

## Getting to the end of Ourselves: Helpless to be Empowered

Gentleman, we have been the object of a hurtful, insensitive stereotype for many years. This stereotype has been perpetuated everywhere by the opposite sex. This cruel stereotype makes the claim that men are unwilling to stop and ask directions.

It sounds absurd I know. Supposedly we will drive hundreds of miles in the wrong direction, while patient, and much smarter non-male passengers implore us, "Please stop at the gas station and ask someone", "Will you do it just for me?", "We're never going to get there on time now", and "Why do you have to be so stubborn?".

If I hadn't experienced this for myself I would not believe it to be true. Gentlemen, we must stick together in defending ourselves against this falsehood **and deny it to the bitter end!**

Well, you might be very surprised to know that research on this very subject was published in the *American Psychologist* in 2003. Oddly enough, the research was conducted by two men, who I am certain were hoping to prove the error of this heinous stereotype.

Their research proved among other things that:

- Men are less likely to stop and ask for help
- Men are less likely to go to the doctor
- When men do seek medical help, they ask fewer questions & share fewer symptoms.

Fellas, in spite of what we say, **we believe strongly in self-reliance**. It makes perfect sense because we were taught this way of thinking by other men as we were growing up. It was both told and demonstrated to us that men:

- Are Lone Rangers (who may have a sidekick to deal w/mental tasks)
- Do all the heavy lifting w/out asking for help
- And never, never throw like a girl

The study also says that we'd rather suffer than cough up the word **help**.

Do you see where this is going? The best way to lose your man card is to get to the end of yourself and admit that you need help.

Apparently, if we can do anything in the world to tough things out, regardless of how foolish it is, that is what we'll do. We may argue this is what God expects from us, isn't it? **After all, doesn't the Bible say "The Lord helps those who help themselves"?**

Actually what the Bible says is that **the Lord helps those who can't help themselves.** God helps those who stop in a time of crisis and asks for help. **When we are helpless and we know it, we put ourselves in the position to receive the transforming help God wants to give us.** In other words, when we get to the end of ourselves we find God waiting to give us what we have been desperate for all along.

The story of the lame man in **John 5** is one of many biblical stories that prove this point.

This man had been lame for 38 yrs. Just think about that. For nearly 4 decades he was incapable of walking, going where he wanted to go, or getting things he needed. That is a long time to be helpless.

**Do you think he ever dreamed of being healed?**

As a child, do you think he ever lied awake at night and hoped that tomorrow he would wake up with the ability to walk? But day after day for 38 yrs the healing never came.

After 38 yrs of disappointment, do you think his expectation of being healed changed? Would it be reasonable to think he stopped praying and hoping? Would it be reasonable to think he accepted the reality that he was helpless?

The man spent his days in a public place, lying on one of the five covered porches that surrounded the pool of Bethesda. The pool was believed to have healing properties. As the text describes an angel went down into the pool and stirred the water and whoever stepped in the water first would be healed.

The pool was a gathering place for sick, blind, lame, helpless people. We're not told how long this lame man had been coming to the pool at Bethesda. But assuming he'd been coming there for the majority of those 38 years, you have to wonder about his motives at this point.

Is he still trying to get to the waters whenever the pool is stirred after 38 years, or perhaps a shorter period of time?

Maybe we picture him in the early years of his coming to the pool with excitement and hope that this will be the day he is healed. But after numerous years have gone by and he hasn't been healed he has lost all hope of being healed. He is now hopeless. Maybe now he comes to the pool daily for social reasons.

These details aren't given as Jesus comes on the scene and asks him:

**"Do you want to be made well?" Jn.5:6**

Does that seem like a strange question to you? A man is severely handicapped and every day he goes to a healing pool. And he is asked if he wants to be made well. It seems like a no-brainer doesn't it? But is it?

Is it possible that this man didn't really want to be healed? Could Jesus have asked the question in a way that questioned his sincerity?

- Hey friend, do you want to be healed?
- Do you want to be healed?

Maybe Jesus is on to something here. Have you ever known anyone who didn't want their lives to be better? Or someone who was content with a very basic existence and low expectations.

It seems that nearly every conversation I've had with others about homeless people the idea is presented that "they just don't want anything different". There are agencies and services available to folks who are homeless and often they don't want the help.

Have you ever known anyone who “came to church” but didn’t really want God’s help?

- show up & occupy a seat on the pew like they are checking a box on a list
- only interested in making new business contacts.
- only comes to church to pacify a family member.

There could be lots of reasons why people would **“hang around the waters without wishing to be healed”**.

But who wouldn’t want help, we ask? **Someone afraid of change.**

Again, let’s think about the lame man in Jn.5. He had been lame for 38 yrs. This was the only life he knew. He may not have liked it, but he had learned to survive as a beggar. Yes, life was difficult but he never had to learn a trade or work. His whole existence revolved around the pool at Bethesda where many other sick and helpless people stayed. This was normal to him. Isn’t it amazing what people can learn to endure.

**And isn’t there a touch of this man in all of us?** We accept a lot of things we know could be better.

- I could be a better husband if Eva would just listen to me more.
- I could be a better father if my girls weren’t so demanding of my time.
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We say, “Well, that’s just my life,” as if it can’t be any other way **unless someone else makes the effort to improve.** I’ll be right here by the pool at Bethesda when you’re ready to change.

And we decide God must want us to be where we’re at and in our current circumstances, because if He didn’t He’d make something else happen.

**In other words we blame God for our lives. And if the circumstances of our lives is God’s fault, then why would we ask Him for help?**

Just like the lame man, we get used to things and we reason that a limited life is less frightening than the thought of change. Resignation is better than disappointment.

Who wouldn't want help? **Someone in denial of reality.**

It is likely that the lame man in Jn.5 had been disabled for so long that he no longer had an idea of what it would be like to have the use of his legs. He spent his days surrounded by hurting people. His world was confined to the boundaries of the five porches around the pool of Bethesda. He wasn't around too many healthy people, so unhealthy became his new normal.

To him, there was no possible way he could be healed after being lame for 38 yrs. As a last resort he'd been sitting by the pool hoping someone would help him into the water. And on the slim chance he where to be healed, how could he adjust to life as an able-bodied person. Where would he work? He never learned a trade. He had no marketable skills. What would he put on his resume about job skills?

I'm not certain that he took Jesus seriously because his view of reality was skewed by 38 yrs of being lame. In reality, Jesus was the Great Physician who could heal him, but his past may have caused him to be in denial of reality. Even if he could be healed, he may not have wanted to be healed.

Who wouldn't want help? **Someone who is ashamed of their condition.**

See if this sounds familiar. We get tired of dealing with the stress and anxiety caused by the choices we've made in our lives. Choices that leave us in less than desirable circumstances. We know that we need to seek help from others, but we're ashamed of our circumstances. The shame that we feel is overwhelming and it becomes unthinkable that we would go public with our problems. As a result, we keep our problems hidden & suffer through life.

I recently read about a man walking to a restaurant next to a hotel where he was staying. As he walked he was approached by another man who asked if he could spare a few dollars. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a couple dollars and after giving it to the man he asked him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Lenny".

He asked Lenny, "Where do you live?" Lenny looked down the street in both directions and said, "You're looking at it." He asked, "How long have you been living on the streets?" And Lenny said, "Eight years". He thought about that and

asked, "What's the hardest part for you?" and without hesitation Lenny said, "Asking for help".

The two men talked for a few more minutes and the man asked Lenny, "If it's so hard for you to ask for help, what finally made you do it?" Lenny replied, "I had no other choice."

Lenny was at the end of himself. **When we finally come to the point of admitting that we need help, we are getting to the end of ourselves.**

As we look back to the text in Jn.5 we see this encounter between Jesus and the lame man and it becomes apparent that the lame man was literally at the end of himself. When Jesus asks him, "Do you want to be made well?" his answer indicates he wants to be made well but he has nobody to help him.

We make the same mistakes the lame man made. We look for our own pool at Bethesda. We go where the crowd goes and follow the ways of the world hoping that life will get better. And when life never gets better we get disappointed.

-DirecTV commercials "Don't end up in a roadside ditch"

**Jesus wants us to see that there is a better way. When we get to the end of ourselves & recognize that we are helpless He is there to empower us.**

The lame man is our example. For the first time in 38 yrs he stands on his own feet and walks. He is no longer helpless. He was empowered to go beyond the boundaries of the porches of Bethesda. He can leave the pool.

There is a real sense in which all of us are lame because of our sin. Jesus is asking each one of us if we want to be made well. But to be made well we must get to the end of ourselves and see how helpless we are.

Don't let the fear of changing keep you from being healed.

-We can do better, but not by ourselves.

-Being a Lone Ranger only works on TV.

-“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me”. **Phil.4:13**

-Jesus will make you what you ought to be

Don't let the denial of reality keep you from being healed.

-yes we are sinners, but we can overcome through Christ (Rom.8)

-life is no longer about the flesh, it is about walking in the Spirit Rm 8:5-13

Don't let the shame of your condition keep you from being healed.

-when we become children of God we are sanctified & Jesus is not ashamed to call us brethren (Heb.2:10-15)

-In Christ we have nothing to be ashamed of any longer!

Jesus told the lame man to get up and walk! Jn.5:8

The lame man didn't say, "It's been so long since I stood or walked, can I wait until tomorrow to try? I really need to think about this overnight."

He didn't say, "I will be so embarrassed to walk in front of my friends, can I wait until they go home tonight?"

**If you are hearing Jesus tell you it's time to get up and walk**, what are you waiting on? It doesn't matter how long you've been lame, Jesus can heal you. For the man at the pool 38 yrs wasn't too long for Jesus.

When Jesus was dying on the cross, a thief was a few feet away dying on another cross. Can you be any more helpless than when there are nails through your hands and feet, and your struggling to breathe, and your life is ending as people all around watch and shout insults at you? Against all odds, the thief asks Jesus for **help because somehow he understood that it wasn't too late.**

The thief had surely lived a terrible life, and in the last tiny fraction of his life, moments from his last breath, Jesus says to him, "...today you will be with me in Paradise." Luke 23:43

To those living today it's not too late to come to Jesus in your helpless state so that **He can empower you to rise and walk.** And there has never been a better time than the present moment.

“We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For He says, “In an acceptable time I have heard you, And in the day of salvation I have helped you.” Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.” **2 Cor.6:1-2**

Friends, we do not have to accept a life without Christ. We don't have to suffer through life as crippled people sitting by the pool.

But we must ask for His help. And the more helpless we are, the better, because it forces us to see that Jesus is the only source of healing. He meets at the end of ourselves and empowers us to rise and walk!

Do you want to be made well? Will you come?