

## Children in Poverty: Can You See Them? A Bible study series

The Children in Poverty Bible study series is a free, web-based series of Bible studies on the three-year mission study focus on Children in Poverty of [American Baptist Women's Ministries](http://www.abwministries.org), ABCUSA. It supplements materials on the same focus also being produced by [National Ministries](http://www.nationalministries.org), ABCUSA.

A new study will be available every two months. Each study has two parts, enabling you to spread out each study over a period of time or to use it in one session as your schedule allows. Each study also has a variety of suggested action steps to take. These are to help spur your thinking about practical, hands-on things you can do related to children in poverty. You may do these action steps as written, or allow them to inspire you to other things.

Please begin and end your study with prayer. If you are studying in a group, read each section aloud and then stop and share your thoughts; if you are using this study as an individual, use the section marked "Reflection" to jot a few of your thoughts down.

In either case, consider designating a special journal for this study, perhaps one with pockets to hold things you may print off the web or other research as you progress through the study.

May God be with you in the study.

### Session 1: John 4:46-53

**The text:** **46** Then Jesus came again to Cana in Galilee where he had changed the water into wine. Now there was a royal official whose son lay ill in Capernaum. **47** When he heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went and begged him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. **48** Then Jesus said to him, "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe." **49** The official said to him, "Sir, come down before my little boy dies." **50** Jesus said to him, "Go; your son will live." The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and started on his way. **51** As he was going down, his slaves met him and told him that his child was alive. **52** So he asked them the hour when he began to recover, and they said to him, "Yesterday at one in the afternoon the fever left him." **53** The father realized that this was the hour when Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live." So he himself believed, along with his whole household.

## Part One A Child in Need of Assistance

This story takes place in Cana, a town where Jesus was man with a reputation. There he was known as the man who could turn water into wine. Remember the story? The wedding guests drank up all the wine before the celebration was over; Jesus' mother asked him to do something about it. When he had worked his reluctant miracle, the steward of the household didn't know that the good wine he tasted had once been water. But the servants knew that Jesus had turned water into wine, and apparently what those servants knew, the whole town knew!

So when a royal official whose son was close to death heard that Jesus was in town, he went to see Jesus. You can imagine his thinking, can't you? If this guy can turn water into wine, he might be able to heal my son. And if he can heal my son, he surely will, won't he? I mean, after all, he used his power before just to keep a wedding party happy. A sick son is so much more important than a successful wedding reception. But when this hopeful father goes to Jesus, he finds in Jesus a man who has been hounded for his power. A man who has been welcomed, not for himself, but for what he could do. A man who is disappointed in his people. And on that day, Jesus didn't say "Suffer the little children to come to me." On that day, Jesus didn't say "Little boy, get up." On that day, Jesus didn't say "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." On that day, Jesus said "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe." Can you imagine *that*? Jesus telling a heart-sick father, "I'm not a miracle machine. I'm not here to prove anything to you. It seems that unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe."

But that faithful father was not deterred. Others may have been looking for a thrill show from Jesus, but this father was a man with a mission. He heard Jesus' response, but he had not traveled to Cana to be turned aside. "Sir," he said, "Come down before my little boy dies." In other words, "Nobody but you can do this. You have the power. You are my hope. He's my son. He's dying. I'm not going home without you. Come with me now, before it's too late."

That father refused to give up until Jesus acknowledged the needs of his dying son. We also must hear the voices of those pleading for us to respond to the needs of children in poverty. In the United States, 29 million children are growing up in low-income families. Over 81% of them have at least one working parent whose income is not sufficient. We must understand these children and their families in order to respond.

### Reflection:

**Action Step:** Go to the National Center for Children in Poverty website [www.nccp.org/fact.html](http://www.nccp.org/fact.html) and select the Fact Sheet dated 9/05, "Who are America's Poor Children?" Read and discuss this with your group or journal about your discoveries.

- What facts surprise or shock you? Can you find your state in the rankings? How do the characteristics of poor children parallel the children you know?

## Part Two A God Who Acts With Power to Save

The father in this text did not go away. He demanded that Jesus come with him and save his boy. Jesus said to him, "Go, your son will live." In those words, Jesus declared that the deed was accomplished; the child's life was given. Again in this text we discover the power of God's love. Jesus cares more about the children of this world than we ever will. In a world where children are neglected and abused—physically, sexually, emotionally and even spiritually—by the very adults they should be able to trust, we too need to hear this word from the Lord. Go home, your son will live. Go home, your daughter will live.

Our God formed our children in the womb. Our God gave them each precious talent they have, their beautiful smiles, their trusting eyes, their curious minds, their tender hearts. And when they are dying from the suffering and shame and disease and fear and greed our adult sin brings to their lives, we need to hear the truth from Jesus...God's will is for our children to live. We can believe in God's compassion, God's desire for their good. We can believe that it is God's intent that they might live. That old, simple hymn is really true: *Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world! Red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in his sight. Jesus loves the little children of the world.*

Children are not the future of our church. They are not valuable for what they might become. Children are not like a bank deposit, sitting in the vault earning interest, to be taken out when it is fully matured. Children are precious for who they are *now*. They are a gift to be nourished and enjoyed and cared for today, while they are still children.

The man who had come to Jesus asking for his son's life believed the word that Jesus spoke to him. He started home, walking a walk of hope, believing a word of promise, going to claim a miracle child. Do we believe that Jesus intends our children to live? Do we walk the walk with a goal in mind? Do we live our lives as if we believed that Jesus wants all the beautiful, precious children of the world to live abundantly?

And at the very moment Jesus spoke those words of life, some other men—the slaves of the royal official—also set out to tell their master of a miracle that they could not yet explain. When the whole story was told, they too found themselves believing in a God who cares about the life of each and every child ever born, a God who cares about them when they are infants, when they are toddlers, when they are youth, when they are young adults, and when they are well-aged, graciously matured men and women. If we learn nothing else from this story of a little boy Jesus never met, let us at least decide this... to live as if we believe that Jesus loves the children, all the children, of the world.

### Reflection:

**Action Step:** Do a little research to discover some of the ministries in your church or community that are proclaiming in word and deed that Jesus loves the children of the world. Pick one as a focus for your energies for the next 6 weeks. Choose at least one way you will help meet the needs of children in that ministry. (If you are doing this Bible study as part of a group, check in with each other and hold each other accountable for completing your commitment!)

- **Possible responses:** Pray daily for the leaders. Volunteer for a special event. Take an offering in your Sunday school class. Pray for un-reached children. Collect needed materials or food goods. Transport children to activities. Pray for each child's family.