

On your marks

The story of the important official in Cana, who asked Jesus to heal his son, is one of the seven signs recorded by John in his gospel. Each sign tells us something special about Jesus and about the difference faith in him makes. This father was desperate because his son was so ill – it is often only when life goes wrong like this that our deepest hopes and fears are revealed. In our story, this busy working father was prepared to make his parental affections and faith public, which is something many fathers may sometimes struggle with – to make their true feelings known. This story offers us the opportunity to explore this as well as giving us an insight into the love that our Father God has for each one of us. A father's role in any family can reflect God's love and, as was prophesied in the Old Testament, God longs for the hearts of fathers to be turned to their children again, just like the nobleman's in this story (see Malachi 4:6).

Get set

You will need:

- craft sticks
- glue or tape
- felt pens
- plasticine

You can find the story in John 4:46-54.

This Father's Day outline could provide your church with an opportunity to explore the work of BRF's [Parenting for Faith](http://brf.org.uk/resources), which equips parents and carers to raise God-connected children and teens.

Finally, it is important to remember that many children may sadly not have a very positive experience of fatherhood, so references to parental affection from dads or about children loving their fathers should be handled sensitively and be as inclusive and thoughtful as possible.

Go!

Background to the story

John records two miracles linked to Cana in Galilee. First there was the water into wine miracle at the wedding and then in this story the healing of the official's son. It is likely that the father in our story worked for King Herod, so it is possible that he is married to Joanna mentioned in Luke 8:3. If this is true, then his name is Cuza. It is clear from the story that his home is in Capernaum (about 30 miles from Cana), so perhaps he was on a business trip for Herod when he meets Jesus. It is also conceivable that he could have been at the wedding recorded in John 2, perhaps with his wife and young child. What is clear is that his son's illness made him think about God again and of the difference that Jesus could make to his family's life. If Jesus can turn water into wine then surely he

can turn sickness into health for his boy. The miracle healing did turn the water of this family's life into wine in so many ways. And Joanna became one of the supporting group of women who funded Jesus' ministry, and Luke records that she was there on the first Easter morning discovering the empty tomb (Luke 24:10).

Opening up the story

Some uniformed organisations run 'dads and lads' camps or events. As an opener to this Bible story, it might be helpful to introduce and interview a dad and son who have enjoyed a camping trip or special outing together. There may be someone in your group who has been on such a weekend.

Alternatively, you could introduce or talk about a dad and son who support a football team and regularly go to matches together. Sons often want to follow in their father's footsteps when it comes to the team they support or even sometimes the job they do.

Talk about what makes a dad proud when talking about his son, and in parallel with this a conversation about what makes a son proud when talking about his dad. You might even include the fun idea of rivalries in the playground being resolved by the phrase 'my dad's bigger than your dad'!

However, dads sometimes have to be away on business and may miss important moments in their son's life, including moments of crisis. Perhaps in our story the official was away working for King Herod when his son became seriously ill and so he felt particularly guilty he couldn't help. Desperate to do something, he remembers the difference Jesus can make and so is prepared to go public with his request for healing. He is prepared to speak openly about putting his faith in God.

Fathers and mothers, even in Christian homes, often are reticent to speak about their faith, so it's no wonder it's hard for the children to grow up into a faith of their own. It might be possible as an extra dimension to your preparation for this story in church to talk with someone whose faith was formed and encouraged by seeing their father exercise faith publicly.

Telling the story

Use the following lines spoken by the storyteller to bring the story to life, while two people representing the father and Jesus stand nearby and respond with mime to the descriptions and feelings (in bold):

Here is a dad, **stressed** by work and with worries at home.

Here is Jesus, returned from Jerusalem, **sad** that most people just want miracles not faith.

Here is a dad who **can't concentrate on his job** anymore because he has a son who is sick and could die, while he has to work far from his home.

Here is Jesus, **worried** that even the people in his home area just want signs and wonders and not words from God.

This worried dad **feels guilty**, for he loves his son but perhaps has never told him so, and now he may never see him alive again.

This Jesus is back to the place where he turned water into wine but he is **disappointed** because it seems no-one has understood the difference he can make to the inside of people's lives.

Then this dad **remembers** that wedding and what he had seen happen, and he knows he has **to share his faith out loud** for the sake of his son.

'But is it miracles you want or me?' **questions** Jesus; yet nevertheless he is **moved** by this father's faith.

This father **believes** that only Jesus has the power over life and death. His faith is public now.

'Your son will live', **declares** Jesus as he heals him there and then, from a distance, in a moment and for ever.

Without seeing it happen, this father **believes**.

Without a sign or a wonder, this father **obeys**.

Without doubt or reservation, this father **sets off home**.

And as this father goes, **he meets with a miracle!**

This father is **reordering his life**: faith in God first; love for family second; and then doing his job can take its proper place.

This is a sign of life for us all.

Talking about the story

- I wonder which part of this story you like best.
- I wonder which part of this story is most important.
- I wonder which part of this story is about you at the moment.
- I wonder if we sometimes want signs and miracles more than Jesus.
- I wonder how public we are with our faith.
- I wonder how much we are prepared to believe without seeing.
- I wonder what comes first in our lives.
- I wonder how this father's life changed for ever.
- I wonder what this story is saying to you.

Playing with the story

John, who records this story for us in his Gospel, chooses it carefully as one of seven special signs that tell us more about who Jesus is. This sign is rooted in a father's love for his son and also tells us something about faith in Jesus which comes before it sees an answer to prayer, rather than afterwards.

Using the letters of the word FAITH, create a series of signposts with craft sticks stuck together with glue or tape. The H is for the healing at the end of the story and comes before the other four letters. Talk together and decide what each of these letters might stand for, then write the words on

the five signposts and stand them upright on a strip of Plasticine, as an illustration of this story. For example:

F - Focusing on Jesus

A - Asking for help

I - Ignoring distractions

T - Trusting what Jesus says

H - Healing

Reflecting on the story

One of the things that this story teaches us about Jesus, and which would have been a surprise to people at the time, is the fact that Jesus doesn't have to see or touch the people he heals but that his word reaches out in an instant. It shows us that Jesus is just like God.

There may be people we know who are not nearby at the moment but who need God's help. Praying for others in the name of Jesus is faster than email or Twitter and can 'go viral' in an instant! As a group, or by talking with the congregation, draw up a manageable list of people who need God's help but who are far away at the moment. Using the letters you have chosen for the word FAITH (see above), pray for those people by saying together:

*We **F**ocus on you Jesus and **A**sk for help for... (NAME)*

***I**gnoring all distractions, we **T**rust in your love that*

*You will bring the **H**ealing of your presence into his/her life.*

Amen