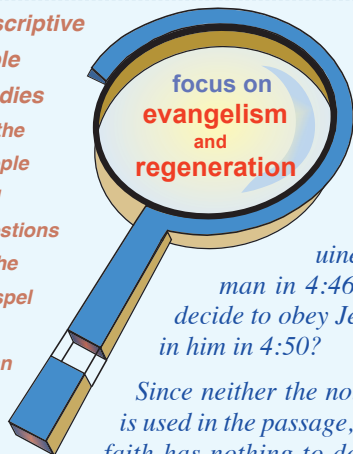


descriptive

Bible studies on the people and questions in the Gospel of John



**When an individual is saved by grace through faith, is he or she also deciding to be a disciple of the Lord Jesus?**

We will attempt to answer this great question about genuine saving faith using the nobleman in 4:46-54 as a case study. Did he decide to obey Jesus or not, when he believed in him in 4:50?

Since neither the noun or verb form of “decide” is used in the passage, some will claim that genuine faith has nothing to do with making a decision or committing oneself to obey the Lord. Yet, it says in 4:50 that when the nobleman believed he starting for home alone, as Jesus had commanded and contrary to the man’s original plan. Was his initial believing in 4:50, then, also, a great decision point for him? Let’s describe the nobleman and “decide” the case as we do so.

#### pre-decision

**4:45** Then when he was come into Galilee, the Galilaeans received him, having seen all the things that he did at Jerusalem at the feast: for they also went unto the feast. **4:46** So Jesus came again into Cana of Galilee, where he made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman, whose son was sick at Capernaum. **4:47** When he heard that Jesus was come out of Judea into Galilee, he went unto him, and besought him that he would come down, and heal his son: for he was at the point of death. **4:48** Then said Jesus unto him, Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe. **4:49** The nobleman saith unto him, Sir, come down ere my child die.

#### point of decision

**4:50** Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way; thy son liveth. And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and he went his way.

#### post-decision

**4:51** And as he was now going down, his servants met him, and told him, saying, Thy son liveth. **4:52** Then enquired he of them the hour when he began to amend. And they said unto him, Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him. **4:53** So the father knew that it was at the same hour, in the which Jesus said unto him, Thy son liveth: and himself believed, and his whole house. **4:54** This is again the second miracle that Jesus did, when he was come out of Judea into Galilee.



This special quest is one of the most important studies in John on the nature of genuine belief. Yet, it is also one of the easiest to understand.

## Let's describe . . .

### 1. The Nobleman

- \* The Jewish nobleman probably worked for Herod Antipas who ruled over Galilee. How is he like and unlike the Gentile centurion in Mat. 8:5-13?
- \* The three divisions of the passage (below left) show that the nobleman’s understanding of Jesus changed as they interacted. So he can be described in various ways.
- \* What did Jesus say about all Galileans, including the nobleman, in 4:48?
- \* Was the official a genuine believer? If he was, when did he become one? “Believe” is a key term in the passage.
- \* Was the nobleman thankful? What about the man at the pool in 5:1-15?

### 2. Jesus

- \* Much is said about physical location and travel in 4:43-54. Yet, Jesus, the Savior of the world (4:42), was not limited by these things like others.
- \* How was Jesus viewed by the Galileans, including by the nobleman, according to 4:43-48? How did Jesus view them (4:48)?
- \* Was Jesus reluctant to heal the nobleman’s son or merely unwilling to go with him?
- \* What was Jesus doing when he told the official to go home alone because his son was already healed? Was he asking him to believe, to change his mind, to repent, to make a faith decision, or to do all these things?
- \* Was Jesus more of a Teacher or an Evangelist in this great chapter and passage?

## and make applications.

- \* What should I believe and do to be like and unlike the nobleman in this passage?
- \* What should I believe about the Lord Jesus in light of what he said and did in 4:46-54? How should I be like him?

### a noble nobleman?

*Members of the “Gospel 101” class thought about the nature of genuine faith as they described the nobleman and the Lord Jesus. Dr. Theophilus struggled to keep some of the discussion from overheating.*

#### Socie (comments on the nobleman as a father)

“I believe that we learn more about people through their relationships than any other way. So—since this royal official cared enough to travel 16 miles each way and take time off from work in order to do so—I believe he was **a good father**, at least, in this situation. Was he that way ordinarily? We don’t know. Crisis sometimes brings out the best in people.”

#### Indy (comments on the nobleman as an individual)

“I believe that the decisions people make when they are alone, like Jesus in the wilderness in Matthew four, show what they are really like. In John four, the nobleman was away from his family. Would he believe the Lord and obediently go home alone or would he insist that Jesus go with him? He decided this alone. Thankfully, he believed as an individual (4:53). So the nobleman was **a personal believer in Jesus’ word and a believer before those in his house.**”

#### Cal (comments on God’s grace to the nobleman)

“I’m very uncomfortable with what Indy said about decision making. It sounds like he believes that the nobleman decided to believe all by himself. He didn’t say a word about election and God working in the nobleman’s heart through his situation and knowledge of other miracles. He, also, said nothing about Jesus’ returning to Galilee just in time (4:46-47). Wasn’t the nobleman **a recipient of God’s grace**? If so, why didn’t Indy and Socie say anything about that? I partly agree with them, but their comments still sound pretty humanistic to me. Shouldn’t they have said *something* about the Lord’s grace?”

#### Dr. Theophilus (comments on faith & humanism)

“Some student comments are rather humanistic at times. Socie studied sociology before coming to Bible college and Indy worked as a guidance counselor. So she’s big on relationships and he stresses personal responsibility and decision making. And, then, there’s you, Cal... with your theological background and zeal for God, you’re keenly aware of humanistic influence and most of your comments are greatly appreciated.”

“Even so, I think Indy’s commentary is in line with John’s stress on personal belief, rather than a denial of God’s grace. **Like the centurion in Mat. 8:5-13**, the nobleman was **unworthy**, but the stress here, in John four, is more on believing and **growing in faith.**”

#### Mat (comments on the centurion & the nobleman)

“Jesus said that the centurion’s faith (Mat. 8:10) was greater than he’d seen in Israel. In part, this is because this Gentile believed from the start that Jesus **could heal from a distance**. The nobleman in John four had to be **challenged by Jesus** before he believed in a similar way. They both asked for healing, but the nobleman’s faith was weaker at first.”

#### Dr. Theophilus (comments on believers in John)

“With John’s stress on belief, we might have expected him to report Jesus’ interaction with the centurion, but he didn’t. Instead we have this nobleman whose faith wasn’t as great. Apparently displaying believers with great faith from the beginning wasn’t John’s plan. Instead, he shows us sceptics like the woman at the well who come to believe and **self-centered** “believers” like this nobleman who believed superficially at first, but later came to genuine faith.”

#### Tim (comments on faith and assurance)

“When did the **time-conscious** nobleman “really” believe? This is a tough question, since his belief progressed over time, from **a believer in Jesus as a miracle working man at the beginning** to a believer in much more at the end. The moment when he came to full assurance that Jesus was **not just a man who could do miracles** was when he met his servants and learned from them that the time his son recovered from the fever was the same hour that Jesus had said, “Your son lives!” (4:52-53). Wouldn’t it have been great if they had accurate watches and been able to check on the exact minute!”

#### Dr. Theophilus (comments on growing in belief)

“Tim used an interesting phrase, “full assurance,” to describe the Galilean official’s faith at the end of the passage. I like that.”

“When the nobleman obediently started home in v. 50 he showed that he already believed Jesus’ word, but his trust in the Lord was confirmed along the way and again when he reached home. So there is a progression in the way he “believed” between v. 50 and v. 52. The final usage in 4:52 means that the man and his household were **fully assured of the truthfulness of Jesus’ words**. Isn’t it great that genuine faith grows in substance over time?! This reminds me of what it says about faith and assurance in Heb. 11:1.”

**Evan** (comments on calling for decisive decisions)

“Isn’t it dangerous to talk about progressive faith? Isn’t that what the liberals do? As evangelicals and evangelists don’t we, instead, focus on people making decisions for Christ, like the Lord did with the nobleman?”

“Indy was right about the importance of making a personal decision. It’s, also, important to make a decisive one. Isn’t that why we give invitations? In v. 50 **the Master Evangelist**, the Lord Jesus, himself, was **calling upon the nobleman to trust him in a decisive way** and he did just that. Praise God for Jesus’ challenge!”

4:47-49	4:50	4:51-53
pre-decision	point of decision	post-decision
superficial hope	genuine belief	genuine belief with assurance
hoping Jesus will do what I want	submitting to what Jesus wants	appreciating all that Jesus does
selfish, pseudo-“belief”	decisive, mind-changing belief	thankful, God-honoring belief

**Luke** (comments on superficial and real decisions)

“What if the nobleman was not noble in character and selfishly only cared about his son’s healing? If so he still may have superficially “believed” Jesus enough to obey him, since he really couldn’t force the Lord to go with him, anyway. In that case his “decision” would not have made him a genuine believer, at all.”

“In Luke 17:11-19 ten lepers obeyed the Lord and went to show themselves to the priests. All ten were healed, but only one was **thankful** and returned to glorify God and have his faith confirmed. It doesn’t say that the others were unbelievers, but their lack of thankfulness implies that they were. [See Rom. 1:21.] So many who “decide” to obey the Lord to some degree are not saved. Thankfully, the nobleman, however, became a **true believer, like the thankful leper in Luke 17.**”

**Dr. Theophilus** (comments on decision in 4:47-53)

“This chart is centered on the nobleman’s point of decision in 4:50. So I agree with Evan on the need to call for decisive decisions in evangelism. However, my chart, also, describes the nobleman’s pre-decision condition in 4:47-49 and his post-decision state in 4:51-53. Please look it over carefully, because most things we’ve talked about — evangelism, pseudo and genuine faith, assurance, and decision making — are all covered in this simple little chart.”

“As for the challenge and the decision, itself, rather than going home with the official, the Lord required him to believe his word (4:50) *before* seeing the healing. At that point of decision, the man had to give up his own plan and accept and trust the Lord’s. God’s blessed assurance came afterward. Believing is seeing.”

**Dr. Theophilus** (comments on faith & repentance)

“In Luke, the Hebrew concept of repentance, turning from sin to God, and the Greek concept, changing one’s mind, are both clearly seen in the prodigal son. In John, however, though some falsely claim that repentance is nowhere to be found, changing one’s mind is still readily seen in the belief that is reported. We saw this clearly with the Samaritan woman and I believe the nobleman, also, changed his mind about the Lord and his word, when he believed in 4:50. So he, too, was **repentant.**”

**Evan** (comments on the nobleman & believers today)

“OK! Then, the nobleman was a **superficial, somewhat selfish “seeker” in 4:47-49**, then, a **genuine believer who made a decisive commitment but lacked assurance in 4:50**, and, finally, a **genuine believer with full assurance in 4:52-53**. These distinct levels help make the gospel clear. Sadly, they, also, show that churches can be filled with pseudo-believers who selfishly hope Jesus will do whatever they want because they have never really submitting to what HE wants.”

the people Jesus & the nobleman	the principles (general principles)	to the point my personal applications
The Lord challenged the nobleman to believe in his word before he saw his son healed.	We should believe in the Lord Jesus the One who is still at work in the entire world.	
The nobleman was a superficial “seeker,” but he, also, became a genuine believer.	We should each truly believe in the Lord Jesus, rather than selfishly seeking to use him.	