

LESSON FOUR

HEALING THE SICK

When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he already had been in that condition a long time, He said to him, "Do you want to be made well?"

JOHN 5:6 NKJV



REFLECTION

There are many hurting people in our society—the poor, the sick, the homeless, the incarcerated. There are people with inner wounds—the grieving, the lonely, the depressed. All too often they are not only forgotten but also invisible. Think about the people in your sphere of influence. How can you take notice? Who can you help and support this week?

SITUATION

Throughout the year, the Jewish people would gather in Jerusalem. Most of the people came to attend the three major feasts. Some came on healing pilgrimages, expecting to find wholeness in the city of David. One particular man came to bathe in the waters of the pool of Bethesda, which was said to provide healing when an angel stirred the water. But even though the man had spent years near the pool, he was unable to get past the others in need of healing when the waters were stirred. Jesus took time out from his Sabbath to speak to this man.

OBSERVATION

Read John 5:1–15 from the New International Version or the New King James Version.

NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION

¹ Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals. ² Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered

colonnades. ³ Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. ^[4] ⁵ One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years.

⁶ When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, “Do you want to get well?”

⁷ “Sir,” the invalid replied, “I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.”

⁸ Then Jesus said to him, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” ⁹ At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.

The day on which this took place was a Sabbath, ¹⁰ and so the Jewish leaders said to the man who had been healed, “It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat.”

¹¹ But he replied, “The man who made me well said to me, ‘Pick up your mat and walk.’”

¹² So they asked him, “Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?”

¹³ The man who was healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there.

¹⁴ Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, “See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.” ¹⁵ The man went away and told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who had made him well.

NEW KING JAMES VERSION

¹ After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

² Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew, Bethesda, having five porches. ³ In these lay a great multitude of sick people, blind, lame, paralyzed, waiting for the moving of the water.

⁴ For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and stirred up the water; then whoever stepped in first, after the stirring of the water, was made well of whatever disease he had. ⁵ Now a certain man was there who had an infirmity thirty-eight years. ⁶ When Jesus saw him

lying there, and knew that he already had been in that condition a long time, He said to him, “Do you want to be made well?”

⁷ The sick man answered Him, “Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; but while I am coming, another steps down before me.”

⁸ Jesus said to him, “Rise, take up your bed and walk.” ⁹ And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed, and walked.

And that day was the Sabbath. ¹⁰ The Jews therefore said to him who was cured, “It is the Sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your bed.”

¹¹ He answered them, “He who made me well said to me, ‘Take up your bed and walk.’”

¹² Then they asked him, “Who is the Man who said to you, ‘Take up your bed and walk?’” ¹³ But the one who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, a multitude being in that place.

¹⁴ Afterward Jesus found him in the temple, and said to him, “See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you.”

¹⁵ The man departed and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.

EXPLORATION

1. What do you think motivated Jesus to go to Bethesda during a time of celebration?

2. How would you describe the life of the invalid man in this story?

3. Why do you think Jesus chose to help this particular man?

4. Why do you think the religious leaders reacted to the man’s healing in the way they did?

5. What does the response of the religious leaders reveal about their hearts and motives?

6. Why was it important to Jesus to speak to the man again after healing him?

INSPIRATION

It’s called Bethesda. It could be called Central Park, Metropolitan Hospital, or even Joe’s Bar and Grill. It could be the homeless huddled beneath a downtown overpass. It could be Calvary Baptist. It could be any collection of hurting people.

An underwater spring caused the pool to bubble occasionally. The people believed the bubbles were caused by the dipping of angels’ wings. They also believed that the first person to touch the water after the angel did would be healed. Did healing occur? I don’t know. But I do know crowds of invalids came to give it a try.

Picture a battleground strewn with wounded bodies, and you see Bethesda. Imagine a nursing home overcrowded and understaffed, and you see the pool. Call to mind the orphans in Bangladesh or the abandoned in New Delhi, and you will see what people saw when they passed Bethesda. As they passed, what did they hear? An endless wave of groans. What did they witness? A field of faceless need. What did they do? Most walked past, ignoring the people.

But not Jesus. He is in Jerusalem for a feast. . . . He is alone. He is not there to teach the disciples or to draw a crowd. The people need him—so he’s there.

Can you picture it? Jesus walking among the suffering.

What is he thinking? When an infected hand touches his ankle, what does he do? When a blind child stumbles in Jesus’ path, does he reach down to catch the child? When a wrinkled hand extends for alms, how does Jesus respond?

Whether the watering hole is Bethesda or Bill’s Bar . . . how does God feel when people hurt?

It’s worth the telling of the story if all we do is watch him walk. It’s worth it just to know he even came. He didn’t have to, you know. Surely there are more sanitary crowds in Jerusalem. Surely there are more enjoyable activities. After all, this is the Passover feast. It’s an exciting time in the holy city. People have come from miles around to meet God in the temple.

Little do they know that God is with the sick.

Little do they know that God is walking slowly, stepping carefully between the beggars and the blind.

Little do they know that the strong young carpenter who surveys the ragged landscape of pain is God. (From *He Still Moves Stones* by Max Lucado.)

REACTION

7. How were others affected who witnessed the healing of the invalid man?

8. What are some of the challenges of ministering to people with a serious illness? What are some of the rewards?

9. How can you demonstrate God’s love to people who are suffering?

10. How can you become more sensitive to the suffering of others?

11. What does this story reveal about why it is important for believers to minister to hurting people?

12. Do you know someone who is hurting? How can you reach out to that person?

LIFE LESSONS

Jesus went to places where people were hurting. There was intention in his steps. We can claim there are hurting people all around us, but if we are going to live by Jesus’ example, we need to make it part of our lifestyle

Forgive us, Father, for any time we have ignored the needs of others. Help us respond to the suffering around us. Fill us with your love. Give us your compassion for the hurting, your love for the despised, and your mercy for the afflicted.

How have you felt God's love for you during painful times?

To complete the book of John during this twelve-part study, read John 4:43–5:47. For more Bible passages about helping the needy, read Matthew 25:34–46; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; and Hebrews 6:10–11.