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Questions Jesus Asked: A Disruptive Question from Our Creator

John 5:1-9

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

Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, in Aramaic called Bethesda, which has five roofed colonnades. In these lay a multitude of invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed. One man was there who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been there a long time, he said to him, “Do you want to be healed?” The sick man answered him, “Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am going another steps down before me.” Jesus said to him, “Get up, take up your bed, and walk.” And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked.

Now that day was the Sabbath.

Today we're looking at another direct, specific, personal question that Jesus asked. But I would also suggest that this is a disruptive personal question. It's disruptive to us.

The context is this: Jesus was traveling around with his disciples, and they decided to go back to Jerusalem for a celebration in the community, a Jewish festival. I think Jesus liked going to these because he could interact with a lot of people at once. So they went back to this festival, and he really never did anything randomly. He was intentional in what he was doing. God is very intentional and directed in his life and his will.

The text says, "There is in Jerusalem, near the Sheep Gate, a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, and the paralyzed."

Now, in the text, in some translations, all you'll see is number four and no reference to any verse. But some translations have an added verse for number four that says this:

"They waited for the moving of the waters. From time to time, an angel of the Lord would come down and stir up the waters. The first one into the pool after each such disturbance would be cured of whatever disease they had."

That helps us understand the context of what's being said here and what's happening here. There was this idea, and maybe it had happened. Maybe the Spirit of the Lord, an angel of the Lord, had stirred these waters and someone found healing.

You know, healing can come in many different ways. And I don't understand God's plan in healing. Sometimes he heals people instantly. Other times he heals people through a process, using physicians and other insights and wisdom. And sometimes he just... He left many people unhealed. I don't claim to understand, as we look into a passage about healing, all what's in the mind of God about healing.

But there are some things we can all learn from every part of Scripture and every passage. And so God can work however he wants, in whatever way he wants. But here we have a specific way that he worked in this time.

Many of these people who needed a touch, a healing, gathered around the pool there. And one who was there had been an invalid for 38 years. That's a long time. Thirty-eight years.

It doesn't say he was born with this. Matter of fact, likely he wasn't. Something happened in his life, and he may be older than 38. He may be 40. It might have happened when he was just young. Fifty, sixty, seventy, eighty years old—we don't know. But for 38 years he'd been an invalid.

Now, an invalid—it's a very unique word. The original Greek text uses the word *asthenopia*. *Asthenopia*. It translates directly to someone who is sick, frail, or lacking strength. It's based on an old English term that means this person was chronically ill, weak, or disabled in some way.

Thirty-eight years.

The next part of the text, inspired by the Spirit of God, says this:

"When Jesus saw him lying there..."

I don't know why he saw him over all the others who were lying there, but God is not random.

"...and learned..."

And this is the second mention of time.

"...learned that he had been in this condition for a long time."

The Spirit of God is emphasizing this time. Why, I don't know. I asked the Lord this week, why the 38 years? Why a long time? He could have just said there was a man lying there who was an invalid.

I wonder if God is emphasizing something that he knows about human beings. And that is that time gets us used to things. It gets us acclimated to things.

We have another unique word in English that we don't very often use. It's a word called habituation. It's the process of becoming accustomed to or used to. Something starts to feel like an old glove for us, just feels normal to us.

Habituation comes from two separate words: habits that are formed around a given situation. All of us form habits around certain circumstances and situations in our lives that, over time, start to feel normal to us. They start to feel like this is how our life is. This is how it should go. This is, this is me. This is my life.

Habituation causes a diminishing of physiological or emotional response to frequently repeated stimulus.

My grandfather got habituated to his pain when I was younger. He developed cancer of the tailbone, and he lived in our house. And the pain was so bad he couldn't sit on chairs. It hurt him to stand up, and so he would sit on cushions as much as he could. Then he would crawl from one room to the other and crawl up on the couch and try to keep that pain at bay as best he could.

But before he was debilitated by his pain, I remember asking him, I said, "Does that pain bother you a lot?"

And I'll never forget his answer. He said, "You know, over time you just kind of get used to it. It just becomes your way."

Habituation.

Jesus sees this man who was an invalid for 38 years, for a long time. He'd been there. When Jesus saw him lying there and learned this, he asked him now a very loving question. This is the heart of God. He does nothing that's not loving.

But this question is a disruptive question. It's a question for self-awareness. He's getting ready to disrupt this man's life.

The question is this:

After 38 years, do you want to get well?

Do you want to? I mean, really?

God knows all things. He sees all things. Jesus knows getting older is automatic. That's just going to happen. But growing and stretching ourselves throughout the course of life, that's not. Human beings, he knows, often choose the path of least resistance. We settle in. We get discouraged. We give up.

We get used to the way things are. We sort of accept them. We get desensitized to things that used to bother us more.

Maybe this man was so habituated into his circumstances, Jesus knew he'd sort of given up his want-to.

Jesus is, in a sense, asking him now, when you think about this, do you want your whole life to change at this point? Your whole life to change?

Are you ready for the duties of being well? The responsibilities? Are you ready to own the demands that will come upon you as a capable person?

On an even deeper level, are you ready to give up an old identity and take on a new one? Are you ready for a whole new chapter in life? Are you ready to step out of the crowd that's become your crowd? Are you ready to stand out in a different way? Have people talk about you in a different way? Take on new risks? Learn new things?

Jesus also knows this. He said it in Luke chapter 12. He said, "If I'm going to give you a healing touch, then we—God the Father and God the Son—they're going to expect more of you, because to whom much is given, much will be expected. From whom one has been entrusted, much will be asked."

And so he asks him, do you really want it? Are you open to it? Have you looked at the cost of a healing?

Inside, I don't know, but I've tried to get a sense of this man's want-to meter, and I think it's right in the middle. I think he's intrigued by being physically free, but he's scared of it. He hasn't had it for a long time.

And I think we can see that his want-to meter is right there in the middle by his answer.

He says, "Sir..." He doesn't know who Jesus is. He says, "Sir, I have no one to help me in the pool."

For 38 years, I have no one to help me in the pool. When the water is stirred and I'm trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.

Now, I don't know what you'd call this, but I would call this a smoke screen.

He's been asked a very direct, personal question, and he just puffs out a little smoke.

"Ah, sir, I, I, I just... I have no one to help me."

Really? After 38 years, you couldn't get a plan with somebody?

"Someone else always tried to get in ahead of me."

It's when someone just throws out some things to diffuse the pressure that they're under. It's a psychological trick people use to evade some truths being brought to the surface.

Excuses and smoke screens.

Sometimes, though, God, in his goodness and kindness, blows away the smoke and makes a choice for us. I've been thankful when he's done that for me many, many times in life.

I don't know if you've ever had God overrule your want-to meter, but it starts very early on for all of us.

None of us actually chose to be born. God, before he formed us, knew us. He knit us together in his mother's womb. And when the time was right, we plopped out, and here we are, all of us walking on the planet. We didn't get a vote.

And here is this gentleman. He's asked if he wants to get well, and God decides to overrule his want-to. He asked him if he wanted to. The man gave his smoke screen.

And then Jesus said to him, "Get up. Pick up your mat and walk."

Sometimes God steps in and births us into a new chapter of life, whether we wanted him to or not. Sometimes he uses something seemingly good, like a healing. Other times he allows something very painful or tragic to birth us into a new chapter.

And more often than not, those new chapters require more dependence on God, more faith and trust in him, more courage, more belief in his goodness, more confidence in his kindness.

For this man, he was going to have to learn how to walk, learn how to do other tasks and skills, take on new responsibilities.

You know what? The church is supposed to be friends. It's supposed to be a place where you and I are encouraging each other as God calls us out to take new risks, operate at new levels of freedom, operate at new levels of responsibility, using our gifts as the people of God together serving him.

A place where we build each other up, encourage each other, fan the flame of each other—not try to pick each other apart or criticize certain little changes that are made—but give fuel to each other, infuse each other with the Spirit and power of God, bear each other's burdens, take on loads for one another, and give life to each other.

I wish there were more men leading young men into the life of God in our world. Friends calling them up and out into who God created them to be.

Our world is longing for this. Families are longing for this. God is longing for this—for people to be willing to let go of worldly identities and step into the identities that God is calling them into, with courage and faith and hope and perseverance, with an I-will-not-quit attitude. I will not give up until the Lord calls me home.

Caleb was 84, 85, 86 years old, and he went into the Promised Land. And Joshua said, "What land do you want?"

He said, "Give me the hill country where the giants are. God made me strong when I was younger. He'll make me strong when I'm older."

We need more people who will be responding to God's call, and us encouraging each other to build each other up, be shaped by the Spirit of God, learn to walk in him, be refined by him, listening to one another, sharpening each other to be the salt and light of the world.

I don't think this story is so much about a physical healing as it is about a person's willingness to keep growing and changing and maturing and stepping out and taking risks until the end. That's what I think this story is about.

All through life, I want to just say thank you to so many of you who've been so faithful, persevering and being courageous and holding to God's Word.

But friends, it's time we keep going.

I believe there's new chapters, new possibilities, great new opportunities on the horizon. And God is saying to us, let's get up. Let's keep walking in faith. Let's follow him wherever he leads and be open to whatever he's saying.

At once the man was cured. He picked up his mat and walked.

I bet it was a little clunky. I bet it took him a while to catch his rhythm.

But later Jesus visited him for something more important.

It says he found him at the temple, as Jesus often does. He never gives up on us. Went back to him and said, "Hey, you're well again. Thirty-eight years—you're well again."

Then he said this:

Do it right spiritually now. Do it right before God now.

"Stop sinning, or something worse may happen to you."

I don't know if you ever get the fear of God in your heart when you study a text, but I do.

Jesus said to him this:

"Stop sinning, or something worse may happen to you."

Oftentimes when Jesus was teaching, he would end saying, "Those who have ears, let them hear."

Let's pray together.

Father, I thank you for your work in the world. Of all the things going on in the planet, there is nothing more important going on than your Holy Spirit working in the hearts of men and women, drawing us to you.

Forgive us when we stray from these most important things and give our hearts and minds to more trivial things, things of the world, things that are passing away.

And, Father, I am mindful that there are probably some sitting here today that you've been calling them to leave something behind, to loosen their grip on something, and maybe they've been right in the middle with a want-to.

I ask that your Spirit would minister to them now, to help move the meter in their hearts towards you. Give them the want-to. To want to follow you. To trust you. To release what they're holding on to and open up their hands to you and say, "God, whatever you want, whatever you're asking me to let go of, I release it to you and I trust you."

Give us a willing heart, Father, to be open to your new work and your new ways in our midst.

Help us, as your Word says, forget the former things and look ahead because you're doing a new thing, making a new way in the wilderness, new streams for people to draw water from, new life for those coming behind us.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.