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# **BIBLE STUDY**

## **JOHN 5:1-9**

Write about some of the places you remember well from your childhood. Give a vivid description of each place and write about what they mean to you.

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study is to understand a recent incident that took place in Winnipeg through the lens of a biblical text.. How does this biblical text connect with issues facing Indigenous peoples in Canada? What can we learn from Jesus about how we respond to these issues? What are we called to do?

### **Read John 5:1-6**

- The man was ill for 38 years and sat by the pool day after day (see note below). What might he be thinking? Feeling? Observing? Use your sanctified imagination!
- What people come to your mind that could identify with this man who was ill and overlooked?

### **Case Study (Have someone read the case out loud)**

Brian Sinclair arrived at the Health Sciences Centre Emergency Department, in Winnipeg, Manitoba in September 2008. He was experiencing pain and needed assistance with the catheter bag he used. He was alert and wheeled himself to the triage desk. He had a letter from his doctor to present to the attending physician. For 34 hours, Brian sat in the ER, visible to people walking around him and to the security cameras. At one point he vomited. Housekeeping came to clean up but no one alerted medical staff. "Sinclair looked like someone who was intoxicated." 34 hours later he was pronounced dead. Rigor mortis had already set in. The cause of death was determined to be a severe inflammation of the bladder which had caused the abdominal cavity to be inflamed and his blood pressure to drop. The autopsy confirmed he did not have drugs or alcohol in his system. His family concluded that he was "simply ignored to death." (Summary taken from Structures of Indifference. Mary Jane Logan McCallum and Adele Perry, University of Manitoba Press, 2018.)

## Discussion Point

- What are your initial thoughts and feelings as you hear this account?

### A reality check related to healthcare in Canada:

There is evidence of racism and colonialism in Canada when it comes to healthcare offered to Indigenous peoples.

*Healthcare is a service that everyone in Canada will use at one point in their lives or another. Something that has been clear about healthcare in Canada for a long time is that it is, among many other services and institutions, an extremely unsafe place for Indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples are constantly forced to contend with hostile staff, inadequate treatment, racism, and the lack of being taken seriously, even in the direst of situations.*

*(<https://www.martlet.ca/opinion-newsunsettled-racism-in-healthcare-indigenous-2020/> Accessed Feb. 19, 2021)*

*Life expectancy for Inuit is a decade less than the Canadian average, for instance, and institutional racism is so severe that Indigenous people strategically avoid public hospitals, when possible, in favour of clinics managed and staffed by Indigenous people.*

*(<https://yellowheadinstitute.org/2021/02/04/the-failure-of-federal-indigenous-healthcare-policy-in-canada/>) Accessed February 17, 2021.*

## Re- Read John 5:1-9

- What insights come to mind in light of the Brian Sinclair story? In what ways are the story of Brian Sinclair and the ill man in John 5 similar? How are they different?

**Let's dig deeper** into the John 5: 1-9 text to see what we can learn from Jesus.

- Notice the interaction of Jesus with the man. Pay attention to the details. Who approaches whom? How does the man react? Why did Jesus' interaction with the man create controversy? (see note below)
- In response to the charge of healing on the Sabbath, Jesus says: "My Father is still working, and I also am working." (v. 17) What do you think Jesus means by "working?" How is that applicable to us today?
- Do you think there are people who feel overlooked or invisible in our society today? Who are these people in your neighbourhood?
- What are we called to do? Individually? As a Salvation Army ministry unit? As a society? How does this action express itself in the interaction between Indigenous peoples and the Salvation Army?

## Prayer and Reflection

- Pray for those who are often invisible in your context. Pray for guidance from the Spirit to know how to act.
- Pray with Jesus' words in mind. Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." (Mt. 25:40)
- Pray for the impact of the Canadian healthcare system on Indigenous peoples in particular.

## Background Notes

- The earliest manuscripts of John do not explain why the invalids are there, but later scribes added an explanation that appears in certain manuscripts (5:4). According to this explanation, people believed that an angel of the Lord would come and stir the waters, and that whoever was the first to enter the pool after the waters were stirred would be healed of his or her malady. (Elisabeth Johnson, *Working Preacher, May 1, 2016*)
- The man whom Jesus heals shows no sign of faith in Jesus or of gratitude for what Jesus has done for him. When confronted by the religious authorities about carrying his mat on the Sabbath, he deflects blame to the man who healed him, whose name he has not even bothered to learn. And when he meets Jesus again and learns his name, he immediately tells the authorities the identity of the man they seek. Perhaps the man thinks that if the authorities go after Jesus, they will leave him alone. (Johnson)
- One might wonder why Jesus chose this particular man to heal out of all the invalids lying around the pool of Bethzatha. It seems like he could have made a better choice! Yet here we see that the compassion and healing power of Jesus are not reserved only for those who are "deserving" — for those whose faith is great and who respond to healing by believing in and following Jesus. Certainly, Jesus heals such people also. But here Jesus heals one whose lack of faith leads him to cooperate with those who persecute Jesus, who even seek to kill Jesus (John 5:18). (Johnson)
- John's Gospel does not answer the question of why certain people are healed and others are not. But this passage makes it clear that healing is not a matter of having "enough" faith (as if we could measure faith). That is not how Jesus operates. Jesus does not heal to benefit himself or receive gratitude, praise or devotion. He heals people simply because this is the work of his Father (John 5:17).
- Note that the story takes place in Jerusalem – the centre of power for Israel – where the Temple is located.
- The healing takes place on the Sabbath day. That creates controversy. (No work is to be done on the Jewish Sabbath.)

## References Cited

Johnson, Elisabeth. <https://www.workingpreacher.org/bible-index>. John 5: 1-9, May 1, 2016.

McCallum, Mary Jane Logan and Adele Perry. *Structures of Indifference: An Indigenous Life and Death In a Canadian City*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2018.