



June 2018

Dear CWR/PTM Friends and Partners,

When Jesus saw him [a man who had been an invalid for 38 years] lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, “Do you want to get well?”—John 5:6

What kind of a question was that for Jesus to ask? We might imagine that a few of the words the crippled man used in response were unprintable—“What are you smoking? You think I am lying out here by the pool of Bethesda working on my tan? Of course I want to get well!” But far from being silly or naive, Jesus’ question gets to the heart of many situations that confront each of us in our lives.

Before going on: A DISCLAIMER: **Jesus was not then nor does he now minimize horrific physical, emotional or spiritual disabilities. Jesus was and is filled with compassion. Jesus is our Healer. However, the focus and teaching we find in the fifth chapter of John is spiritual healing, based on an example of a physical disability.**

Jesus asked this question because many expect healing to involve someone waving a magic wand, saying a hocus-pocus memorized prayer and scattering some spiritual pixie dust. Who doesn’t want that kind of healing—who wants to pay a price involved in “getting well?”

Sometimes it’s easier to deal with life without “getting well.” Sometimes it’s easier to blame others and live with excuses than it is to face up to reality. Sometimes it’s easier to cling to cherished beliefs and customs rather than to embrace the consequences that good health (spiritually and/or physically) will entail.

Superstition surrounded the pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem and the healing that its waters supposedly provided. Apparently the superstition was that angels would bathe in the water and then, when some kind of bubbling could be seen in the water, perhaps caused by a geothermal spring, the first diseased person to come in contact with the “stirred” waters would be healed. The waters of Lourdes in southern France and their supposed healing powers might be considered a modern-day religious superstition.

Instead of asking his disciples to move the man closer to the pool so that he could be healed the next time the waters were “stirred” (John 5:7) Jesus, in effect, said “Get over the religious superstition. Quit feeling sorry for yourself—pick up the mat you have been laying on for 38 years and get on with life.”

That may sound audacious for Jesus to say—perhaps even cruel. Jesus’ response did not mean that Jesus lacked compassion or empathy. Jesus wanted this man to know that “getting well” meant facing new realities, and that getting well might, in fact, mean leaving a comfortable, familiar environment with long-time friends—Jesus told the man to get up and walk. At other times he told people to leave what they were busy with and engrossed in and “follow me.”

Are we willing to count the cost of what “getting well” entails? The man who had been crippled for 38 years didn’t have to deal with many of the day-to-day responsibilities of life. He didn’t have to work, but rather received alms for the poor. He was with friends he had known for decades every day. If the man wanted to “get well” Jesus told him to get up and walk.

Begging can be a good source of income. Why change a winning game? I realize some roadside “homeless” people are actually homeless and destitute, but I also know some “work” a particular corner, pretending to be something they are not because the money they receive is 1) better income than they would make in most jobs they are qualified for, 2) easier income than working 40 hours a week for an employer who insists on certain rules and procedures, and 3) the money they receive from strangers is tax-free. This is not to minimize poverty, but it is to face the reality that all humans play games and work the system, no matter what their (our) condition might be.

Sometimes being sick or incapacitated in some way brings benefits that some people don’t want to give up and, on the flip side, they are unwilling to face the challenges of what being well means. **For some people, “getting well” physically and/or spiritually just might be their biggest nightmare.**

Some prefer to play the role of being a victim, blaming others—if they “get well” they will have to take responsibility for their actions. Some believe the life they know, even if it is impaired and dysfunctional, might be better than the unknown life they fear, the life they would be faced with if they “got well.”

The man picked up his mat, accepting the healing Jesus gave and therefore radically changed his life, and immediately faced opposition from the religious authorities (the people who are supposed to help and serve others were upset!). Before he was healed, the man was no threat to the religious authorities so they left him alone.

But now, the formerly crippled man had not only been healed by someone big-business religion did not recognize but his healing happened on their Sabbath—and the man was breaking the Sabbath by carrying his mat, much too heavy to legally carry on the Sabbath.

Like the Israelites who were given freedom from Egypt but found freedom in the wilderness more challenging and more frightening than the security they had enjoyed in Egypt, this man, upon being attacked by the religious authorities, may have thought “You know—life was easier just laying by the pool.”

God’s grace and freedom in Christ is not easy—Jesus said it is a narrow road. If you want the comfortable, wide boulevard then you will want the mirage-like security of religious superstitions and legalisms.

When the religious authorities heard that this crippled man had been healed, they did not organize a party to celebrate—they were angry that what had happened was outside of their control. To paraphrase them, as they “yelled” at the man who was overjoyed to be healed: “You can’t work on the Sabbath! It’s illegal to carry that sleeping bag.”

So Jesus’ question “do you want to get well?” was much like his admonitions to others when he told them to “count the cost” of being a Christ-follower. The formerly crippled man found out in a hurry what it meant to walk with Jesus. Now the man whose body had been transformed had to put up with arrogant religious authorities haranguing him about keeping the law. Now the man “who wanted to get well” had to find and keep a good job to pay the bills, pay his taxes, take out his own garbage and in general pull his weight in society. In many ways it would have been easier for him to just lay by the pool.

Some people would rather be sick than face the demands of a healthy life as a fully functioning adult. When people go to the doctor they may hear the doctor telling them that they must decrease the calories they are eating, cut back on sugar and salt/sodium, stop smoking, cut back on alcohol and exercise regularly. So the doctor asks, “Do you want to get well?”

Upon hearing about drastic changes to their lives, some people go find another doctor, because they are not willing to make those changes to “get well.” They want a doctor who will just prescribe a medicine that will change how they are feeling without changing their life.

When someone is addicted to a chemical substance or a behavior or a religious habit, it is hard for them to admit they are sick and even harder to be willing to accept the changes that are necessary to “get well.” But Jesus says, “Do you want to get well, or do you wish to remain a slave? I have come to offer you freedom, but there is a cost to discipleship.”

There are those who want to “get well” but they are not willing (some would say not “able”) to quit smoking and drinking. Others want to lose weight, but they may not be willing to give up sugary desserts and candies. Some want to stop being angry about their past, and about people who hurt them, but they are not willing to forgive.

When Jesus told the man to pick up his mat and walk he was stressing the importance of making a commitment. The man had to commit himself to being well. Yes, Jesus walks with us, but he doesn't do the walking for us. Yes, Jesus heals and forgives and loves us, but he will not force us to accept the grace of God. We must pick up our mat and walk with Jesus.

“Getting well” spiritually is not just a one-time event, but it is an ongoing process, whereby we are “renewed day by day”(2 Corinthians 4:16) in Christ, and whereby, as Jesus lives his risen life in us we “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18).

The Jesus Way is a journey, a walk of faith, a walk of commitment, a grace-based way of life—and we are blessed and highly privileged to work together sharing *The Jesus Way* with so many around this world, through the ongoing work of Plain Truth Ministries.

May God empower, enable and embolden us to choose the harder and more difficult right path on *The Jesus Way*, the strait and narrow way walking with Jesus, rather than the easy and wrong path that leads to destruction.

Thanks for your part in this work—it is an honor to walk with you as we all walk together with Jesus and follow him!



Greg Albrecht
President, Plain Truth Ministries

CWR/PTM Prayer List—June 2018

These requests for prayer represent just a few of the thousands we receive and pray for. We invite you to join us in praying for these and the others that space does not permit us to include here. Thanks for joining with us as a CWR/PTM Prayer Partner.

Please pray for me. I've had multiple spinal fractures and I cannot endure the pain anymore.—Ontario, Canada

I struggle to break free from the grips of addiction—please keep me in your prayers.—New York

Please pray for my brother and me, that God will grant us healing of our health problems.—Virginia

Please pray for my mother's overall health—physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually.—Texas

Please continue to pray for me; I have a lot of inflammation and pain from my sciatic nerve.—Mississippi

Please pray for our son-in-law that the Holy Spirit will provide the understanding he needs at this time.—Nebraska

Please pray for me as I'm struggling with health problems, financial difficulties and depression.—New York

Please pray for complete healing for me and my twin brother.—Ontario, Canada

Please pray for my son's drinking problem and that God will help him come to know Jesus.—Ohio

Please pray for a friend who was hit by a car while walking and fractured his knee and pelvic bone.—California

Please pray that I will have good health soon and that I will have enough income to pay all my bills.—Georgia

Please pray for my grandson, age 22, who suffers from a rare kidney disease.—Kentucky

Please pray that I will love others the way God wants me to. It seems that I allow people to keep hurting me.—Delaware

Please pray for the healing of my left knee and leg and for healing of my heart condition.—New York

Please pray for myself and others at the company that I work for. We need a respite from the "daily grind."—Virginia

Please pray for my friend, a young Christian, who has lupus and has just come home from the hospital.—Mississippi

Pray that God will heal me of scoliosis—I'm in constant pain especially when standing and walking.—Texas

Pray that my grandson will be able to endure his jail sentence until he gets out.—Alabama

My daughter broke her leg in three places and dislocated her ankle. Pray for her full recovery and relief from pain.—Ohio

Please pray for our family who has lost our 15-year-old-granddaughter in a four-wheeler accident.—West Virginia

Please pray for me as my Medicare check has been cut and now I can't pay all my bills.—South Carolina

Pray for healing of my mom's spinal stenosis and knee pain, my dad's stroke and my chronic neck pain—Pennsylvania

Please pray for my son who just got out of prison. He has a very bitter attitude. He is on parole and needs a job.—Texas

My brother-in-law is diabetic, suffers from stomach pain and has lost a lot of weight. Thanks for your prayers.—Florida

Please pray for my grandson, age 24, who recently had his last round of chemo.—Tennessee

Please pray for a friend who has advanced Lyme disease and another friend who has Stage 4 lung cancer.—New York

Please pray for my sister who fell and fractured her pelvic bone. She's in excruciating pain.—Virginia

Our Father in Heaven: We thank you for your grace, mercy and love. You know each of these individuals, and we thank you in advance for the answers you will provide for each request. With thanksgiving for our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, our suffering servant who heals us, in whose name we pray—Amen.