

## Faith of a Centurion

Galen clicked his phone off. He was meeting his wife, Alyssa, at home. Neither of them was in the state of mind to finish out their workday. But while his mind was racing, he had one immediate thought when he heard the distressing news.

It had come to him like a life preserver. The only thing he knew for sure that could withstand the tumultuous and encapsulating waves threatening to overtake him was the person he most depended on—Jesus Christ.

Galen had received a call fewer than 30 minutes ago from the head coach at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois. “Damitri sustained a back and head injury,” the coach had said. “He’s in surgery now. I don’t have any more information now. I will give the hospital doctors your number, and they and I will be in touch as soon as possible. Stay by the phone!”

The Coopers lived in Tampa. So, they were a long ways away from their middle child, and they could not get to him any time soon.

“Lord, I have trusted You with Damitri,” prayed Galen as he entered his neighborhood. “I trust You with him now. I ask You again to heal my son. I call on the mighty name of Jesus! I do so, knowing You are a good, gracious, and mighty God! Heal our son, dear Lord. And bless the doctors and medical personnel. I ask all of this in Jesus’ precious name. Amen.”

When he pulled into his driveway, Alyssa was waiting. “He’s in the Lord’s healing hands now,” he told her.

**1.** *What reasons might you have for not calling out to Jesus at hard times in your life?*

**2.** *How do you overcome that lack of faith in Him?*

**3.** *In what ways does Jesus reach out to you?*

**LESSON FOCUS:** Have faith to call out to Jesus.

## The Centurion's Request

*Luke 7:1-5, KJV*

1 Now when he had ended all his sayings in the audience of the people, he entered into Capernaum.

2 And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear unto him, was sick, and ready to die.

3 And when he heard of Jesus, he sent unto him the elders of the Jews, beseeching him that he would come and heal his servant.

4 And when they came to Jesus, they besought him instantly, saying, That he was worthy for whom he should do this:

5 For he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue.

*Luke 7:1-5, NIV*

<sup>1</sup>When Jesus had finished saying all this to the people who were listening, he entered Capernaum. <sup>2</sup>There a centurion's servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die.

<sup>3</sup>The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant.

<sup>4</sup>When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, "This man deserves to have you do this, <sup>5</sup> because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue."

At the end of Jesus' teaching session (called the Sermon on the Plain: Luke 6:17-49), He went to Capernaum (7:1), where He would heal the servant of one of Israel's enemies—a Roman centurion. He commanded a detachment of Roman troops stationed at Capernaum.

The centurion had a male "servant" (vs. 2) whom he greatly esteemed and who had demonstrated his considerable worth on several occasions. The Greek adverb rendered "sick" could be translated "to be in a bad state" or "ill." In the case of the centurion's servant, the text says the servant was "about to die" (vs. 2). The news about Jesus and His ability to heal gave the centurion renewed hope. He believed that Jesus could cure his dying servant.

So, when the centurion found out that Jesus was present in Capernaum, the soldier sent some Jewish "elders" (vs. 3) as his emissaries to Jesus. Perhaps the centurion did

not feel it was appropriate for him, as a Gentile, to make his request directly to such a powerful miracle worker as Jesus. This explains why the officer dispatched the local religious leaders to ask Jesus to come to the centurion's home and heal his slave.

Once the "elders" found Jesus, they began to implore Him "earnestly" (vs. 4). These intermediaries explained that the centurion, while not a full convert to Judaism, was a God-fearing Gentile who loved the people of Judea, admired their culture, respected their worship, and even had sponsored the construction of the local "synagogue" (vs. 5) in Capernaum—something that showed his deep devotion to the God of Israel.

The centurion likely contributed substantially to the building costs out of his own pocket. In either case, the delegation considered the soldier to be a worthy individual who deserved to receive help from Jesus.

**4.** *What prompted the centurion to seek Jesus' help?*

**5.** *Who told Jesus about the centurion's gravely ill servant?*

**6.** *What reason did the Jewish elders give for Jesus' traveling to the centurion's home?*

## The Centurion's Humility

*Luke 7:6-10, KJV*

6 Then Jesus went with them. And when he was now not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying unto him, Lord, trouble not thyself: for I am not worthy that thou shouldst enter under my roof:

7 Wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee: but say in a word, and my

*Luke 7:6-10, NIV*

<sup>6</sup>So Jesus went with them.

He was not far from the house when the centurion sent friends to say to him: "Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. <sup>7</sup>That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the

servant shall be healed.

8 For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.

9 When Jesus heard these things, he marvelled at him, and turned him about, and said unto the people that followed him, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.

10 And they that were sent, returning to the house, found the servant whole that had been sick.

word, and my servant will be healed. <sup>8</sup>For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."

<sup>9</sup>When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following him, he said, "I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel." <sup>10</sup> Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well.

Jesus was convinced by what He heard from the Jewish elders. In turn, He accompanied them to the centurion's home. Unexpectedly, the soldier, after first asking Jesus to come to him (Luke 7:3), next asked Jesus not to come (vs. 6).

Jesus was convinced by what He heard from the Jewish elders. In turn, He accompanied them to the home of the centurion. Unexpectedly, the soldier, after first asking Jesus to come to him, next asked Jesus not to come (vs. 6).

The Savior was not far from the centurion's home when he sent some "friends" to say Jesus need not bother personally showing up at the soldier's house—he did not consider himself sufficiently "worthy" (vs. 7) for such an esteemed religious leader to enter his home.

Strict Jews of the day would have agreed with the centurion. They believed Jews became ritually unclean when they entered the home of a Gentile (see Acts 10:28). The irony is that this ceremonially impure Gentile proved to have more faith than his more scrupulous Jewish peers (Luke 7:9).

Instead, the soldier asked Jesus to issue the command for the servant to be cured. The officer believed that when this

happened, his servant would be “healed” (vs. 7).

As a person in charge of others, he leveraged his understanding of how the chain of command worked. For instance, he could use his “authority” (vs. 8) to direct subordinates to come and go whenever it was necessary. The centurion could also order one of his slaves to do this or that, and the command was quickly performed.

While the centurion acknowledged that he had some authority in physical realms, he believed Jesus had power in the spiritual realm that was not limited by distance, time, or even maladies. The soldier believed that if Jesus would “say the word,” the chain of command would go into action and the dying servant would be cured.

The centurion’s grasp of what Jesus could do both pleased and “amazed” (vs. 9) Him. Perhaps to emphasize His point, the Lord turned to face those accompanying Him to exclaim that He had not seen “faith” this great or profound throughout the nation of “Israel.” In accordance with the centurion’s faith, his servant would be “healed” (vs. 7). So when the officer’s subordinates arrived at his home, they discovered the servant had been fully restored to health.



*The ruins of a synagogue at Capernaum, possibly built on the ruins of the one the centurion helped build.*

*Photo: James Emery*

**7.** *What reason did the centurion give for asking Jesus not to come?*

**8.** *In what way did the centurion describe himself?*

**9.** *How did Jesus respond to the centurion?*

**10.** *What was the result of Jesus’ intervention?*

## Reach Out!

“The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth” (Ps. 145:18). In other words, if we call on the Lord in faith and in sincerity, He will be close to us to hear whatever the need we express to Him. Like the centurion, whose faith Jesus commended before His followers, we need to humbly call out to our Lord while recognizing His divine authority. Even when He doesn’t respond to our petitions in the way we want, our trust in His love for us should be ever present and ever firm.

“Resolved, never to count that a prayer,” said Jonathan Edwards, the American revivalist preacher of the eighteenth century, “. . . which is so made, that I cannot hope that God will answer it.”

Furthermore, R. C. Sproul, a modern Christian theologian, confesses, “I don’t always feel His presence. But God’s promises do not depend upon my feelings; they rest upon His integrity.” What both men are noting is that our call to God should rest on who He is—that is, His faithfulness and righteousness.

On the one hand, we know that Jesus listens to us whenever we call on Him. On the other hand, we trust that whatever is His response to our call will be for our best. Jesus did not suffer so greatly even to an agonizing death for our redemption that He would ignore us during our hardships and struggles. Moreover, His triumph over death and evil tells us that He has the power to truly answer our petitions. Therefore, call upon our Lord, for He “richly blesses all who call on him” (Rom. 10:12).

- 11.** *Why is faith essential when you call out to Jesus?*
- 12.** *Why is the recognition of the Lord’s authority crucial when you offer your petitions to Him?*
- 13.** *How does God bless you when you reach out to Him?*

## My Current Petitions

This week's Scripture focuses on the faith that the Roman centurion displayed in Jesus and his humble petition for Jesus to heal his beloved servant. Such faith and such humility of this Gentile are what Jesus highly commended before the Jewish multitude and what the Gospel writer teaches us through God's holy Word. And, as such, we are to call on the Lord in like manner.

► *List some reasons you might call out to Jesus this week. Thank Him in advance for listening to you and beginning to answer your request even before you give it.*

### KEY VERSE

Wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee: but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed. —Luke 7:7, KJV

That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. —Luke 7:7, NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of April 15 through April 21

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

**Mon.** Luke 7:11-17—Jesus' Compassion for the Grieving.

**Tues.** Psalm 92—Sing Praises to God's Name.

**Wed.** James 5:12-20—Confession, Prayer, and Healing.

**Thurs.** Micah 7:7-20—God Pardons Iniquity and Transgressions.

**Fri.** Psalm 86:1-7, 11-17—God is Good and Forgiving.

**Sat.** Romans 8:1-17—No Condemnation in Christ.

**Sun.** Luke 7:36-50—Jesus Forgives a Sinner.

# THE MEASURE OF FAITH

The measure of our faith is found in how much we trust Jesus. Four people He encountered in His travels showed the depth of their faith when they came to Jesus, hoping He could bring healing and forgiveness.

When Jesus taught, large crowds often gathered; that was the case one day when four men brought a paralyzed friend on a mat to Jesus for healing. Unable to reach Jesus through the crowd, “they went up on the roof,” broke through it, and lowered the man “right in front of Jesus” (Luke 5:19). Impressed by the “faith” of these men, Jesus did not immediately heal the man, but, instead, did something more eternal: He forgave the man’s sins. The “Pharisees and the teachers of the law” (vs. 21) were appalled—only God had the power to forgive sins, not some Galilean rabbi. So, to show “that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” (vs. 24), Jesus commanded the man to pick up his mat and walk home. The man was fully healed, physically and spiritually.

When He found great faith, Jesus healed people without even seeing or touching them. One such event happened when Jesus entered Capernaum and met a group of Jewish elders who “pleaded earnestly” (Luke 7:4) with Him to come and heal the servant of a Roman centurion. Though the relationship between the Jews and their Roman conquerors was usually antagonistic, this centurion was beloved in the community because he had helped build the local synagogue. When Jesus went with the elders to the centurion’s house, friends of the centurion met them, saying the Roman did not “deserve” (vs. 6) to even have Jesus in his house. If Jesus would just “say the word” (vs. 7), the servant would be healed. Jesus marveled at the centurion’s faith, saying, “I have not found such great faith even in Israel” (vs. 9). When the centurion’s representatives returned to the house, they found the servant healed.

One woman came to Jesus not for physical healing but with the faith that He would forgive her sin. While Jesus was eating at the house of a Pharisee named Simon, “a woman in that town who lived a sinful life” (Luke 7:37) interrupted the meal by anointing His feet with her tears and perfume. Simon was appalled that Jesus would even allow this sinful woman to touch Him, but Jesus chided Simon for not even washing His feet before the meal. However, for this display of faith, Jesus said, “Her many sins have been forgiven” (vs. 47). Simon and his guests wondered how Jesus could forgive the woman’s multitude of sins, but He told them, “Whoever has been forgiven little loves little” (vs. 47).

When Jesus retreated from Jewish territory into the Gentile region of Tyre and Sidon, a “Canaanite woman” (Matt. 15:22) confronted Him with a request for healing—not for herself, but for her demon-possessed daughter. This Gentile woman recognized God in this Jewish prophet, calling Him by the Jewish titles of “Lord” and “Son of David” as she begged Him to heal her daughter. The disciples urged Jesus to send the woman away, and even He said He had come only to “Israel” (vs. 24) to bring salvation. But her persistence and “great faith” (vs. 28) caused Jesus to heal the daughter without even seeing her.

Great faith comes with great trust. Those who trusted in Jesus found healing, forgiveness, and hope.



A painting of a Roman centurion by James Tissot (1836-1902). Jesus said of the centurion who asked Him to heal his servant, “I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel” (Luke 7:9).

Brooklyn Museum, New York/Public Domain





This reconstructed house in the Nazareth Village in Israel shows a roof like one of the four friends could have broken through to bring their paralyzed friend to Jesus (Luke 5:19).

Ian Scott



This stained-glass window from a church in North Carolina shows “a woman . . . who lived a sinful life” (Luke 7:37) anointing Jesus’ feet with perfume while a Pharisee watches in disbelief.

Nheyob



A miniature alabaster jar—possibly like the one the sinful woman used to carry her perfume to anoint Jesus (Luke 7:37).

Metropolitan Museum of Art/Public Domain



Jesus was in “the region of Tyre and Sidon” (Matt. 15:22), in what is now Lebanon, when “a Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him” asking for healing for her demon-possessed daughter. These are the ruins of Roman Tyre showing a triumphal arch and the remains of an aqueduct (on the right).

Roman Deckert

By Jerry Yamamoto

# Faith Petitions

Our need for Jesus is not only to save us so we can go to heaven. If that were so, Jesus would be merely an impersonal object for us to use, like an admission ticket for an amusement park or a long-awaited concert or a sporting event. No! Jesus is a person whose powers are beyond the cosmos and our imaginings. Therefore, we can call on Jesus for every need we have; and He has the power to deal with those needs however He so desires. That means His response to our calls may not be in a way we want, but we must have faith in Him and know He works for our best interests.

The following situations represent a few of the major incidents in our lives when it is imperative that we call on our Lord Jesus. In each case, describe your own situation in which you called on Jesus; relate why you called on Him and how He responded; and discuss your reaction to His response and what insights you gained.

› When you sought God's saving grace:

› When you were physically ill or hurt:

› When you were spiraling into a depression or an emotional heartbreak:

› When you felt the loss of someone dear to you:

› When you petitioned Him for the sake of another: