



Week 9: Expect the Unexpected

John 5:1-15

GOAL: To stop “lying by the pool” and accept Jesus’ invitation for full and complete healing.

CHECKLIST

- Invest in your own spiritual life by participating in the daily Growth Guide readings. (This will also prepare you to lead the question about it in your group again this week.)
- Reach out individually to anyone who did not attend last week. Let them know that you missed them and would love to see them this week.
- Prepare for your group meeting by praying for yourself and your group (feel free to use the prayer below) and reading through this Leader’s Guide.
- If you haven’t already, plan your Grow Group Pair-Up by connecting with the leaders of your paired group.
- Take attendance in Planning Center, including guests/new members (please include their names and contact info in the meeting notes section). Help new members register for your group using the QR code in your room or at vrbc.net/grow.

PREPARING THROUGH PRAYER:

Father, you see me with my physical and spiritual needs lying by a pool waiting for healing that I think depends on my ability to get into the water. Too often I only seek partial healing related to my physical wellbeing without understanding the need for my spiritual healing. I ask you to speak healing words today that reach into every area of my life. Give me faith to respond. Thank you for being a God of unfailing love and mercy.

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:24-25

CONNECT & COORDINATE

We will maintain the same rhythm each week this semester:

1. Welcome your group. Repeat introductions if there are any new people.
2. Coordinate any logistics (group socials, snacks, Grow Group Pair-Up, etc).
3. Check in with your group and gather prayer requests. Consider using the following questions:
 - Where did you see God at work this week?
 - Where do you need God in the week ahead?
4. Pray for the requests shared and for God to lead your time together today.

DISCUSS

Read John 5:1-5.

- What is the significance of the pool of Bethesda and the people who came there? What are some ways you have tried to find healing by the world's ways instead of coming to Christ?

Leader's Note: *Today, people make pilgrimages to various places seeking spiritual and physical healing such as Lourdes in France or the Way of St. James in Spain. In Jesus' day one such place was the pool of Bethesda (the house of mercy) which was near the Sheep Gate in Jerusalem. It wasn't until the late 20th century that archaeologists discovered its location in the northeast section of the city which dispelled the criticism that John's Gospel did not represent historic Judaism.*

John describes a great number of disabled people who would regularly lie near the pool of Bethesda because they believed it was their only hope for healing. The lifestyle of the blind, lame, and paralyzed depended on begging or the kindness of others to provide for their needs. They lived with great social isolation because Jews didn't want to interact with the sick and disabled. The disabled in Jesus' day had lives that were challenged in ways we cannot imagine.

There may be individuals in your group who feel that they have exhausted all the available options for achieving the healing and wellbeing they desire, only to find that these solutions were inadequate. In many respects, each of us can relate to the people at the pool, as we have sought assistance from various sources but have overlooked what Jesus offers.

A quick word about verses 3b-4. Some Greek manuscripts add as part of verse 3 the words, "and they waited for the moving of the waters." Other manuscripts also added the words in verse 4: "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." Although the best Greek manuscripts omit verses 3b-4, these do provide a reason as to why so many people with physical ailments would gather at the pool and explain the man's response found in verse 7.

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Read John 5:6-9a.

- Why do you think Jesus asked this “unexpected question”? How does the man’s response to Jesus’ healing demonstrate his faith?

Leader’s Note: *Think about the first two signs we have studied. Mary and the royal official approached Jesus with a request. This time it is different. Jesus is the one initiating the conversation. He saw one man among the many and knew he had been paralyzed for 38 years. Even though the man’s physical condition was visible for all to see, Jesus looked deeper and wanted to bring wholeness both physically and spiritually.*

Jesus approached him and asked what Pastor John described as an “unexpected question”. “Do you want to get well?” Notice the man didn’t answer the question. He complained about the reason he couldn’t get in the healing waters. To be fair to the man, he didn’t know who Jesus was, hadn’t asked him for anything, and couldn’t imagine what Jesus could do for him.

Jesus was not put off by the man’s response. He gave him a three-part “unexpected command”. First, get up. The Greek word for “get up” is the same word used for resurrection. Next, the man was told to “pick up your mat”. The Greek used here describes a single event. It was as though Jesus was saying, “Get your stuff together because you won’t need to come back here.” The last command was “walk”. The Greek tense used here means “continuous events”. Again, Jesus seems to be saying, “You are going to take that first step and keep on walking for the rest of your life.”

This is such a beautiful picture of what Jesus the Messiah does for us. He sees us broken and without hope. He extends an invitation for new life which is a resurrection from death to life. This new life is one of wellbeing and wholeness.

Read verses 8 and 9 slowly and carefully. Jesus spoke divine words and brought divine healing by his divine power. Immediately the man was cured! The man obeyed Jesus’ commands, and his new life began.

Read John 5:9b-13.

- Why do the religious leaders focus on the Sabbath rather than the miracle? What does this tell us about misplaced priorities versus Jesus’ priorities?

Leader’s Notes: *Festivals/feasts were important to first-century Jews. The three pilgrim festivals include the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Pesach/Passover), the Feast of Weeks (Shavout/Pentecost), and the Feast of Booths (Sukkoth) and occurred once a year. People would travel to Jerusalem to celebrate these festivals. The text begins by telling us that Jesus had gone to Jerusalem for one of these but is not specific. The Jews also considered the Sabbath as a weekly feast which was celebrated wherever they lived.*

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One commentator writes that “Festivals were made by God to bring good gifts to his people, not to legislate and control behavior.” If that were so, why would the religious leaders be so upset that Jesus healed on the Sabbath? Two things are colliding in these verses – the miracle and Jewish law.

God gave ten commandments including one to remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy (Exodus 20:8). The commandment includes not working. Evidently, that was not sufficient, so oral laws of Judaism outlined 39 categories of what was forbidden on the Sabbath. Carrying one’s bed fell under the category of not carrying anything from one place to another.

The Jewish leaders acknowledged the miracle. But overshadowing the miracle was a broken rule! Never mind that the man had been paralyzed for 38 years. Never mind that he lived in dire poverty on the margins of society. Never mind that he was overlooked and scorned by many. NO! What mattered more was that the man carried a mat on the Sabbath.

On more than one occasion Jesus intentionally healed on the Sabbath, thus “breaking” the Sabbath laws. But there was a reason. Mark 2:27-28 says, “Then he said to them, ‘The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So, the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.’” As Messiah, Jesus could heal physical infirmities and forgive sin even on the Sabbath. Christ does for us what the law could never do.

Read John 5:14-15.

- What does Jesus mean when he tells the healed man, “You are well again. Stop sinning or something worse will happen to you?” How can we respond to Jesus’ call to stop sinning?

Leader’s Note: *Pastor John says Jesus gave an “unexpected warning.” It would seem to indicate that suffering and sin were connected in this man’s life. Verse 14 can be a bit tricky and could lead to a deeper discussion which needs to be for another time.*

One commentator offers a concise view by stating, “Those with an infirmity have not necessarily sinned, and those who sin do not necessarily endure suffering as a consequence. . . Suffering is not an index of a person’s sin. But having said that specific suffering may still come from specific sin.”

Perhaps “specific suffering” coming from “specific sin” was what Jesus was warning this man about. Jesus wisely cautioned the man to be on guard, so he is not drawn back into sinful ways. Matthew Henry wrote, “It is common for people, when they are sick, to promise much, when newly recovered to perform something, but after a while to forget all.”

We, too, need this warning because we are tempted to fall back into old sinful habits and patterns. What are the parts of your lives where Jesus is calling you into a deeper walk with him? Deepening our relationship with Christ through consistent time in scripture and prayer help us live this new life in Jesus.

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Remember this new life is not lived in isolation but is best done in community. It is tempting to hide from others when we are struggling but that is the precise time we need to rely on one another. The support and encouragement of others strengthen us in times of weakness. What other ways has your Grow Group found to come alongside one another?

PRAY

Jesus doesn't call us to lie by the pool or even to get in the water. He calls us to himself. Matthew Henry wrote, "The proof of our spiritual cure is rising and walking."

Make the focus of this prayer time on our need for Jesus to help us "get up and walk." It can be hard to be transparent and vulnerable in a large group. Create groups of 3-4 to pray for one another.

- Thank him for one another and the joy of being his body with Christ as head.
- Pray for those places that need healing and forgiveness.
- Pray for God's power to lead you into paths of godly living.
- Ask him to show you who you can share this good news with this week.