

# SERMON/BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

This guide is designed to support you as you lead your congregation on a spiritual journey to understand how COVID-19 vaccines connect to our faith. Engage parishioners in a life-changing journey of faith and healing as we navigate life during the pandemic.

## SESSION 1: HEALING PASSAGE OF FOCUS: JOHN 9

Scripture captures numerous instances of healing within the New Testament. The miracle of healing was one of the hallmarks of Jesus' earthly ministry. However, there was a common theme throughout each of the healing narratives. In each story of Jesus providing healing, there were 3 necessary variables: 1) a need for healing, 2) a desire for healing, and 3) an opportunity to impact the broader community.

As we navigate the COVID-19 pandemic, those same variables exist in present-day culture. There is very much a need for healing and restoration in our communities. So many people have an unmatched desire to see their homes, families, and loved ones healed. Lastly, the healing we receive, as individuals, helps us protect others connected to us from the impacts of COVID-19. These variables make our communities prime candidates for healing, just as we see Jesus continually healing throughout the Bible. COVID-19 vaccines are a step in that healing process.

In this story, a blind man receives healing from Jesus. Jesus gives the blind man specific instructions regarding what to do after he is healed. As others learn of the man's healing, they want to investigate and know more about who healed him and why. The more they investigated, the more they learned about the power of faith in obtaining healing. Even in the face of many questions, the once-blind man is confident in the pathway to healing made available to him. He did not allow the uncertainty of those who did not understand his healing stop him from taking advantage of the opportunity to be healed. We

too, even in the face of questions and uncertainty, must pursue our healing with faith and resolve.

### Discussion Questions

1. What does healing look like in this passage? Who does the healing?
2. What does it mean to be healed?
3. Who needs to be healed?
4. What is the impact of the healing throughout the community?

### Questions for Reflection

1. When was a time you needed healing? What happened?
2. When was a time that our world needed healing? What happened?  
(Note: Ensure COVID-19 and vaccines are part of the discussion)
3. What healing do you or your family currently need to experience?
4. What avenues for healing are available to you? How can you access healing?

### Additional Scriptures: Mark 2:17, Psalm 41

### Prayer

Gracious God, we pause to ask for your healing powers to manifest in our lives and our families. As we work to be responsible and diligent in protecting ourselves, we recognize your infinite power to heal each of us and all those who have been impacted by the COVID-19 virus. In the face of questions, uncertainty, and an abundance of information, we ask that you give us insight and confidence into the avenues for healing made available to us. May we respond with faith and resolve. Help we remain confident in your ability to heal our lives, families, communities, and our nation. We trust you and anticipate you healing all of us. In your name, Amen.

## SESSION 2: ACCESS TO HEALING

### PASSAGE OF FOCUS: LUKE 5:17-26 OR MARK 5:21-34 OR NEHEMIAH 5

Communities of Color are often disproportionately impacted by health disparities and experience systemic barriers in accessing affordable, high-quality healthcare. Some have also experienced this first-hand during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, scripture records multiple instances where barriers are addressed and/or eradicated so that all people have access to the healing and resources necessary to ensure their well-being. This is the core of faith – God making possible for us that which we cannot make possible for ourselves.

Whether it is a paralyzed man being healed, a young lady being given new life, or a woman experiencing the healing power of Jesus, healing requires that we first have access to a power that supersedes our own. As we seek to better understand the COVID-19 vaccines, it is important that we first understand the value being placed upon our communities. While we make personal decisions about the best approach for ourselves and our families, there are people fighting to ensure we have access when we are able and choose to do so. That's the beauty of faith.

And it is not just access to COVID-19 vaccines, it's also access to protection, safety, and security for us and our families. It is the access that has been made possible for all of us, because of our faith and the sacrifices made on our behalf.

#### Discussion Questions

1. What is the role of each person in this passage? Who is giving access? Who is preventing access? What/who are they trying to access?
2. What does it mean to have access?
3. What difference does it make to have access to healing and justice? What does it mean, to you, to have access to healing and justice?

#### Questions for Reflection

1. Have you ever been denied access to something you really needed? What happened?
2. Have you ever been admitted to something where you didn't think you would get in? What happened?
3. How can you ensure others who need access are granted the privileges they deserve?

(Note: Think about how COVID-19 and vaccines can be a part of the responses.)

#### Additional Scriptures: Hebrews 4:16, Psalm 143

#### Prayer

Gracious God, we are thankful that you have worked to secure access to medical treatments for each of us, as your children. In the face of this pandemic, you have endowed medical professionals with insights that we can now access via COVID-19 vaccines. We ask that you give us insight and wisdom as we determine our individual plans regarding the vaccines. Please protect and cover those who are concerned about accessing the vaccines and the timeline for getting vaccinated. As those connected to us think through the appropriate safety measures, please guide their thinking and give them peace. In your name, Amen. All of us. In your name, Amen.

#### Additional Resources

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/health-equity/race-ethnicity.html>

## SESSION 3: GIFTS OF HEALING - FAITH + MEDICINE

### PASSAGE OF FOCUS: MATTHEW 10:1-8

We witness Jesus calling disciples and commissioning them for service. As Jesus calls these servants, they are empowered with gifts to help aid in their work and their mission. This was a major step for Jesus, and he made his choices after a night of prayer. These disciples would carry on Jesus' mission and extend it into all the world. As we look at the persons, we see they are ordinary people from the communities in which Jesus ministered, and they were a group with great variety of backgrounds and personalities. With all of their differences, one thing united them – they have all been given significant gifts by Jesus to accomplish their mission.

Each of us has also received gifts to assist us in these moments. We have received the gift of faith and of modern medicine. To have medical experts with the knowledge to develop groundbreaking vaccines is a gift. It's a valuable resource to help us carry forward the mission assigned to each of us – to love and care for one another.

#### Discussion Questions

1. What kind of gifts of healing does Jesus do?
2. How does Jesus continue to heal others?
3. What is our responsibility when Jesus offers us gifts?

#### Questions for Reflection

1. How do you view medicine? Do you view it as a gift? Why or why not?
2. How can the COVID-19 vaccines be seen as a gift? How can we use that gift?

**Additional Scriptures: Jeremiah 29:11-13,  
James 1:7, Psalm 139:13-17**

#### Prayer

Gracious God, you give the best gifts. We thank you for the gifts of life, faith and medicine. We applaud your consideration of us and the ways you work to ensure we can access the gifts you have given us. May we begin to view all that you do for us as a gift. Give us the grace to view each other, our brothers and sisters, as a gift from you. Help us to align our decisions, during the pandemic and beyond, with our commitment to treat all people as gifts that you have given us to change the world. Touch those medical professionals who have developed the gift of the vaccines. May we work to fully appreciate and understand the gift of medical advancement and those brothers and sisters working on our behalf. In your name, Amen.

#### Additional Resources

<https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2021/january-web-only/covid-19-vaccine-christian-ethical-questions-fetal-cells.html>

<https://statement.biologos.org/>

<https://biologos.org/articles/mother-knows-best-lets-talk-common-vaccine-concerns>

## SESSION 4: LOVING YOUR NEIGHBOR

PASSAGE OF FOCUS:  
LUKE 10:25-37 OR  
MATTHEW 25:31-46

We often think of our neighbor as simply someone who lives next door or in our immediate location. These are the people we see as we are passing them in their cars or perhaps even at the neighborhood grocery store. We see their children playing as we check the mail or grab a package from our front door. We may not know their names or the details of their background, but we can identify with them because we live in such close proximity. At one point, neighbors were practically family. We would borrow ingredients from each other and even help keep an eye out for each other's house or children.

Mr. Rogers invited all of us to be his neighbors. His catchy opening song welcomed each of us to his neighborhood to discuss a variety of topics and explore concepts that could create a better world. Jesus also expanded the concept of our neighbors. He challenged the disciples and those encountered to view every child of God as a neighbor. To view everyone as worthy and deserving of our love and concern. We've been invited to become good Samaritans – taking every step we can to love on and protect those divinely connected to us.

The pandemic has shown us that we must all unite and care for each other. Together, and with God's help, is the only way for us to get past the pandemic. In crisis, we have seen people giving their best and making enormous sacrifices for each other. In the face of difficult moments, we have stepped up to ensure our neighbors had what they needed to weather COVID-19. Now, we are standing on the threshold of another opportunity to love our neighbors instead of – vaccination.

### Discussion Questions

1. What does it mean to love your neighbor?
2. What does it mean to receive love from your neighbor?
3. Who is your neighbor? How can you trust your neighbor?

### Questions for Reflection

1. What are times when you have received love from someone you didn't trust but saw you as a neighbor?
2. Are there times you have loved someone as a neighbor who didn't trust you?
3. What are steps you can take to express love for your family and community during the pandemic?

(Note: As we all continue to deal with the pandemic, think about how getting vaccinated fits into building trust and loving your neighbor)

**Additional Scriptures: Jeremiah 29:7, Matthew 22:37-40, John 13:34-45**

### Prayer

Gracious God, we thank you for the way you love all of us fully and equally. We are humbled by the way you connect us to each other and empower us to make life better for everyone. May we never forget our responsibility to protect, care for, love, and enjoy our neighbors. In crisis and in happiness, we are a community of God and we value your presence in our lives. As we navigate uncertainty, please remind us that we are never alone and always connected to each other, even in a time of social distancing. Give us the resolve to do all we can to protect ourselves and every one of our neighbors. May our lives be an example of commitment to loving our neighbors. In your name, Amen.

## SESSION 5: DISCERNING THE TRUTH

### PASSAGE OF FOCUS: JOHN 4 OR 1 SAMUEL 3

In a world fueled by a constant stream of information, it can be difficult to determine what is true and fact. This has been even more evident during the pandemic, as we all have sifted information in a rapidly changing environment. However, we must focus on what is true and noble, each day, as we work to overcome this moment in our lives.

Sharing factual, important information is critical to navigating COVID-19 and the vaccines. Our communities deserve truth and its incumbent upon us to ensure we discern truth, share fact, and promote accurate information. Our commitment to discerning truth will empower our communities to make informed decisions regarding the COVID-19 vaccines options available to all of us.

#### Discussion Questions

1. How do we determine what is true or false?
2. How do you test whether something is of God or not? What do you test it against?
3. How can we develop discernment?
4. What role does prayer play?
5. What role does community play?

#### Questions for Reflection

1. Where do you get information? How can you trust it and determine whether it is true or false?
2. What is misinformation and how do you guard against misinformation? Are you diligent in not spreading information that may be false?

(Note: Tie COVID-19 vaccines into the discussion by asking where people go to get information on COVID-19 vaccines so they can make a more informed decision on what's best for themselves and their families. Suggest they visit [getvaccineanswers.org](http://getvaccineanswers.org) to get the facts on COVID-19 vaccines.)

#### Additional Scriptures: Philippians 4:8, 1 Corinthians 13:6, Psalm 25:6

#### Prayer

Merciful God, give us knowledge and wisdom as we decipher so much information during this unprecedented moment in our lives. We desire to be responsible, and we only want to promote those things that honor you and the mission you have placed upon us. Give us grace as we confront misinformation and courage to challenge what may be a threat to our communities' safety and well-being. We also ask that you dismantle the forces that may be intentionally misrepresenting facts and figures to communities most impacted by COVID-19. May truth be our guiding light and love our endearing companion. Protect what we feed our minds as we work to protect ourselves and our families. In your name, Amen.

## SESSION 6: QUESTIONS, WISDOM, AND DECISION-MAKING

PASSAGE OF FOCUS: ACTS 1:12-26  
(POSITIVE EXAMPLE OF SEEKING  
WISDOM) OR 1 KINGS 13:1-17  
(NEGATIVE EXAMPLE)

Questions are part of life. There have definitely been a number of questions and decisions to be made during COVID-19. However, we must pursue positive and constructive ways of making decisions and getting answers to our questions. Positive decision-making skills are critical to our well-being in this moment. Looking beyond our worries, asking effective questions, and then responsibly deciding how best to protect our families is the responsibility of people of faith. Our desire should be wisdom – it ensures we are acting as God would have us act even in the face of uncertainty and competing decisions.

### Discussion Questions

1. What is the purpose of wisdom?
2. How do the disciples make a decision? How does Rehoboam? What happens as a result?

### Questions for Reflection

1. How do you go about making a decision? What is your process?
2. After you make a decision, how do you act on your decision?
3. What are some of the major decisions you've had to make during this pandemic and how have you handled them? Note: Think about how to include the COVID-19 vaccines in this discussion.

**Additional Scriptures: James 1:5,  
Matthew 7:7-9, Proverbs 4:7-11**

### Prayer

Gracious God, we have so many questions and we know who to seek for the answers: you. There appears to always be a series of critical decisions that we must make. We ask that you grant us wisdom in our decision-making. We pray that our decisions and choices honor you and fulfill our responsibility to protect our families and communities. Guard our hearts and mind against negativity and pessimism. We ask for your overarching presence to guide our hearts and regulate our thoughts. May we be diligent and reasonable in our decisions and work to heal our land. We ask that your will be done in our lives and that you endow us with your Spirit and renew our hearts for this moment. In your name, Amen.