

## **Questions Jesus Asked, Part Six**

*John 5:1-15*

1. The setting.

2. The question.

3. The implications.

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## Questions Jesus Asked, Part Six<sup>1</sup> *John 5:1-15*

“Do you want to get well?” Imagine that you’ve been plagued by a crippling disease for nearly 40 years of your life. For some of you, I know you don’t have to imagine it – it is close to your experience. So imagine then that someone walked up to you and asked, “Do you want to get well?”

I can’t think of an answer better than, “Well, duh!”

As you’ve probably figured out, that was a question that Jesus asked, and as usual the question as well as the answer involves much more than the obvious.

After taking a break last Sunday for such a monumental day as celebrating being debt-free and burning the mortgage, we are back in our summer sermon series called, “Questions Jesus Asked.” *Every* time Jesus taught, spoke, or did *anything*, his message and methods were always *on purpose*. So here’s the thing: *any* interaction Jesus had with anyone in the Gospels is an interaction he can and will have with *each of us*.<sup>2</sup> That means his questions are important, and our answers to Jesus’ questions will determine the depth of our relationship with Jesus, will determine the success of our Christian life, the fruit of our Christian life, and the impact of our Christian life. We must answer Jesus’ questions well if we are going to accomplish a life of purpose in this world that God has for us.

The question that I mentioned earlier is one we find in John chapter 5, and I’d like to read the passage to us. Remember, we don’t read Scripture as spectators; we are participants – God’s Word is alive, and God’s Spirit is in his followers, so this story is alive for us and in us. That means we are part of the story, too. So do your best to picture yourself in the story – as if you were right there. As usual, I’d like to ask all of us to honor God’s Word by standing as I read it us. Thank you!

After this there was a Jewish festival, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate in the north city wall is a pool with the Aramaic name Bethsaida. It had five covered porches, and a crowd of people who were sick, blind, lame, and paralyzed sat there. A certain man was there who had been sick for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there, knowing that he had already been there a long time, he asked him, “Do you want to get well?”

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<sup>1</sup> Resources:

- Bible Study Series: Best Questions in the Bible <https://jesusplusnothing.com/series/post/JesusQuestions>  
- Laura Sweat Holmes, George Lyons John 1-12, *A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Beacon Hill Press, Kansas City, 2020)  
- Daniel Cash and William Griffith, *8 Questions Jesus Asked* (Judson Press, Valley Forge, PA 2017)  
- Dale and Sandy Larsen, *Questions Jesus Asked* (IVP, Downers Grove, IL 2019)  
- Joseph Dongell, *John: A Bible Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 1997)

<sup>2</sup> Bible Study Series: Best Questions in the Bible <https://jesusplusnothing.com/series/post/JesusQuestions>

The sick man answered him, "Sir, I don't have anyone who can put me in the water when it is stirred up. When I'm trying to get to it, someone else has gotten in ahead of me."

Jesus said to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." Immediately the man was well, and he picked up his mat and walked. Now that day was the Sabbath.

The Jewish leaders said to the man who had been healed, "It's the Sabbath; you aren't allowed to carry your mat." He answered, "The man who made me well said to me, 'Pick up your mat and walk.'" They inquired, "Who is this man who said to you, 'Pick it up and walk?'" The man who had been cured didn't know who it was, because Jesus had slipped away from the crowd gathered there.

Later Jesus found him in the temple and said, "See! You have been made well. Don't sin anymore in case something worse happens to you." The man went and proclaimed to the Jewish leaders that Jesus was the man who had made him well. (John 5:1-15, ceb)

This is the Word of God for the people of God, so thanks be to God! Thank you – you can be seated.

Remember that before this event, in chapter four, Jesus had his encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well, talking about himself being living water and revealed himself to be the Messiah. Then, he went to Galilee and he healed the government official's son without even being there – the son was somewhere else, Jesus said the word, and the son was healed from another part of town.

So as usual, let's make sure we understand the setting, and the question, and the implication.

## 1. The *setting*.

Jesus is in Jerusalem for one of the Jewish religious festivals. We don't know which one, and John doesn't think it's important to the story for us to know; it just explains why he's there. Most likely the disciples were there, too, but like the story in chapter four of the woman at the well, they are off doing something else, and Jesus is on his own, seeking people out.

John tells us this story takes place at the pool of Bethesda, near the Sheep Gate. This particular pool that the story refers to has been discovered by archeologists, and if you travel to Israel like Shelly and I did in 1999, you will see this particular pool. It was surrounded by five covered areas, the roofs of which were held up by columns. It was fed by a spring, because it would occasionally gurgle, and that's how the legend started that it was stirred by an angel, and the myth was that the water had healing properties.

I don't know if you've ever been to a hot springs pool, but there are two that come to my mind – one is Zims' Hot Springs, north of Boise, and the other is Glenwood

Springs, in the Rocky Mountains, west of Denver. These hot springs, heated geothermally, have sulfur that binds with oxygen to form sulfate. They soak your skin in many needed minerals. It is widely accepted that these provide healing properties; they detox your skin and help treat psoriasis, acne, and eczema, they relax your mind, help your circulation, and are a natural painkiller. Glenwood Springs was originally well known and used by Native Americans, and then as settlers discovered it, they developed it with bathhouses and hotels. It has a huge pool that's been used over the decades by just about every known national and international leader, and aristocrats and sports and movie celebrities. They come from far and wide for its legendary as well as documented healing properties.

So imagine what this pool was like in John 5. There was limited medical professionals with far less technology and even what they had, was hardly accessibility by common people, let alone outcasts. In addition, the religious leaders said that people who were sick or crippled were sinners being punished for their sin so they deserved to be that way, therefore they were outcasts. Their existence was at the mercy of family or friends. And this guy in the story apparently had very few if any of those. I can't imagine the degree of illnesses, sicknesses, diseases, open festering wounds and subcutaneous deformities and disabilities that were represented by the people gathered there, but it was crowded. Picture that they were all there, maybe some of them conversing with each other, others crying out in their pain and misery, all with at least one eye trained on the water. As soon as it gurgled, this mass of broken humanity would shuffle, drag, pull, and push their way in as if they were one giant, diseased creature, all trying to be the first one in the waters.

So you might ask, if this place was a gathering place of the sick and infirm and outcasts, why was Jesus there? That's *exactly* why Jesus was there! Jesus was seeking the places of human need; he was drawn to the places where needy people gathered (see Luke 4:16-30). You can be certain that Jesus is drawn to the broken and wounded people in our community and the places in your life.

Not only was he drawn to the place, he was looking specifically for this man. This guy had been sick for 38 years. We don't know how old the man was, but understand that he had been sick longer than most people even lived at that time. We don't know specifically what was wrong with him, but whatever it was it crippled him so that he could not walk.

Who knows how long he had been going to this pool, but the story indicates that he'd been doing so daily for years. We are left to imagine that someone – family or friend or neighbor – would drop him off there and leave him, since he had no one to help him. Maybe they'd pick him later, or maybe he just lived there.

John tells us that Jesus knew that the man had already been there for a long time, indicating that Jesus knew all about the guy – how long he'd had this condition, what it was, and what was his state of mind. Now, we don't really see this in the translation but the original language is very, very clear: the reason Jesus knew all this about the man wasn't because he heard about him, or asked others, or that Jesus

plugged in to the invalid grapevine. The original language is very clear: Jesus had supernatural awareness. The word that John uses when he says that Jesus “knew” about the man, was a word that John used in his gospel fifteen times, and fourteen of those times, the focus is on Jesus’ divine knowledge. Jesus knew about this man without ever being told. Jesus knew because he is God. He knew this man, his situation, his mindset, and his need. Listen to me: *He knows all about you, too.* Keep that in mind as you are a participant in this story.

So Jesus came to the man; the man didn’t approach Jesus. The man had no friends who brought him to Jesus. The man didn’t have family members approach Jesus on his behalf. The man was a face in the crowd of sick outcasts. The man didn’t even know who Jesus was. But Jesus looked for him specifically and approached him. Listen: *the grace of God in Christ reaches out to us before we ever ask or even know who he is or know that he can make us well.*

So now let’s get back to...

## 2. The ***question.***

“Do you want to get well?” Think about it; why would Jesus ask the man this question? The guy’s been crippled for t-h-i-r-t-y-e-i-g-h-t-y-e-a-r-s. He’s been showing up to this place of healing for the majority of his life. Why would Jesus even ask this question? Isn’t that a bit rude, or at least kind of insensitive or forward? Since Jesus knew the guy so well, you’d think he’d know the answer already. Or maybe, *because* Jesus knew the guy so well, he knew the answer wasn’t as obvious as it seems...

So what is Jesus getting at?

Let’s consider the guys’ situation. From everything we know about him, there are some things we can figure out if we just give it some thought.

First of all, this guy, along with the others, was caught up in superstitions and myths. He was so desperate for healing that he was willing to put his hopes in some bubbly water. This is a little like people who get their health products off the home shopping network, right? Some people are so desperate for healing that they’ll buy anything. And this guy was desperate.

More than that, he had dealt with this for so long that, even though he was there looking for healing, he was probably stuck in a place of resignation. He had focused so long on his disability, his pain, his obstacles, his weaknesses, his loneliness, and his challenges, that he couldn’t really see anything else. My goodness – he couldn’t even see that it was *Jesus* who asked the question: the guy was so focused on his mess that he couldn’t see the Messiah. *Are we so focused on our messes that we don’t see the Messiah?*

Over the years that I’ve provided counseling with people, I’ve noticed something. People will come to me to talk about their problems, but some people have grown so comfortable with their problems that the idea of change is frightening to them.

They'd rather live with the pain that they *do* know, then take the risk of living life in a way that they are unfamiliar with, even if that life involves healing.

I remember one lady came to me because she was very concerned about her husband. He was a high-functioning drug addict. He could do his job, but he was abusive to her in so many ways. As far as she knew, he wasn't that way to the kids, but he was to her. She'd confronted him on it numerous times, and they'd gotten into fights over it. She didn't know what else to do.

So I asked her: "What are you willing to do in order to get well? What are you willing to do in order to help your husband? How desperate are you to have a healthy marriage and family?" She said, "What do you mean?" I said, "Are you willing to do whatever it takes to help your husband see what he's got to lose? Because he's losing his wife and kids. Because I promise you, the kids' lives are getting messed up even if he leaves them alone. But right now, you enable him, you make excuses for him, and so he figures he can keep using and he's got nothing to lose. He's having his cake and eating it too. Are you willing to kick him out, and tell him that until he gets professional help, he can't come back?"

She was silent for a while. I said, "Go home, pray about it, and let's get back together and you can tell me what you think." She did. And when she came back, she said, "I'd rather stay with him and his addiction and abuse, than have to face the possibility of life without him." Listen: she was more comfortable in her pain than she was willing to accept change in order to get well. Now don't misunderstand me – I'm not trying to oversimplify a very complex issue like drug and spousal abuse, codependence and enablement. But at the end of the day, if you are more comfortable in your pain than you are willing to change, you don't really want to be made well. By the way, it turned out that a few years later, the husband never stopped using drugs, had an affair, left his wife and kids, and his kids ended up struggling with their own addiction issues, leaving her broken and alone. So what she ended up with was worse than what she had.

This guy in the story was stuck in desperate superstition, stuck in resignation, comfortable with his pain, focused on his obstacles and weaknesses and challenges when he should have been focused on Jesus who knew him, who had been looking for him, who was *right there ready to make him well*.

Thankfully, though, Jesus jolted the man into a new reality. Without hardly waiting for the guy to answer, while the guy was making excuses, Jesus said, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk."

Immediately the man was well, and he picked up his mat and walked.

Jesus had *already* healed the guy! All the guy had to do was obey! He could've continued to focus on his issues and never known he was healed, but instead he took Jesus at his word and did what Jesus told him to do. He was willing to trust Jesus. He didn't even know who Jesus was, obviously hadn't heard about Jesus. But there was something about Jesus that was compelling. The look in Jesus' eyes that said, "I know all about you. And I love you." The authority in Jesus' voice. It was enough for him to obey. And he was made well!

Now, we know from the rest of the passage that the religious rulers aren't impressed with the healing, they're mad that this guy is "working" on the sabbath because he was carrying his mat. So they question the man, and he testifies to what he knows. He doesn't even know who the man that healed him was, but – he told them what he *did* know. By the way, *that's* what a witness does. When Jesus commands us to be witnesses to others for him and what he's done in our lives, that's all that's expected of us to do: we simply tell what we know from our own experience. We don't have to know all the theology or have the Bible memorized. This guy didn't even know Jesus' name. He just told what he knew.

And by the way, don't miss this important change: notice in verse ten it says, "The Jewish leaders said *to the man who had been healed.*" In verses five and seven he's identified as a sick man, but then in verse ten and thirteen he has a *new* identity: he is the man who had been healed!

Then Jesus meets up with him again in the Temple. This is a good sign – whoever it was that healed him, the guy knew it had to be from God, so he goes to church. He's already started the important habit of going to church weekly. He's already growing in his faith.

Then Jesus says, "See! You have been made well. Don't sin anymore in case something worse happens to you." I need to explain this.

Right away, Jesus moves from the man's illness to his sin: *Stop sinning or something worse may happen.* This is important: Jesus did NOT equate the man's illness to be a result of his sin (see 9:2). Not all sin causes physical illness, and not all illness is because of sin. It *could* be that there was some kind of contributing sin, but In John, sin is defined this way: sin is ultimately not believing in Jesus as the one God sent to reveal the Father to us and to redeem us. So Jesus was not implying that sin had caused the man's illness, but he was warning that a life apart from Jesus would lead to a condition far more wretched than his invalidism, namely judgment (5:24-27). Jesus was more deeply concerned with the man's SPIRITUAL healing!

By analogy, imagine that there's a man who goes to his doctor for help with a case of poison ivy. After administering a prescription to relieve that problem, the doctor looks him straight in the eye: "I've helped you with this irritating skin condition. But now that you're here, I must get at something far more important. You must stop drinking, or one day you'll be facing something far more serious than poison ivy!" The poison ivy was not caused by the drinking, but treating the poison ivy *gave opportunity* for the doctor to address a far more serious condition and to identify its cause.<sup>3</sup> The crippled man's sin didn't cause his sickness, but there was a deeper issue that, left unresolved, would result in not only a crippled life here but eternity forever in judgment, in hell.

So what are...

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<sup>3</sup> Joseph Dongell, *John: A Bible Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 1997), 91.

### 3. The *implications* of all this for us?

Consider the broken, wounded, or crippled areas of your life that you've been living with. Perhaps they are physical, or maybe emotional, or relational. Ask yourself: how long have you been dealing with them? Have you given up hope and given in to resignation? (repeat).

Have you been dealing with it for so long that you are actually more comfortable *with* the disability, than you are open to change and getting well?

Are you so focused on your obstacles and challenges, are you so focused on your mess that you don't see the Messiah?

Because right NOW, Jesus comes to YOU. And Jesus *knows* you. He knows what's crippling you in whatever way. He *knows* all about you. Maybe you hear that and you think, "I don't know that I like the fact that Jesus knows all about me. There are some things I'm ashamed of. There are things that I work hard to keep hidden from others that no one knows about." But listen: your handicap – whatever cripples you and paralyzes you may not be as obvious as this man's, but Jesus knows it and approaches you nonetheless, and he asks you, "Do you want to get well?" He may not always heal you physically; there were others at that pool that day that didn't get healed. But Jesus is *always* ready to make you spiritually well.

Jesus is most deeply concerned with your spiritual condition. There is a deeper healing, as well as a deeper disability that you must allow Jesus to address. If you have not accepted the new life and healing Christ has for you, do it now! Do you want to made well? Stand up in the wellness of forgiveness and healing and a relationship with Christ, pick up your mat and walk!

Perhaps you need to make a deeper commitment to Jesus; he's healed you in the past, but he's calling you to make a deeper, more necessary commitment to him that must take place for ongoing healing. Do it now or something worse may result!

Whatever the case, if you will let Jesus, your entire identity will change. You will be known as the person that Jesus made well!

*Pray*

Now – be a witness to what Jesus has done. Pick up your mat and walk and tell others about the one who made you well!

*Pastor Dan*

Glory to God, who is able to do far beyond all that we could ask or imagine by his power at work within us; glory to him in the church and in Christ Jesus for all generations, forever and always...Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything that (Jesus) commanded you. (And Jesus Himself) will be with you every day until the end of this present age." (Ephesians 3:20-21, Matthew 28:118-20, ceb)