

# WANT TO GET WELL?

## Recoverers (Part 1) | John 5:1-9

I invite you to listen with me to a story from the life of Jesus that may matter more to you than you expected when you decided to do church today. Hear the Word of God as it comes to us from the gospel of John, chapter five at verse one:

**<sup>1</sup> Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. <sup>5</sup> One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. <sup>6</sup> 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?” <sup>7</sup> “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.” <sup>8</sup> Then Jesus said to him, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” <sup>9</sup> At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.** This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

There is so much in this story that I find fascinating. For one thing, I’m struck by the truth of it. Skeptics often suggest that the stories we read in the Bible are mostly made up, including this one. Liberal critics in the 1700’s scoffed at the notion of a pool that had **“five colonnades”** around it. “Who ever heard of a five-sided pool,” they said. “It’s just a made-up story with the colonnades symbolizing the five books of the Old Testament Law. The whole tale” they contended, “is just religious myth.” And then, in the late 1800’s, archaeologists digging near one of the major entrances to Jerusalem -- where sheep used to be herded into the city -- uncovered the ruins of an ancient ritual bath. And guess what. The pool was five-sided – with the foundations of columned porticoes on each side, just as the Bible describes.<sup>1</sup>

Another thing I find fascinating about this story is the description of the sort of people who used to come to this pool. They weren’t the glistening sunbathers or romping kids or well-toned athletes who frequent the pools we so often see. No, we’re told that they were **“disabled people... the blind, the lame, the paralyzed.”** People who couldn’t see... people who couldn’t walk... people who couldn’t move... the way they undoubtedly wanted to.

Many of you know that one of the commitments of our two-year LIFT vision has been to establish a Disability Ministry that respects the dignity of such persons and lets them know they are cherished parts of this church family. I’m thrilled at all the progress we are making there and the more people we’ll help LIFT in months and years to come. But back when this story we read in the Bible takes place, there were no such

ministries. On the contrary, it was common in the first century to view such people as cursed by God.<sup>2</sup> Holy people and religious leaders routinely avoided getting close to disabled or diseased people out of fear that they carried a form of *spiritual uncleanness* that might rub off on them. The area around the Pool of Bethesda would have been viewed by so-called *healthy* people as an infectious zone.

So what is really fascinating is that JESUS went there. The person who, in truth, was the most holy, the most spiritually clean, the most able to go anywhere else on that Jewish festival weekend... He chose to go there... to be among the disabled or diseased persons who lay around the Pool of Bethesda... and to pour out his grace upon a man who'd been an invalid for thirty-eight years.

As you know, it does not always work this way. Jesus does not always alter someone's disability or heal their disease in this life. We may not know till heaven how someone's differences or difficulties served God's purposes or were intended to shape our hearts. But one of the messages I take from this story (and many others in the New Testament) is that not only do our infirmities and vulnerabilities not make God avoid us, they attract Him to us. We slip into thinking sometimes that Jesus (or the God he represents) is most interested in us when we have our act together, when we're behaving well, when our record's clean and our lives are all healthy. But the Bible teaches that God is most interested in meeting us not at our point of ability but at our point of disability; not at the peak of our health but in our place of dis-ease.

To make this point, three of the four gospels describe an occasion when Jesus was being criticized by the Pharisees for hanging around with people who plainly had problems, moral and otherwise. This is how Jesus responded: **It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners (Matt 9:12; Mark 2:17; Luke 5:31).** In other words, my main interest isn't in people who have everything RIGHT. They can take care of themselves. But I've come for people who know their lives are NOT RIGHT and want my help.

When you read the word "sinners" there, I know it's common to translate it as "people who do wrong things" and that's certainly a part of the definition of sin. But, biblically speaking, sin is not just a behavior; it's the underlying condition that accounts for our behaviors and a lot of other problems in life since the Fall of mankind. Sin is a state of not-rightness in ourselves or in the world around us that comes from our loss of relationship with God. It's the absence of the kind of full health that Adam and Eve had when they lived in perfect communion with God... the kind of health we see in Jesus' beautiful way of being and doing... the kind of magnificent health you and I will enjoy one day when Christ makes all things new.

To say: ***I am a sinner*** is simply to acknowledge that not only do I do wrong things but I am not right -- as in fully healthy -- spiritually, relationally, physically or some other

ways. Do you ever think about that? Do you ever think about what is not as healthy and whole as you or God would like it to be and how it might get better?

Personally, I have moments of clarity about this – times when I perceive that my life is marked or marred by what I will call the “3H’s.” The first of the H’s is signified by the word **HURTS**. A hurt is a life experience that may have damaged your heart. Perhaps you experienced a strike against you that affected your ability to deal with the world in a healthy way. Whether intended or not, something twisted your view of yourself, God or others and it still influences the way you come at life.

Over the years I’ve talked with so many people who experienced some form of abuse from an authority figure when they were young or went through a violent change of their life circumstances. Even though it has been so many years since that time... Even though there have been many good people and steady periods in their life... that original hurt still makes it hard to trust others. They live with this sense of apprehension that the rug could be pulled out from beneath them at any moment. My question to you is: Are there any HURTS that may be playing an oversized role in your life?

The second place that sin gets expressed in our lives is through our **HABITS**. For many of us, certain actions get started as a perceived “remedy” for some problem in our life but they end up turning into a chronic bad behavior or addiction. I began smoking secretly when I was in my thirties. It was one of the means I used to manage my anxiety over my work. That little tobacco “Helper” ended up nearly costing me my life in the form of a heart attack in my early fifties. Bad habits are the default scripts that run on repeat when the going gets tough but which lead to even tougher going in our life. Are you wrestling with any of these common habits? Is there a now-ingrained pattern in your life that isn’t doing you or others any favors?

One of my favorite Bible verses is the one where Jesus says: **I have come that you might have life and have it more abundantly (John 10:10)**. God wants all of us to have a future filled with hope. Alongside unexamined hurts and bad habits, however, there is a third deadly “H” that can block us from progressing further in God’s good plan for our life. I’m speaking of **HANGUPS**. Hangups are destructive ways of coming at life that are shaped by bent or unbiblical thinking. These ways of thinking sometimes get rooted in our mind when we’re young or they are unhealthy attitudes we may have adopted as a means of coping with a particular challenge.

As a child, I remember being involved in a wrestling game with an older stronger relative from whose grasp I couldn’t escape. When I’d manage to break free, he’d cuff my legs out from beneath me and I’d hit the ground. Eventually, I began to cry and my relative pointed at me and said: “You’re losing the game.” I know he was trying to make me a resilient person and I have become that. But for years that experience influenced how much I would share my true feelings with other people. It made me

project invulnerability and spin the truth in a way that wasn't good for me or my relationships. It's taken a lot of work to change this mental framework and I'm still working on it. The Apostle Paul once said: **Be transformed by the renewing of your mind (Romans 12:1)**. What are the unrealistic or unchristian ways of thinking that have taken root in your mind and driven you in ways that produce something very different from the abundant life God wants for you? How aware are you of the role that HURTS, HABITS and HANGUPS still play in your life?

As we move to a close, let me return to the story from John chapter 5 with which we began today. You may remember that when we left-off we were at the Pool of Bethesda. There are many people with serious needs lying all over the place – **the blind, the lame, the paralyzed**. Among them is this man who has been an invalid for thirty-eight years. The Bible says: **When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time... [Jesus] asked him, "Do you want to get well?"**

Of all the elements in the story, I find this one the MOST fascinating. Why does Jesus ask this question? I can only conclude that Jesus was either genuinely puzzled or else wanted to invite this man to puzzle through his own condition. After all, this guy had been blind, lame, paralyzed or something else for almost forty years. The man goes on to explain that he hasn't been able to get himself into the pool where, tradition held, healing was possible. Could he not have rolled himself into the pool? Could he not have asked somebody else's help to get him to the edge of the pool? What the heck was he doing for nearly four decades? Here's my theory: He was growing accustomed to his problems. He was growing complacent about his issues. He was becoming content with his conditions. He was getting very good at explaining why things in his life were the way they were and couldn't truly change. Have you ever met someone like that? Are YOU someone like that?

Here's the bottom line: All of us have inherited a sin-soaked nature. We've been raised by families, influenced by peers, and shaped by cultures that are sin-stained too. True spiritual, emotional and relational health is hard to find. But Jesus is about that project. Being a disciple of Jesus is not simply a matter of getting pie in the sky when we die. It's not simply a matter of memorizing Bible verses or becoming slightly nicer neighbors. Knowing Jesus, being trained in his Word, and being a part of his forever family is meant to help renew us as much as is possible in this life. As I've said, not all disabilities or diseases can be overcome. Some of them are left with us to serve God's mysterious purposes. But a lot of the damaging stuff in our lives can be transformed while we're here. To borrow a sentence from the Twelve-Step Movement which, by the way, began in a Christian small group: ***We can be RECOVERERS.***

So how does that happen? Well, in no particular order, ONE act is to recognize that you are in a safe place. You are at the equivalent of the Pool of Bethesda today. Do you know what the Aramaic word "Bethesda" translates to in English? It means: "House of

Grace.” This community is a House of Grace. You don’t need to be fully healthy to enter here. We believe in a grace greater than the gravity of life and are seeking it together.

Strengthened by that knowledge, I hope you’ll, **SECONDLY**, be courageously honest about the things that are not-right about you. Jesus makes clear that truth, not denial, is our friend and the path to freedom (John 8:32). So start by doing a fearless moral inventory of the hurts, habits, and hangups that are affecting your inner peace and your personal relationships.<sup>3</sup>

**THIRDLY**: Admit you are powerless to overcome all these things on your own. If you could have done it, you would have done it. If you knew how to make yourself wonderfully healthy, you would be there by now. Sin is a stubborn and insidious condition. But here is the good news: You are not on your own. There is a Great Physician whose name is Jesus. He came for those who know they need a doctor. He knows how to repair what is sick or broken in your life. He can help you like He helped the man at the Pool of Bethesda.

So **FINALLY**, put your life afresh in Jesus’ hands. If you will keep returning to this place of healing and follow the direction of Christ, you will become a RECOVERER. Make a start today as you come to the Table of Communion and ask Jesus for His help.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-sites-places/jerusalem/the-bethesda-pool-site-of-one-of-jesus-miracles/>

<sup>2</sup> See John 9:2

<sup>3</sup> Psalm 139:22-24