

Hope and Healing

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Sometimes Jesus surprises me. When dealing with people he has the insight and understanding regarding realities that I am often unaware of and fail to even consider. In my own life God works in ways that are contrary to my expectations and I have learned that his plans are always better. As a pastor I want to see people truly helped but the real need is sometimes not obvious and beyond my ability to quickly recognize it. Closely examining Jesus' ministry often brings unexpected revelations to me that apply to my life as well as those that I hope to help. One such example that fascinates me is the way he handled the lame man in John 5.

There was a man who was immobile for 38 years having some debilitating illness. He had to rely on others for just about everything. Basic necessities for life such as acquiring food, changing clothes, and handling "bathroom needs" required the help of others. Being in his situation for so long had additional unintended consequences. Everyone began to know him as one of the local town beggars. People may have grown tired of the on-going prayer need. It seems that this man had really given up on the hope that he would ever be healed. Although he hung around "the miracle pool" where others were being healed, it seems that there was no expectation that this guy would ever be whole.

Compassion is a quality that Jesus had in generous supply. What amazes me is the application of this compassion that brings real help. He said something that sounds kind of dumb at first glance; he asked this man, "Do you want to be healed?" One can't help but stop and say, "C'mon Jesus, what kind of question is that? Of course he wants to be healed!" After further contemplation and prayer I realized that this question had unexpected wisdom into a decision that this man needed to make.

As I consider the people I have been involved with over the years, I think that same question would be very appropriate. You see, I have seen many people's lives completely changed. I have witnessed people being healed of all sorts of things from physical illness and disease to addictions, emotional wounds and spiritual pain. I have also prayed for people who seem to struggle in the same place year after year after year. I understand that not everybody is intended by God to be healed of their affliction. In the case of the Apostle Paul, suffering was a way that God was working a different purpose in his life and ministry. But for some people I know, one has to wonder if Jesus' question to this man isn't the same inquiry they should be asking themselves: "Do you want to be healed?"

On the surface, of course, most would answer with an immediate and resounding "yes," but look deeper for a moment. There is a lot more to this than just saying goodbye to pain. If this man is healed by Jesus, he is going to have to enter a whole new way of living that he has not done in 38 years, probably ever. If he is no longer diseased, that means that his source of income must change for he will not qualify for free money. He will have to be trained and get a job. His housing situation will most likely require transition because the subsidy for the infirmed won't apply. All of the friends and associates he hangs around with every day will also need to change for he will be busy with a whole new life. While he is used to being on the receiving end of generosity and help, he must now become part of the answer to help others. Everything about his life will be new. Further, any excuse for not being able to accomplish his dreams, fulfill his purpose, contribute to society, get along with others, keep a job, pay the rent, and help other people will be gone; he will be "whole." That means that his entire life will be different tomorrow and he will be heading straight forward into untraveled territory. This can be a fearful place and many people

simply do not like stepping outside of their experience. We are talking about much more than having your comfort zone stretched, but an extreme makeover into the unknown.

When faced with the challenge, this man's response is equally revealing; he said, "I have no man to help me." Maybe that is part of the problem. Are we saying the same thing? Are we looking to our misunderstanding, waiting for another person to help instead of relying on God? There are myriads of ways that people look to the inability of others to provide real help and say, "I have no man to help me." Maybe the deficiency is in looking to others as our answer. This guy had a way that he thought he could be helped if he only had someone to help him. As a pastor I might be tempted to step in and say, "I am here to help." This guy knew what he thought someone should do to help him; pick him up, hold him until the right time, and throw him into the miracle healing waters. In order to help, this person would need faith to believe, willingness to help, physical strength and stamina, perseverance and patience not to give up after a short time. He would need to be attentive, keeping his eyes on the water, for at the soonest sign of the stirring, the helper would have to be quick to get his patient in. In other words, the man who would be healed was expecting to essentially do nothing and the one he hoped to "help" would do everything. The infirmed man would merely wait until someone else provided his healing. That sounds like people I know today. However, Jesus had a higher plan.

Jesus spoke with genuine understanding, authority, and power! As he informed the man that this would happen differently than expected, Jesus commanded him to get himself up, pick up his own bed, and walk out of there himself. Unlike my tendency, Jesus would not be assisting this man to his feet, Jesus would not be helping him carry his stuff, and Jesus would not be walking him out. This man was to do it himself! God's miracle power mixed with his own personal life-changing decision. He would really need to "want to be healed" and be willing to live a whole new life. How about you? What is your pain? Do you want to be healed?

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Dan Nelson is a frequent contributor to the Ojai Valley News and currently serves the Ojai Valley Ministerial Association and community as editor of the Religion Column. Permission is freely granted to reprint the article in its entirety. Dan Nelson is pastor of Calvary Chapel Christian Church of the Ojai Valley.



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Mid-Week Study:

7:00pm Thursday
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