

Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew, Bethesda, having five porches. In these lay a great multitude of sick people, blind, lame, paralyzed, waiting for the moving of the water. For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and stirred up the water; then whoever stepped in first, after the stirring of the water, was made well of whatever disease he had. Now a certain man was there who had an infirmity thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he already had been in that condition a long time, He said to him, "Do you want to be made well?" The sick man answered Him, "Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; but while I am coming, another steps down before me." Jesus said to him, "Rise, take up your bed and walk." And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed, and walked.

Text: John 5:2-9a A 11/12/17 Prov. 3:1-8 James 1:2-5, 12 Responsive Psalm: 30 Ps. 19
Hymns: 281, 456, 457, 784

DO YOU WANT TO GET BETTER?

Dear fellow believers in Christ,

Years ago I was talking to my pastor about something that was bothering me. He let me 'get it off my chest.' When I was done, I guess I expected him to say, "You poor guy;" and in general feel sorry for me. Instead, he asked me, "What are you going to do about it?"

In the city of Jerusalem there was a special pool. A large crowd of people with various diseases and injuries would gather around that pool. From time to time an angel would stir up the water, and whoever went into the water first was miraculously healed of whatever was wrong with him. There was a man in the crowd who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. He didn't have anyone to help him get into the pool, so he hadn't been able to be cured.

That would be very hard to be an invalid for all those years. Life isn't always fair. I know that, but it's one of my personal 'things' that I sometimes struggle with. Being honest with myself, my totally unrealistic concept of what is "fair" in life is having things be the way I think they should be. Just because we are God's children, it doesn't mean He's going to make everything happen in our life the way we would like it to. The Bible tells us, "*We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God*" (Ac. 14:22). Like that invalid man, we all have different things we struggle with in life – mental or emotional struggles, our physical health, problems with friends, family problems, marriage problems, problems with our job, financial problems – you name it. We can worry ourselves sick over our problems. Our problems can cause us deep sorrow, they can make us depressed, and they can make us very upset and angry. Some of the things we have to struggle with affect our whole life.

Jesus asked the invalid man, "*Do you want to be made well?*" If that were anyone else but Jesus asking that question we would say, "What kind of dumb question is that!" Of course someone who had been an invalid for so many years would like to get well! But it was Jesus asking the question, so it was just the right question. What the man had been trying to do to get better by waiting by the pool had not worked. Now the Son of God was asking him if he wanted to keep trying to do things his own way, or did he really want to get better?

You have your problems, and I have my problems. As we each look at our life, Jesus asks us, **“DO YOU WANT TO GET BETTER?”** If we choose to feel sorry for ourselves, be mad at God and the world, try to run away from our problems, and in general give up, we have only ourselves to blame when our life doesn’t change for the better. The Lord doesn’t want us to sit back and do nothing to try to help ourselves. He has given us our brains and our abilities, and He expects us to use them. At the same time, the Lord wants us to look to Him and place our trust in Him. Scripture says, *“The mind of man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps”* (Prov. 16:9). *“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight”* (Prov. 3:5-6).

No one would help the invalid man get into the pool. Everyone else was trying to get into the pool first. Still, the man waited by the pool. Do we want to keep doing things our own way, even when our way isn’t changing our life for the better? Do we want to try to run our own lives? Or do we want Jesus’ help to truly get better? Wishing our life were different doesn’t help us. If we want our life to be better, we need to face up to the way things actually are in our life, and ask God to help us make the best of the life He has given us. Whatever problem we may have, if we don’t want to get better, we won’t. (“I’m kind of depressed that I’m not in better shape,” lamented the man as he sat in his easy chair all afternoon.)

Our human nature has a perverse way of wanting to hold onto what is familiar to us, even when what is familiar to us causes us pain and trouble. We may be hurting, maybe very badly. But breaking out of our ‘comfort zone’ can be scary, and it can take a great deal of on-going, hard work. Of course everyone with a problem wishes that problem were gone. But the only way we can truly overcome our problems is if we are willing, with the Lord’s help, to do what needs to be done to overcome them. Are we willing, with the Lord’s help, to do the things we need to do in order for our life to be better?

We read in Psalm 34, *“Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many good days, keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking lies. Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.”* Wise Solomon assures us, *“This will bring healing to your body and refreshment to your bones”* (Prov. 3:8). If we have been fighting God and His help, we need to stop it and ask Him to help us do good, constructive, positive things that please Him instead. If our problems affect us mentally and/or emotionally, especially if we are depressed, we can’t simply ‘pull ourselves together’ and ‘snap out of it.’ We can, however, with the Lord’s help, stop letting our problems control our life. Paul tells us in the fourth chapter of Philippians, *“Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me – put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you”* (vv. 8-9). With the Lord’s help and blessing, we can let our minds dwell on, and keep ourselves busy doing, the kinds of things that will improve our life and make us happier and bring us *“the peace of God that surpasses all understanding”* (Philip. 4:7).

“Jesus said to [the man], ‘Rise, take up your bed and walk.’ And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed, and walked.” Like the invalid man, we find the healing we truly need in Jesus. Jesus is *“our refuge and strength, an ever present help in trouble”* (Ps. 46:1). Jesus invites us, *“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke*

upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light” (Mt. 11:28-30). If we want to get better, we need to keep praying to God and not give up until He answers us. Jacob wrestled with God in prayer, telling Him, *“I will not let You go unless You bless me”* (Gen. 32:26). The Lord will help us, and He will make things better for us. Jesus promises us, *“Keep asking and it will be given to you; keep seeking and you will find; keep knocking and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened”* (Mt. 7:7-11). With the Lord’s help, whatever problem we have, things can improve! The psalmist assures us that the Lord *“heals all [our] diseases”* (103:3). If we want it, the Lord will either take away what bothers us; or, if it is His will to leave us with that problem, for the time being, or for our lifetime, He will give us whatever we need to accept His will, cope with it, and be at peace with it. We say with Paul, *“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me”* (Philip. 4:13).

Jesus says, *“It is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick”* (Mt. 9:12). In love Jesus confronts us with our biggest problem: sin. And in love, Jesus healed us of our sin-sickness through His suffering and death on the cross. Since Jesus loves us enough to do that for us, He certainly wants to help us, and will help us in every way that we need Him to.

When I have problems, I often think about what my pastor said to me: “What are you going to do about it!” How very simple, and how very profound! In effect, my pastor was asking me the same question Jesus once asked the invalid man, **“DO YOU WANT TO GET BETTER?”** Whatever situation we find ourselves in, whatever problems we may have, we each need to ask ourselves, “What am I going to do about it?” “Do I really want to get better?” Do you need help with something in your life? Do you have a problem that is really troubling you? Are you carrying a heavy burden that causes you worry and sorrow? Jesus is always by your side. Jesus has all the help you need. **DO YOU WANT TO GET BETTER?** Amen.