

Savoring God's Word

A Meditation on John 5:1-9

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This meditation exercise on John 5:1-9 is especially for those wanting God's help in healing life's wounds. If you wish to have a group meditate on the passage together, the instructions for the group leader are in italics. If you wish to use it alone, ignore those instructions. This meditation roughly follows the pattern of *lectio divina*, but also includes elements from the Ignatian style of Scripture meditation. For more information about how to meditate on Scripture, see [Savoring God's Word](#) or tape [Meditating on Scripture](#).

WARMING UP (5-10 minutes)

Center yourself by breathing in and out several times. Relax your neck and then take time to let your muscles relax. Turn over each distraction one by one, jotting it down, if necessary, to surrender it. Ask yourself the following question to help focus your thoughts for meditation on today's passage. **In what areas of life are you at a standstill? Why?**

Close your eyes and take a few minutes to quietly consider this question. It's OK if nothing comes to mind right away. Just enjoy being in God's presence.

Group leader: After group members have had a chance to greet each other, read the centering instructions above. Then present the above "quiet question." You may want to set the tone by praying aloud: "Help us, O God, to set aside what is around us and invite you to the center of our being." Let them reflect quietly for a few minutes and then repeat the question. Ask them to share their thoughts in a sentence or two. Anyone who wishes to pass may do so.

READING the PASSAGE (15-20 minutes)

Read silently the passage printed below, noting the explanations on the right.

Group leader: Ask a group member to read the passage below aloud. Suggest that other group members might want to close their eyes and listen.

JOHN 5:1-9

JESUS GOES TO THE PLACE OF NEED

1 Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for a feast of the Jews. 2 Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. 3 Here a *great number of disabled people* used to lie--the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. . . . 5 One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years.

ITALICIZED WORDS & PHRASES

GREAT NUMBER OF DISABLED PEOPLE Jesus may have healed many or all of these people, but John chose to tell about this one because of the heat it generated later among the Pharisees (John 5:10-15).

JESUS SPEAKS WITH THE DISABLED MAN

6 When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, "Do you want to get well?"

7 "Sir," the invalid replied, "I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me."

JESUS INVITES HIM TO WALK

8 Then Jesus said to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." 9 At once the man was *cured*; he picked up his mat and walked.

CURED This cure was complex: his physical disability was cured, as well as 38 years of deterioration of muscle and bone. Also, after not being upright on one's feet for just a few weeks, people often can't stand without fainting. This man stood and walked, apparently without limping, fainting or falling.

If you haven't read the notes in the right column, read them silently now. Take a minute to consider the following questions.

Group leader: After the passage is read, ask group members to read silently the explanations in the right column and then to jot down answers to the questions below. After a few minutes, have them choose one question and share their answer to that question in a sentence or two. Or they may pass, if they wish. Explain that this is not a time for discussion, but for reporting responses to the questions.

WILLINGNESS

1. This man didn't approach Jesus and didn't ask to be healed. In fact, Jesus challenged this man who had been disabled for 38 years: "Do you want to get well?" Jesus' question has made people speculate that the man no longer wanted to help himself. He may have felt trapped and helpless, and was no longer willing to try. It's difficult to tell. The man didn't even answer Jesus' question directly (Do you want to get well?), but gave an explanation of why he hadn't been healed through the pool.

When, if ever, have you gotten so used to a bad situation that you quit trying to resolve it?

2. Consider the disabled man's reply, "I have no one to help me." Have you had this experience -- no friend or relative to count on in certain matters? Lacking the resources you need? List a few areas in your life that are at a standstill. You would resolve a situation, except you're lacking something.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

3. Pick one of the two answers (from the previous question) and consider Jesus' question: Do you want help? Are you sure you should pursue this?

- Yes, I'm anxious to resolve this.
- If I thought it would work, I would try.
- I'm not sure.
- other: _____

(If you wish, write about this in the blank space at the end of this section.)

If so, are you willing to risk?

The right thing would be to be willing, but I'm not sure I am.

No, I've already tried so hard. I can't risk failure.

other: _____

(If you wish, write about this in the blank space at the end of this section.)

PICTURING the PASSAGE (10-15 minutes)

Before reading the passage again, consider this cue.

SETTING CUE: THE POOL OF BETHESDA

This event took place at a sheep gate in Jerusalem's huge city wall by a pool with five porches. Historians can't identify this structure for certain, so we don't know what it looked like. It may have been a gazebo type structure with a pentagon-shaped border and a pool in the middle. In Jerusalem today, there are mineral springs on the east side of the city, and the pool may have been fed by one of them.¹ This might then explain the stirring of the water and its reputation for curing. The bed the disabled man picked up was probably a mat of woven fabric or cloth.

Read the passage aloud and close your eyes, picturing the events as if they were a movie playing in your mind. Consider putting yourself in the place of the man who was healed. If you wish, contrast how you feel when Christ prods you about being willing and it feels to actually get up and walk.

Group leader: Have group members read the above cue silently. Then have a group member read the passage aloud while the others picture the events and conversation of the passage.

SOAKING in the PASSAGE (5-15 minutes)

Ponder how this passage touches your life today. Read the passage aloud again and reflect on the following question for several minutes: **What phrase or scene emerges from the passage and stays with you?** Here are some possibilities:

phrases (circle one): thirty-eight years, no one to help me

question: Do you want to get well?

scene: he picked up his mat and walked

After a few minutes, write below a phrase or scene that stays with you.

Group leader: Have a different group member read the passage aloud and then state the question printed in bold. Have the group sit quietly and then fill in the blanks above. After a few minutes, ask group members to read what they've written. Remind them that they may pass if they wish

¹Frederic Louis Godet *Commentary on John's Gospel* Grand Rapids, Kregal Publications, 1978), p. 455.

PONDERING the INVITATION (5-15 minutes)

Perhaps God is offering you an invitation in this passage to do or be something in the next few days. What might that be? Sit quietly for a few minutes, pondering this question: **What do I need to know or do or be in order to "get well"?**

Group leader: Read the above instructions aloud and after a few minutes, repeat the question printed in bold. Ask group members to respond by saying, I SENSE THIS PASSAGE CALLING ME TO: and then completing that statement with a short phrase. Anyone who wishes to pass may do so.

PRAYING (5-10 minutes)

Take a few minutes to respond to God about this meditation. **How do you feel about what you sensed (or didn't sense)? What is it you most want to say to God at this time?**

Group leader: After allowing a few minutes for private prayer, ask group members to pray for the person on their left. Anyone wishing to pray silently may do so, saying, "I'm praying silently." When they're finished, they can say, "Amen."

DAILY LECTIO:

If you wish, use the above format to meditate on God's word between group meetings. You may wish to focus on today's passage everyday this week or use the following passages:

- Luke 5:1-11 (Jesus healing a paralytic lowered by four friends)
- Luke 6:6-11 (Jesus healing a man's shriveled hand)
- Luke 7:1-10 (Jesus healing a centurion's servant)
- Mark 7:31-37 (Jesus healing a deaf-mute)
- Luke 13:10-17 (Jesus healing a crippled woman)
- John 9:1-9 (Jesus healing a man born blind)

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