

# S I G N S

DISCUSSION GUIDE

# Welcome & Announcements

*Welcome to community group! We believe that people come to faith and grow in their faith when they get to spend time reflecting on God's Word, and also spending time with other Christians. That's what we're hoping for tonight. Here's what's happening in the broader life of the church:*

- **Easter Weekend**

Although it's just the beginning of the season of Lent (the 40 days leading up to Easter), Easter weekend will be here before we know it! We'll gather on Good Friday for worship at 6:30p, then gather for a pancake brunch and egg hunt on Saturday at 10a, and then for worship as usual 9a and 10:45a Easter Sunday!

- **Women's Happy Hour | March 30th, 5:30p**

Ladies, it is exactly what it sounds like: happy hour with other women from the church. All are welcome to join, it'll be held at Chuy's in Kenwood on Hosbrook Rd.

- **Men's Retreat | April 24th-25th**

Gentlemen...early bird registration has begun for our annual Men's Retreat @ Higher Ground! Our speaker this year is pastor and author Mike Khandjian from Chapelgate Church in Baltimore. The early bird registration deadline is March 20th so get signed up today!

# The Official's Son

(John 4.39-54)

## OPENER

*We are in a sermon series called "Signs" during the season of Lent. Lent is a season of preparation, a season of repentance and reflection, leading up to Easter weekend. As we look at these miracles Jesus performed - "signs" as John calls them - let's make our prayer be for eyes to see the signs, ears to hear God's truth, and hearts to love God more.*

*Open up with a prayer toward that end: eyes to see and ears to hear, giving thanks for the community God has given us, asking for encouragement amongst one another, and for God to be honored, etc.*

## Opening Question(s):

- March 10 is National Middle Name Day. What's your middle name? Is there a story behind it
- Have you ever had a nickname? What was it?

## STUDY/DISCUSSION

*This week we're looking at the healing of the royal official's son.*

**>> READ >> John 4:39-54**

1. Reading this story, what immediately stands out to you? What is interesting? Challenging? Confusing? Encouraging? Provocative? What questions does it raise for you?
2. Who exhibits faith in this story? Why might this have been surprising to John's early readers?
3. What do you make of Jesus' statement that "a prophet has no honor in his own hometown." Is there any warning here for us to heed? (*NOTE: The Galileans welcome him warmly at first, but by the time we get to the end of chapter 6 folks are taking off in droves*)
4. On Sunday Josh said that faith is often activated in a time of need. This is certainly the case for royal official in our story. When did you first get interested in Jesus? What was going on in your life? (Or, when did you get more serious about your faith?)
5. What else can we learn about faith from the royal official?
6. We don't have a direct promise from Jesus like the royal official did when he said, "Go; your son will live." But we do have lots of other promises in Scripture. In what way is our faith connected to believing God's promises?
7. What is one way your faith can grow in light of what we've discussed?

## PRAY

Take some time and pray together. Pray for each other and pray specifically for eyes to see God in the scriptures, in the signs we'll be discussing through Lent, and in all the ways He might want to show his love for us.

## LEADER'S NOTES

We use the word *faith* in a variety of ways in our culture. Faith is a name. Some people used it as a synonym for religion (“So and so is of the Muslim faith”). Some people tell us when we’re in a difficult time to “just keep the faith” (without specifying in what). There is such a thing as inauthentic faith, or misdirected faith — the warnings in the New Testament should so challenge us in that regard. John the Apostle writes about faith (or belief and believing) 3x more than the other Gospel writers. And our text this week really centers on the notion of real faith.

**1.) *The Surprising Recipients of Faith (v.39-45)*** — Samaritans and Jews reacted to each other with great animosity. How surprising, then, when John records the Samaritans warmly believing in Jesus. Later in the story, the royal official has real faith, though he’s almost certainly a Gentile, and is working for the occupying Roman Empire. Contrast, the equally surprising resistance of the covenant community — “a prophet has no honor in his own hometown.” This teaches us that God has an eye for the outsider, and so should we. Rebecca McLaughlin tweeted — “1.) An alone person in our gathering is an emergency. 2.) Friends can wait. 3.) Introduce a newcomer to someone else. Let’s all be missionaries at church today.”

It also warns those of us inside the church, to beware of merely going through the motions. It’s possible to be around Jesus without really trusting him.

The Samaritans also made a bold confession — “We know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.” This would have been a dangerous statement, as Roman emperors took unto themselves the title “the savior of the world.” In an election year, it’s important that we not pour our hopes and dreams and fears into a political outcome.

**2.) *The Journey of Faith (v.46-54)*** — Many of the ancient commentators saw the royal official as a paradigm for the way faith plays out in our own lives. a.) *Faith has a Beginning (v.46-47)*. And it very often begins in the midst of a great need. Troubles and suffering don’t create our need, so much as surface it. Before his son was ill, would the royal official have walked 15 minutes to see Jesus, let alone 15 miles? Faith often begins in hardship. b.) *Faith’s Perseverance (v.48-50)*. The royal official doesn’t get the response immediately that he was hoping for. But he hangs in there, and asks Jesus again. Then Jesus makes a promise, and before the official sees the result, he takes Jesus at his word. Real faith involves trust in Jesus. c.) *Faith’s Growth (v.51-54)*. He goes home and then when he sees his son has been healed, he believes. He believed before, but now that he has seen Jesus at work, his faith grows. The royal official would go on to deal with more suffering in his life. But now he had a sign to return. “Real faith is going back to what we know about Jesus, and then extrapolating out to the things we don’t know” (David Bisgrove). We have an even better sign, the death and resurrection of Christ. We need to constantly return to that in order to deal with the challenges we face.