

# L E S S O N 7

For April 14 • Page 47

## Faith of a Centurion

It was back in 1973," Craig explained, "and quite frankly, I'd reached the end of my rope." In a partnership with his brother-in-law, Craig had been accused of unfair business practices. Though the dealings had been instigated by his brother-in-law, the blame was laid on Craig. As an investigation ensued, the business incurred overwhelming debts and failed. His wife left with their two kids and moved in with her parents. Because of the probe, he couldn't get a job in his field, so he ended up working as a clerk at a gas station.

"I had lost all hope," he said. "To escape my misery, I'd buy a six-pack at the end of my shift and drink myself to sleep every night." Craig admitted to never having been religious, but one evening on his way home from work, as he turned the radio dial on his car, a certain song caught his ear. "Frankly, I probably would have kept turning the dial if it hadn't been Elvis Presley singing," he divulged. The song was "Reach Out to Jesus" by Ralph Carmichael, and it struck a chord with where Craig was at that time of his life.

"Is the life you're living filled with sorrow and despair? Are you tired and friendless? Have you almost lost your way? Jesus will help you; just come to Him today." By the time the song ended, Craig had accepted and done what the chorus encourages: "He is always there, hearing every prayer, faithful and true; walking by our side, in His love we hide all the day through. When you get discouraged, just remember what to do: Reach out to Jesus, He's reaching out to you."

**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. Their presence was intended to maintain law and order in the area.

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" is more idiomatically 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 soldier was unable to care for his servant. Yet, the news about Jesus and His ability to heal gave the centurion renewed hope. He believed that Jesus could cure the centurion's 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. While this was a good and kind act, the Jewish delegation may have wrongly thought such giving made the man worthy of Jesus' help. That is not what charitable giving is about.

**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 shouldest enter under my roof:

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

*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 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,

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.

'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 accompanied the Jewish elders 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 dispatched a group of his "friends." When they reached Jesus, they addressed Him respectfully as "Lord" (the Gentile equivalent of "teacher" or "rabbi") and said He need not bother personally showing up at the soldier's house. The reason was that, despite what others may have thought, he did not consider himself sufficiently "worthy" (vs. 7) for such an esteemed religious leader to enter his home. Likewise, he did not deem himself virtuous or pious enough for Jesus to come to him.

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).

Nonetheless, the centurion would not make any presumptions and risk offending Jesus. Instead, the soldier simply 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 noncommissioned officer 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 the throng accompanying Him. Then, Jesus noted that the faith and humility displayed by the Gentile soldier was exemplary. In fact, Jesus exclaimed He had not seen “faith” this great or profound throughout the nation of “Israel.” Undoubtedly, Jesus’ declaration would have stunned and possibly angered many of His Jewish listeners.

However, Jesus announced that in accordance with the centurion’s faith, his servant would be “healed” (vs. 7). As a result, 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 Roman centurion, whose faith Jesus commended, we need to confidently 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 can know that Jesus listens to us whenever we call on Him. On the other hand, we can trust that His response to our call will be for our best. Jesus did not suffer so greatly even unto 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 Jesus, 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 petition for Jesus to heal his beloved servant. Such faith of this Gentile is 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 the 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

Week of April 15 through April 21

(See *The Quiet Hour* for 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.