

## Questions Jesus Asked

# “Do you want to get well?”

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*Reading: John 5:2-9a*

Picture the scene around the well of Bethesda. It is a crowded place with lots of women and children, and the occasional man, coming to collect their water supplies. Men generally meet in town squares to discuss their business. Women gather at wells and water holes. It is a noisy place. There is another part to the picture of this particular well. There is a legend that this well has special healing powers. In the past this had attracted the rich and famous who came to take the waters. A generation or two before, the well had been extended to form two large pools with a row of porticoes down one side to allow people to rest in the shade. Today these porticoes have become the home of some of the city's most unwanted and unlovely people. Here you will find the sick, the blind, the unclean and the lame. Legend has it that every so often an Angel comes down and stirs up the water, though with so many coming to draw water for more prosaic uses it must have been difficult to tell if it was an angel or little Joseph falling in, again, that caused the disturbance. Whatever, everyone knew that the first one into the water when the angel was there would be healed. Every time the water is disturbed there is an undignified rush to get into the pool.

Into this scene of barely controlled chaos steps Jesus and some of his disciples. Now do not ask me why, but Jesus walks past many sick people and goes to one man in particular. Jesus sits on the floor beside the man and talks to him for a while. He learns that this man was paralysed thirty-eight years earlier, maybe as a result of some childhood illness or perhaps from an accident. Jesus then asks the man what at first hearing sounds like a very odd question: “Do you want to get well?” (6)

There is a very real and valid reason behind this question. Thirty-eight years is long enough to become accustomed to a situation, even to grow dependant on it. In the film *The Shawshank Redemption*, Brooks Hatlen, a long-term prisoner, and the prison librarian, is given parole and told that he must make his way in the outside world. Unable to face the thought of life outside the prison walls he tries to kill a fellow prisoner so that his parole will be revoked. Ellis Boyd, another long-term prisoner, comments, “I’m telling you; these walls are funny. First you hate ‘um, then you get used to ‘um. Enough time passes and it gets so you depend on ‘um.”

“Do you want to get well? Do you want to be free?” Sometimes it is more comfortable, more secure, to stay a prisoner, stay unhealthy, than to put ourselves through the trauma of seeking health and freedom. Sickness, whatever form it takes, becomes a lifestyle choice. Or maybe a person has been in their situation so long that they see no possible way out. This is this man’s first response to Jesus. He is convinced he can never get better because he can see no way of being first into the water (7).

How do you visualise what happens next? For all the crowds gathered around the pools, I see this as an intimate moment. I see Jesus quietly standing and holding out his hand to the man. There is no show, no voice of command, just a gentle invitation, "Come on, get up. Pick up your mat and walk away from here." Why do I see it this way? Because Jesus is not just curing a disease, he is healing a person. There is physical healing – he does get up and walk. But there is also emotional healing as Jesus helps him overcome his negative attitude and deal with the hard question, "Do you want to get well?" And there is spiritual healing. Later that day Jesus met the man in the temple where Jesus assured him that his sins were forgiven, and that he had a restored relationship with God. It also seems likely that there was a healing of relationships between the man and the others who gathered around the pool. Thirty-eight years is a long time to build up resentment, bitterness and anger. These things, too, need healing.

So I finish with a question: Is there any part of your life that has been less than whole and healthy for a long time? So long, in fact, that you have grown used to it. If so, how would you answer Jesus if he were to ask you the same question: "Do you want to get well?"

Amen

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