

## **“Signs” #4: “Do you want to be well?”**

**July 12, 2015**

Okay, if you have a Bible or a Bible app on your phone or tablet open up to John chapter 5. We'll get there in a few minutes: John chapter 5. We'll be starting at verse 1. Now, at first it kind of sounds like a stupid question, until you start picking at it. Jesus looks at this guy who has been paralyzed for 38 years, and he asks him, “Do you want to be well?” Does that sound like a stupid question to you? This guy has been a paraplegic for about all his life. He can't walk. Back then: no wheel chairs, no public accommodations for those with disabilities, no social security disability benefits, no Wounded Warrior projects. And Jesus says, “Do you want to get well?” Well ... Duh!” ... But Jesus doesn't ask ... stupid questions.

So here's the deal: I'm trying to find me another doctor. I don't like mine, much. Doc Crum – he's one of our elders. Kind of a rude guy. You see, my blood pressure is a little too high. So he tells me, “You need to eat better.” A little less salt, a little less red meat, more vegetables. Now I think that's rude! I just want another pill. Then he says, “And you could lose a little weight. You know, eat less, exercise more.” And that's flat out rude. I just want another pill. And he won't give me one for this (belly)! You see, I guess I want to be well. I want my blood pressure lower, and I want to be skinnier. But not enough for less salt, less red meat, more vegetables, and more exercise. I don't want to be well ... that badly.

Do you want to get well? Of course you do; everyone does. Right? In November 2004 there was a medical conference at Rockefeller University in New York City. Some of the elite in the medical world gathered to address the health care crisis. In the end, their findings were both encouraging and discouraging. It's encouraging to know that most of our health problems are not caused by factors beyond our control. And it's discouraging to learn that most of our health problems are not caused by factors beyond our control! So ... we know how to be well-er, but we choose not to. Doctors can sometimes patch what we break, but we keep breaking ourselves.

This is incredible: Study after study shows that 80% of our health problems are rooted in 5 behavioral issues: we eat too much, drink too much, smoke too much, don't exercise enough, and we don't handle stress well. Now, let

me ask the question again: “Do you want to be well?” Do you want it enough to eat less, drink less, smoke less, exercise more, and manage your stress more appropriately? I doubt it.

Dr. Edward Miller, Dean of the John Hopkins School of Medicine, says that every year more than 1.5 million Americans undergo coronary bypass surgery. It usually works. Blood starts flowing again. But he says, “If you look at people after their bypass 2 years later, 90% have not changed their lifestyle.” We just go back to the same old that got us into the mess in the first place. And eventually the arteries clog up again. We want to be well; but not enough to change.

So: “Do you want to be well?” And I’m not just talking about physically. Let’s reshape the question: “What is broken in your life that needs to be fixed? Do you really want it fixed?”

- Maybe it’s your checkbook. There’s just not enough money. But maybe it’s more about your desires than your money. Maybe you have this problem with spending too much ... way too much. Your debt keeps growing; it’s creating stress. Do you want it fixed? Of course you do. But you still carry that plastic in your pocket. You want to be free from debt, but not as much as you want those new shoes, or those new golf clubs, or that Apple Watch.
- Over maybe your problem is stress, because you can’t say, “No.” Your calendar is wrecking your life. You don’t have time for your wife, or your kids ... or your God. You know it’s out of control, but do you really want to be well? Enough to stop it?
- Or maybe it’s an addiction that has its claws deep in you. You’re smoking something you shouldn’t be smoking, or popping pills you shouldn’t be popping, or drinking way more than you should be drinking. Maybe it’s food for you, or shopping, or even your fitness class. That’s my addiction – I’m addicted to Crossfit. Can you tell? Maybe it’s gambling, or porn. Do you want to get well? Do you really? Don’t lie to yourself, don’t lie to God. You might fool yourself, but you won’t fool God. Do you want to be well badly enough to dump the pills in the toilet, or pour the bourbon down the sink, or to clean out your fridge, or to put guardrails on your TV and your computer?

Sometimes what we really mean is, “I want to be well ... tomorrow.” I’d like to do a little more sinning first. Ever been there, felt that? “I want to be pure ... tomorrow.”

- Or maybe for some of you here it’s a relationship that is broken. You can’t get along with your mom or your dad; your marriage is a wreck; you are at war with your kids, or a neighbor, or an ex-friend. Some relationship is a disaster; but do you really, really want to repair it? Do you want it enough to forgive? To let go of the bitterness you revel in? Some of you guys hate your neighbor more than you love your God.

It’s a really tough question: “Do you want to be well?” So we are going to get into the story today where Jesus asks this question, and I want to challenge you to apply this story to whatever is broken in your life. Are you ready? As we work through this story today, listen to it through the lens of your life challenge.

Here goes: John 5.1. It says, “Jesus returned to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish holy days. Inside the city, near the Sheep Gate, was the pool of Bethesda, with five covered porches.” Now ... I’m not sure you could get that one past the health inspectors today. You’ve got this pool. It’s really not a swimming pool, although some people are going to be jumping in. It’s probably more of a water supply. And you put the water supply right next to a sheep gate. That’s just wrong, isn’t it? Even if you figure out how to keep the sheep out the pool, it’s going to smell, and you’re going to find some of those raisins in the water.

(v 3) Anyway, this wasn’t just a water supply. It says it was a gathering place for sick people: the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. They’d all hang out on the porches around the pool ... waiting. Because there was this tradition, this legend, that every once in a while an angel would stir the waters of the pool. And whenever the water bubbled up, the first person in would be healed. And verse 5 says, one guy is there who has been an invalid for 38 years. We find out later it’s his legs. Apparently he’s been a paraplegic for 38 years. Guys, back then the average lifespan back then was about 40 years. He’s probably been a paraplegic for his whole life.

Now, that guy on the video we played before the sermon ... Dr. Dwight Peterson, is a Bible Scholar, a theologian, and a paraplegic. He says, the problems of a paraplegic today are little compared to their problems back in the world of the Bible. Getting around at all in that world; the social isolation, the stigma. He says, and just think about personal hygiene. A lot of paraplegics can't control their bladder or their bowels. So this guy would probably be a mess, and he'd stink. He'd have to rely on people to move him around, unless he crawled. His hands would probably be rough and torn from the streets, since he probably used them like feet. (v 6) So when Jesus comes along and picks this guy out, he is picking the worst of the worst, the most pathetic of the pathetic.

And Jesus says to this pitiful guy, "Do you want to get well?" Are you serious? I mean, Jesus almost sounds cruel, doesn't he? If this were a Monte Python film, the guy would answer, "Nah, I love crawling around in my filth. Better than a desk job!" I mean, the question sounds weird. It's like asking a broke guy, "You want \$100?" It's like asking a guy who hasn't eaten in a week, "You want to go to Cracker Barrel?" It's like Julie asking me, "You want to fool around?" Well ... yeah! But Jesus' doesn't ask stupid questions.

And the guy's answer is kind of weird. (v 7) He never actually says "yes." Instead he says, "I can't, sir ... for I have no one to put me into the pool when the water bubbles up. Someone else always gets there ahead of me." Can you imagine how pathetic it would be, how depressing it would be, to come plant yourself in a place where you believe healings can happen, but certain that it could never happen to you? (v 8) So here's what happens: "Jesus told him, then "Stand up, pick up your mat, and walk!" And instantly, the man was healed! He rolls up his sleeping mat and starts walking!" Because an encounter with Jesus, a touch by Jesus, a word from Jesus can change a man – any man – forever. Sometimes it's not a physical healing, sometimes it's not the miracle you are hoping for. Sometimes it is a healing way more powerful than what you think you need.

Okay, let's go back and pick up where we started. What's broken in your life? What's been broken in your life for a long time? We're not talking about new problem you've got; let's talk about the old ones that are still there. It might be something physical, or financial, or some relationship, or

some addiction. Maybe you are spiritually broken. Where do you need healing? You see, there are some serious challenges we face when we have brokenness that persists. Here are three of them.

#1: *The longer a problem lasts, the more discouraged we become.* Do you buy that? Some of you have been battling the same problem for months, or years, some of you for decades. It won't go away. Sometimes it seems like it's not even getting better. And you get discouraged. You've prayed ... and nothing happened. You've tried whatever you thought might work ... still the same. And sooner or later you get discouraged.

- You've worked on your marriage, you've prayed about your marriage, you've taken classes, gotten counseling – and your marriage is still a mess. And you're thinking, "I don't think it's ever going to get better." And that's really discouraging.
- Or maybe you have some physical issue. And you've gone to doctor after doctor. And you've read all the self-help stuff you can find on the internet. And you've tried the remedies pushed by those late-night TV infomercials. And you've prayed, and you've prayed. And you've listened to stories about others who got better. It gets discouraging.

A year, 10 years, 38 years – the longer a problem lasts, the more discouraged you get. Here's the second challenge: *The longer a problem lasts, the more excuses we tend to make.* We start making excuses because it's going to make us feel better to start blaming someone else. "Jesus, I've tried, but there was no one to help me get in the water. It's their fault. I can't walk; the water stirs and all these blind guys run by me and jump in. They are all selfish"

You've been there; you've made those excuses.

- I've tried; I just can't do it myself. No one will help me. I need someone to give me a break.
- Or, we've tried counseling. It didn't work.
- We've even tried church. We went to church whole month. It didn't work.
- Or, I've been to the doctor after doctor after doctor
- Or, I've tried to get a better job, but they all want a college degree. And I'm too old, or too poor for that.

- Or, my problem is that I have a slow metabolism, and my body doesn't burn fat.
- Or, I've tried prayer. God won't listen. It's his fault.

You see, *The longer a problem lasts, the more discouraged we become.* And *The longer a problem lasts, the more excuses we tend to make.* Here's the third challenge: *The longer the problem lasts, the more we tend to compensate.* The more we just learn to just live with it – to treat it as normal.

Permission to speak the truth? Some of us here in this room are really good at compensating for something broken in our life.

- We have some highly functioning alcoholics in this room. Sure, it puts stress on your marriage. Yeah, it causes more than a few problems for your kids. It has even caused some problems at work. But so far, you've been able to get along. You know you have a problem, but you have learned to accept it, and to live with it. You have even learned how to help people you love live with it. Because we are selfish twits, aren't we?
- Some of you have learned to exist in a dead marriage. You don't like it; but you've learned to accept it — it's just the way it is. There is no intimacy, no real partnership, no making each other better. Some of you have nothing in common other than an address. "We're just going to stay together for the kids." Really?!
- We have people here today who compensate for their overspending. You have lived from paycheck to paycheck for so long; you have given up believing you could live any other way. You've become adept at shuffling bills, using credit cards to pay living expenses, maxing out one card and getting another, avoiding the bill collectors.
- Some of you have learned to compensate for your porn addiction. You know you've got a problem, but you tell yourself it's not that bad. And you tell yourself it's better than being a physical adulterer. And you tell yourself that you can still value your wife, or your girlfriend, even though they will never stack up to the photo-shopped perfection you enjoy onscreen. And you've learned to cover your tracks so you will probably never be caught.

Listen guys. This is important: You can't change what you are willing to tolerate. In fact, we even make it hard for God to change things in us that

we are willing to tolerate. He wants to fix us – but we fight him. And God doesn't like forcing himself on us. You can't change you until you acknowledge you've got a problem. And for these persistent problems, it's going to take God's help. And he almost never changes us until we acknowledge we have a problem and we are willing to cooperate.

So Jesus asks this guy: "Do you really want to get well?" Are you serious? Why would Jesus ask a pathetic paraplegic that question? Well, because *Everybody needs help; but not everybody wants it.*

- After all, if he heals you, you might have to give up that handicapped parking sticker.
- If he heals you, you might have to give up your bragging rights on being sicker than everyone else. Have you ever noticed that some people just want to be sicker than you? If you tell them how hard it is for you, they have to tell you that they have it worse. It gets tiring, doesn't it?
- Or, if he heals you, you might have to take some responsibility; maybe do some chores, or even go out and get a job. It might be your turn to help out someone else who is broken.

So, everybody needs help; but not everybody wants it. In your mind, what is the greatest obstacle to faith? Some of you might say, "Doubt." Some of you might say, "Fear." Good answers. But maybe for a lot of us it is ... familiarity. We become comfortable in our brokenness, and we push back against the risk of being healed, by God. "You don't understand, I've been a cripple for 38 years. You don't understand, I've tried everything possible. I've got all these great excuses. I don't like being sick, but I've learned to live with it." And you start to accept what is, rather than believe what could be. Did you hear that? You start to accept what is, rather than trust what God can do.

Here's the bottom line: Ordinarily, until your desire becomes bigger than your disability, you won't be healed. Do you want to be well? I know you are discouraged. I know you have all these excuses for being the way you are. I know you have learned to live with it. But do you want to be well? Really?

- Do you want to be out of debt? Because for some of you shopping is your drug of choice. You wouldn't say it that way; but it's the way you live.

- Do you really want to be free from the addiction that is holding you hostage? Because most people get really comfortable with the known, and kind of afraid of the unknown.
- Do you really want your marriage healed? Or is the bitterness so deep, you'd rather enjoy your anger than be right with God?

You see, ordinarily until your desire becomes bigger than your disability, you won't be healed. Now there are exceptions. We have an amazing God who sometimes heals us despite ourselves; but ordinarily, until your desire becomes bigger than your disability, you won't be healed.

And sometimes, when you are healed, it's going to be way different than what you expected.

And I want you to notice 3 things about the healing of this paralytic:

1. In this case, *this guy didn't even ask to be healed*. Listen to me: If you let Jesus get up close and personal, if you let Him press into your world, He will do things for you that you don't even ask for. He will do things for you that you didn't even know you needed done! He will change the way you think, when sometimes you don't even know your mind is messed up. Sometimes he will heal shame you don't even know you are carrying around, he'll bring peace you don't even know you are missing. Sometimes he will heal a heart when you don't even understand how broken it is. If you let God in, He will do for you things you never thought to ask.
  2. This is big. I want you to notice that *this guy does nothing to earn his healing; nothing to deserve it*. He didn't go looking for Jesus. And Jesus didn't go looking for him because the guy was good. Jesus healed the man because Jesus is good! That's what we know as grace. It's all gift; it's all grace.
  3. And I want you to notice that *the healing didn't come the way the man thought it would*. This guy was counting on the water to heal him. "If I could just get to the water..." Some here have been searching for relief ... in the wrong places. Some here are even searching for the wrong kind of healing.
- There are people here whose finances are a mess... and you think the solution to your woes could be in your next lottery ticket. It's not coming that way. In fact, the healing God might give you may be the gift of ... contentment.

- There are people here who are looking for love in all the wrong places... True love doesn't hang out there. In fact, the healing God may give you might be the realization that He is enough.
- There are those here who run from their stress and hide in a bottle... Guys, those pills aren't going to fix you. They will only hide the problem temporarily. God may give you the ability to beat your addiction. Or he may just give you the strength to get through one day at a time.

My preaching partner Randy told me about a Sunday morning, years ago. He was sharing with the church family the story of Everett Gruelle, one of their family in his early 60s. He was really sick – with a rare disease. He had these stones in his lungs – kind of like kidney stones, or gall stones, but in his lungs. Very painful, very dangerous. He would cough them up, and they would tear their way through his lungs on their way out. The doctors figured that the only way to manage it was to go into both lungs and take them out. A dangerous surgery, possibly fatal. The family gathered around him in the hospital and prayed with him, and then went to the waiting room where they expected to be for the next 6-7 hours. In about 45 minutes, the nurse told them to go to the counseling room. They were terrified. Randy prepared to comfort a widow, and her kids. The doctor came in and he said, “Before we started the surgery we took one final x-ray to confirm where we were going, and the stones are gone. I can't explain it, I saw them yesterday; but they are not there today.”

It was an amazing story, and Randy was sharing it with their church family the next Sunday morning. Everett was sitting right there, about 2/3 of the way back, at about 10:00. Randy kept scanning the church family, and there in the balcony was Hazel Pate, a 41 year old mom, dying of lung cancer. She'd had chemo, radiation, surgery ... nothing had worked. And in her eyes was ... confusion. She had prayed, she had begged. And now, “Why Everett, and not me?” Why would God save a 60 year old grandfather and pass over a 40 year old mom?

I don't know. Why did Jesus step over others with disabilities to get to this paralytic? I don't know. Two months later Hazel died -- and she received a healing from God that made Everett's seem like band-aid over a severed leg. God always does ... enough. He always gives us ... enough.

Jesus says to this guy: "Get up, take up your mat and walk." Let me translate that for you. Jesus says, "Just trust me. Just do what I ask you to do, no matter how hard it seems, and trust me." Do you trust that God can truly fix what is broken in your life – his way? Do you believe He has the capacity to change you? Are you willing to try to change? Or will you leave here this morning, claiming you want things to change -- but still refusing to get up, take up your mat, and walk. Maybe what Jesus is saying is this: "I don't want any more excuses. I want to see faith. I want you to trust me. Don't tell me what you can't do; don't give me all the reasons things are as they are; don't blame other people. Just trust me. Because I just want you healthy and whole!"

So do you want to be well? Do you want it badly enough to trust him, no matter what he wants you to do? On that day, best I can tell, only one needy person heard Jesus ask that question; and Jesus healed him. Today you are here; you heard the question...maybe today is the day when you have that one moment in the presence of Jesus that will change everything. Do you want to be well?