not a demand but a request. Second, there was a belief in the power of Jesus to heal him: “you can make me clean.” The leper did not know if Jesus would heal him, but he was confident Jesus could. These two elements are necessary in every petition for healing—belief in God's sovereignty and belief in God's ability.

Who are the outcasts in our society and what are some typical reactions to them?



Day 2: Matthew 8:3-4

Underline “Jesus touched him.”

Jesus touched the leper. He could have just spoken a command as He did in other instances (see Matt. 8:5-13). But in this instance Jesus reached out His hand and touched the leper. This would have rendered Him “defiled” according to the teachings of the day. By touching a leper, He became contaminated and ritually unclean. Jesus, however, would have nothing to do with the phobias of the day. Instead, He showed compassion to one of society's most unwanted outcasts. The healing occurred “immediately.” The defilement was gone, and everybody saw it go away. This was an obvious miracle before the crowd's eyes.

Jesus gave the healed man two instructions: First, he was not to tell anyone. Why was this a pattern throughout Jesus's ministry? (See Matt. 9:30; 12:16; 16:20; 17:9.) In this case, perhaps to keep the healed man focused on obeying Jesus's instructions. Also, Jesus didn't want the acclamation of the crowd as simply a worker of miracles or the political deliverer they anticipated. He still had more to teach about the kingdom of God. Mark tells us what happened when the leper disobeyed the command not to tell: “Jesus could no longer enter a town openly” (Mark 1:45). Second, Jesus instructed the man to perform the prescribed steps in the law to show his healing (Lev. 14:1-32). Jesus sent him to carry out the law's requirements. The first step of faith is obedience.

What is the next step of obedience Jesus wants you to take?



Day 3: Matthew 8:14-17

Compare Matthew 8:17 to Isaiah 53:4-5.

The story of Peter's mother-in-law is the shortest of all the healing narratives. We are not told any particulars of the circumstances. Matthew simply tells us that when Jesus entered Peter's house, He discovered the woman had a fever. Jesus reached down, touched her hand, and she was immediately healed.

The words "when evening came" might imply that the previous healings happened on a Sabbath (see Mark 1:21,29). This could explain why the multitudes who came to Jesus for healing came after sunset. Among the ones who came to be healed were "many who were demon-possessed." Jesus drove out the spirits by rebuking them. He also healed all those who came to Him with physical ailments. A distinction is made here between demon possession and physical sickness.

One of the prominent characteristics of Matthew's Gospel is his pointing to the Old Testament prophecies that Jesus fulfilled. Here, Matthew pointed out that the healing ministry of Jesus was a fulfillment of prophecy, quoting from Isaiah 53:4. Certainly, Matthew had in mind the entirety of Isaiah's prophecy, which includes: "But he was pierced because of our rebellion, crushed because of our iniquities; punishment for our peace was on him, and we are healed by his wounds" (Isa. 53:5). Jesus came not only to heal physical ailments but to heal spiritually—to save us from our sins.

In what ways can your church show that it values the most vulnerable members of your community? How do these verses in Matthew provide a model for you?



Day 4: Matthew 9:1-2

Contemplate the significance of the phrase "seeing their faith."

Matthew 9:1 forms a transition. Leaving the region of Gadara (8:28), Jesus crossed over the Sea of Galilee to his own town of Capernaum (see Mark 2:1). There, He began teaching. Quite possibly this took place in the home of Peter, where Jesus apparently was staying. While teaching, Jesus was confronted with another healing opportunity.

A group of men brought a paralytic to Jesus. The man was "lying on a stretcher." Missing from Matthew's account is the detail of the men lowering the man from the roof to the floor (see Mark 2:4; Luke 5:19).

That these friends cared about the paralyzed man is seen in their effort to get him to Jesus. Also seen is their belief that Jesus could heal the man. Jesus, seeing their faith, rewarded their efforts. Faith played a key role in many of the healing miracles of Jesus.

A common belief in Jesus's day was that illness and disease were the direct result of sin. Jesus dispelled that belief in another incident of healing when He told His disciples that a man's blindness was not the result of sin (John 9:1-2). Nevertheless, this paralytic probably had lived his life thinking that his paralysis was punishment for sin. Jesus immediately dealt with the man's spiritual and mental state by exclaiming, "Your sins are forgiven." Jesus, as the Son of God, used His divine authority to pronounce forgiveness. Forgiveness of sin is our greatest need.

How might your faith lead to other people experiencing the power of Jesus?



Day 5: Matthew 9:3-8

Circle the word “authority” in verses 6 and 8.

The religious leaders perceived Jesus’s action as blasphemy. Only God could forgive sins. They were convinced Jesus was usurping a function that belonged only to God. They refused to believe Jesus was God. Perceiving their thoughts, Jesus denounced their unbelief and objections as coming from the evil in their hearts. The problem with the scribes was a problem of the heart.

In response to their objection, Jesus asked, which is easier, to pronounce forgiveness or to make a paralyzed man walk? For Him to claim to forgive sin was easier than physically healing the man. If Jesus could do the harder task of healing, then the assumption would be that the easier task of forgiving sin had been accomplished as well. So Jesus declared that He would heal the man to prove He had the authority to forgive sin.

Jesus’s authority was vividly illustrated when He commanded the paralytic to get up, take his stretcher, and go home. In obedience to Jesus’s command, the man who once was paralyzed got up and went home. This was irrefutable proof that Jesus had the authority and power to heal and forgive.

This healing was an act of compassion toward another of society’s outcasts. In that day, and unfortunately in our day as well, those with handicapping conditions are often looked down on as having lesser value than others. Once again Jesus demonstrated that every person has value.

Why do you think Jesus addressed spiritual needs before He addressed physical needs?

APPLY THE TEXT

Consider your attitude toward people who are often ignored. Consider how your attitude clashes with the attitude Jesus had toward those who were deemed second class in His day. What needs to change in your attitude?

JOURNAL



THE SANCTITY OF HUMAN LIFE

BY BOB BUNN

- On January 13, 1984, President Ronald Reagan issued a proclamation supporting what he dubbed “the sanctity of human life.” Pointing to the deaths of millions of unborn children through legalized abortion, Reagan noted that Americans were “poorer not simply for lives not led and for contributions not made, but also for the erosion of our sense of worth and dignity of every individual.”¹ In response, Reagan proclaimed Sunday, January 22 of that year—the 11th anniversary of the Roe v. Wade Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion—“National Sanctity of Human Life Day.” He issued similar proclamations for the third Sunday of January in each of his remaining years in office, as have several of his successors in the White House.

By the late 1980s, the Sanctity of Human Life movement had gained momentum in many churches, but the seeds of the Southern Baptist Convention’s support for the sanctity of all human life had been planted much earlier. At its 1976 annual meeting in Norfolk, Virginia, the Convention adopted a resolution against abortion. In that resolution, the SBC affirmed “the biblical sacredness and dignity of all human life, including fetal life” and rejected “any indiscriminate attitude toward abortion, as contrary to the biblical view.”²

In its article on “The Family,” the *Baptist Faith and Message* (2000) states that “children, from the moment of conception, are a blessing and heritage from the Lord.”³ Later, in the article on “The Christian and Social Order,” it also makes a broader appeal for the universal value of each human life, especially those who cannot defend themselves: “We should work to provide for the orphaned, the needy, the abused, the aged, the helpless, and the sick. We should speak on behalf

of the unborn and contend for the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death.”⁴

Today, Christians from a variety of backgrounds recognize the importance of protecting the sanctity of human life.

What the Bible Says

Our English word “sanctity” can be traced to the Latin word *sanctus*, which basically means “sacred.” By definition the sanctity of human life considers every life “sacred” or “set apart” by God for His purposes and plans.

Human beings are created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27). All of us—even those who choose to reject God’s mercy and grace—bear His image. This gives every human being value and purpose. Our lives have meaning because we reflect Him.

In the Psalms, we see that the image of God places humans a little lower than God and that we are crowned “with glory and honor” (Ps. 8:5). Plus, we

are “remarkably and wondrously made” by the very hand of God (139:14). He “knit” (a word that implies protection and security in Hebrew) us in our mother’s womb, and nothing in our lives is hidden from Him (139:13,15). This is how our Creator sees us, and it underscores our responsibility to view others through the lens of the sanctity of human life.

The sanctity of human life also emphasizes the purposes God has for each individual. Again, the psalmist noted that God knows the course of our days before they even begin (139:16). In addition, the prophet Jeremiah learned that God had set him apart for ministry before his birth (Jer. 1:5).

God, the Creator of the universe, knows each of us and has a plan for each of us. This reinforces the truth that human beings are His highest creation. But the greatest proof that every human life has value can be found in what is arguably the most familiar verse in all of Scripture. John 3:16 states that God’s love for humanity drove Him to make the greatest sacrifice imaginable. He sent His Son to pay the price for our sin. Because Jesus died for humanity, we can affirm the sanctity of all human life.

What It Means

The momentum of Sanctity of Human Life Sunday began with a presidential proclamation regarding the unborn. But if we believe God calls us to value and protect every person He has created, believers must consider expanding their definition of the sanctity of human life beyond the issue of abortion.

In the Old Testament, God sent His people into exile for two primary reasons: idolatry and injustice toward those who could not defend themselves. Today, we don’t have to look far to see how oppression of the helpless and hopeless continues to raise its ugly

head. Some discount the value of the elderly, especially those who can no longer actively contribute to society. Racial strife, economic injustice, physical disabilities, and mental illness leave many on the fringes of society.

By and large, these are the people Jesus helped. He socialized with the “sinners,” seeking to be the Great Physician who offered the cure for their deepest needs. He was the rabbi who touched lepers and other outcasts with a healing hand. He broke down cultural walls built around ethnic, gender, and social constraints. For example, His interaction with the Samaritan woman in John 4 shattered several first-century cultural barriers.

Why? So He could fulfill His messianic call articulated by Isaiah centuries earlier: “to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and freedom to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor, and the day of our God’s vengeance; to comfort all who mourn, to provide for those who mourn in Zion; to give them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, festive oil instead of mourning, and splendid clothes instead of despair” (Isa. 61:1-3).

Jesus affirmed the sanctity of all human life through His words and actions. He remains the best template for our lives and ministries as well. His example reminds us, as C.S. Lewis stated, “There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal.”⁵

And He challenges us to value the sanctity of every human life just as He does.

Bob Bunn serves as a content editor on Lifeway’s Adult *Explore the Bible* team.

1 <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/proclamation-5147-national-sanctity-human-life-day-1984>.

2 http://media2.sbhla.org.s3.amazonaws.com/annuals/SBC_Annual_1976.pdf

3 <https://bfm.sbc.net/bfm2000/#xviii>

4 <https://bfm.sbc.net/bfm2000/#xv>

5 <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/42142-there-are-no-ordinary-people-you-have-never-talked-to>