

I PRAISE YOU BECAUSE I AM *fearfully & wonderfully made*

CHANGING  HEARTS

Opening Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for creating us and calling us Your own. Thank You for giving us opportunities to study Your Word. Help us see others through Your eyes and love others through Your heart. Your Son Jesus shows us how important it is to be healed and made whole through His love and grace. Help us recognize His compassion for us and share it with others. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Introduction

We began our discussion by determining that each person is *wonderfully made* by our heavenly Father, and each is endowed with abilities and purpose according to God's will (lesson 1). We then spent some time discovering that disability can be imposed on people who have impairments, not only as a consequence of the impairment, but also by the attitudes and biases of society. In lesson 2, we looked briefly at two of Jesus' healing miracles: the healing of the ten (Luke chapter 17), and the more personal healing of a single man (Luke chapter 5). We will continue to focus on the healing miracles of Jesus, but first, let's clarify some concepts.

Curing vs. Healing

Many scholars in the field of disability make a distinction between the concepts of *curing* and *healing*. The simplest way of distinguishing the two is:

1. *Curing* refers to the specific act of removing or correcting a medical condition.
2. *Healing* goes beyond the clinical, encompassing the *whole* of the individual.
 - Discuss the difference between these concepts.
 - Do you agree or disagree? Why?
 - What examples or experiences could you share to support your position?

Read John 5:1-17

- What are your first impressions of this passage?

There are several key points to consider in this narrative. First, the man whom Jesus healed had his disability for over 38 years, and we are led to believe that he has spent a considerable amount of his life lying on his bed at the pool of Bethesda.

Read Luke 5:18-22

- What did this man have that the man in John 5 did not?

Having family and friends for support is important for anyone, but it was essential for those with impairments in biblical times. We learned earlier (lesson 2) that the isolation imposed on those with chronic skin conditions was especially devastating. Without relationships, the suffering was enhanced. Friendship is a valuable gift. Even today, relationships outside of paid support staff for people with disabilities are cherished.

Let's return to John 5.

The pool at Bethesda was not a Hebrew religious site. It was probably connected to a Greek healing cult, or it may have been a mineral spring. Either way, a cure was not guaranteed, or even likely; yet the man remained—almost a captive.

- What questions are raised by the man's behavior?
- Discuss Jesus' question (v.6), and the man's answer (v.7). Do you find this exchange unusual? If so, why?
- What does the man's answer say about his focus?
- What is significant about the day (v.16) on which Jesus cured the man?

It is interesting that the man never really answers Jesus' question, nor does he ask to be cured. This is one of seven healings performed by Jesus on the Sabbath. It attracted both the attention and the ire of the religious leaders, and caused them to begin persecuting Jesus. The man's response and the actions of the Pharisees nearly overshadow the curing. At first asking, the man did not know who had healed him. After running into Jesus at the Temple, the man seeks out the Pharisees and implicates Jesus.

- How might Jesus' instruction to the man in the temple be interpreted?
- Do you believe that Jesus was connecting sinful actions with impairment/disability?

Many interpret this passage by connecting sin with disability, making Jesus' instruction a threat. Remember that the man had spent 38 years with an impairment, nearly the life expectancy of his time. Reread John 5:14.

- What could possibly be worse than spending 38 years with an impairment?

Here we have an example of someone who was *cured*, but not *healed*. The man's loyalty to the religious leaders and his disbelief kept him from recognizing Jesus as the Savior and Son of God. Jesus was warning the man against the consequences of disbelief, a fate far worse than physical impairment.

Conversely, it is possible for someone to be *healed* but not *cured*. Most people with disabilities cannot be *cured*, but people with disabilities can be *healed*, become *whole*. When we emphasize *wholeness* and *restoration* as a family member of God and a receiver of His grace, we are made *whole*.

- Who comes to your mind as someone who lives a life of compassion and kindness?
- You do not need to say this out loud, but who comes to your mind as someone who may need compassion and kindness?

Although Jesus ignored some of the biblical practices, He did instruct the man to go see the priests and be declared clean. By doing so, the man fulfilled the Levitical law in the Bible. Jesus recognizes that the man's restoration to community was still dependent on cultural bias. Even though the man did not need a priest's declaration of health, Jesus knew the man needed to be accepted back into the community. Seeing the priests was the only way back to acceptance.

- Think about times you are at church. Do you feel accepted there?
- Do you feel accepted as an equal? Why or why not?
- How do you know you are accepted?
- Do people show you compassion and kindness?
- Think about times you have seen people with disabilities in your church or community. Did you accept them as equal members?
- How do they know you accept them?

As those who represent God's kingdom today, we should receive all who have been cleansed or wish to be cleansed in the waters of Holy Baptism.

- What can you and your church do to be more accepting of others, especially those who may seem marginalized or treated differently?
- How is your church recognized as a place of compassion and kindness?