



Small Group Tools: FaithWalk

August 21-22, 2010
John 5:1-8; Psalm 144

Community

TODAY'S THEME

Jesus heals on the Sabbath. It seems like nothing will stand in the way of Jesus reaching out and healing the broken people around him. Jesus' compassion for a man who had been ill for 38 years stands in stark contrast to the religious authorities, who are more concerned that he is working on the Sabbath.

WHAT DO WE WANT OUR SMALL GROUP TO KNOW?

If this is a story about the blind, the lame, and the paralyzed, who among us isn't? If we're asked if we want to be healed, how could the answer be anything but yes? If the real issue isn't about putting our hope in the power of God, then what else could it be?

WHAT DO WE WANT OUR SMALL GROUP TO DO?

We want to acknowledge our brokenness and trust Jesus for healing. We want to become agents of God's healing on behalf of others.

INTRODUCTION: THE ER

An Emergency Room (ER) is a medical treatment facility specializing in acute care of patients who present without prior appointment, either by their own means or by ambulance. Due to the unplanned nature of patient attendance, the department must provide initial treatment for a broad spectrum of illnesses and injuries, some of which may be life-threatening and require immediate attention. (*– wikipedia.org*)

ICEBREAKER

Have you ever been a patient in an emergency room? Describe your experience. What is it like when you get a lot of sick and hurting people together in one place?

A pool at the Sheep Gate in Jerusalem was like an ancient waiting room in the ER. Our text tells us that here the lame, blind, and paralyzed would gather. The pool was a place of healing, and there were many places like this where healing was supposedly common. This venue carried with it a sense of superstition. People believed that occasionally an angel would descend and stir the waters, and then the first one into the pool would receive healing.

As we study together today we'll explore our own brokenness and learn to more fully trust in Jesus for healing.

PRAY TOGETHER

God, we often feel like we're waiting, lingering for the moment to come when everything is made right. We recognize that, in many ways, we are each blind, lame and paralyzed. We are not able to see the needs of those around us. We are hesitant to be the hands and feet of Jesus. We are immobilized by our fears and failures. Give us hope that you can heal the broken places in our life. Give us faith to trust you for everything. Amen.

Content

John 5 begins a larger section that is commonly understood as the festival cycle. John 5 places Jesus in Jerusalem during "a festival of the Jews," most likely a Sabbath festival. An interesting, but not earth-shaking, note is that there's a lot of chatter about the actual placement of chapter 5. At the end of chapter 4 Jesus is in Galilee, but then suddenly in chapter 5 he's in Jerusalem. In chapter 6 he's back in Galilee. This is scintillating to some, but probably not so much for us.

Anyway, in chapter 6 we read about the Passover Festival; in chapters 7-8, the Tabernacles Festival; and in chapter 10, the Hanukkah Festival. What we can say for sure is that the festivals were of profound importance in first-century Judaism. That this story takes place within the context of the weekly festival of the Sabbath indicates that it's set within a framework of celebration and remembrance of God's faithfulness. Respect, reverence, devotion, awe, you name it – it's all due God. (*Read John 5:1-18.*)

- The Festival of the Sabbath; a day of rest. John has an agenda in the way he composes his Gospel. The sequence of events throughout the book reveal a rather sophisticated purpose. "The festival is the Sabbath and the argument that flows from it is based on rabbinic expectations for behavior and piety on the Sabbath. Above all, John (and Jesus) has a 'Sabbath understanding' of the festivals that we will see surface repeatedly in the festival cycle. Festivals were made by God to bring good gifts to his people, not to legislate and control behavior" (*– The NIV Application Commentary: John, page 171*).

- Jesus enters the city at the Gate of the Sheep. Jesus is the great shepherd.
- There is a pool there identified as Bethesda. Greek texts also call it Bethzatha, Bethsaida, or Belzetha. The meaning is something along the lines of either "house of sheep" or "house of mercy."
- Jesus takes the initiative and asks him, "hey, do you want to be made well?"

• The man doesn't answer the question, and blames his current situation on others.

• Jesus doesn't play into any of that and simply tells the man to pick up his mat and walk.

• This man doesn't know Jesus, doesn't ask for his help and doesn't have any faith. There isn't any testimony of who Jesus is, no confession of sin, nothing. He simply obeys and is healed.

• But it's the Sabbath. That is a huge problem for those who have let orthodoxy, getting it right, living inside the box and trying to protect God get in the way of what God is trying to do – and with a pagan, no less! This man doesn't know Jesus, yet God is at work in his life!

• The man doesn't know Jesus. He simply points to his own healing. The joy of new life obliterates the legalism he must somehow debate. Talk about the emphasis being on the wrong syllable!

DISCUSSION Why is it such a problem for Jesus to heal on the Sabbath? What kind of modern day rule-keeping, or legalism, do we get stuck in? Give some examples. Does it bother you that Jesus heals without any confession of faith or repentance for sin? Where in our culture do people “wait by the gate” to get their healing? Where does superstition enter our story? Where's the line between superstition and faith? How do we know?

Our culture loves the idea that God helps those who help themselves. The truth is, that's nowhere in scripture. God helps those who are incapable of helping themselves. If this is a story about the blind, the lame and the paralyzed, who among us isn't?

DISCUSSION Name some ways in which we are blind. What are some ways in which we are lame? How are we paralyzed by fear and failure?

If the question is “do you want to be healed,” how could the answer be anything but “yes?”

DISCUSSION Where in your life do you feel you need the healing touch of God?

If the real issue isn't about putting our hope in the power of God, then what else could it be?

DISCUSSION What barriers stand in the way of truly putting our hope in God when it comes to healing? If God has the power, why isn't everyone healed? Are there some answers to prayer that we simply can't see?

GOING DEEPER: HOPE

We often say, “God couldn't possibly heal me; I'm such an unlikely candidate.” In this story, the man doesn't ask for healing. Even when Jesus asks him if he wants to be healed, he skirts the question. But he does have hope; he held out hope for 38 years! He must have seen

other miracles along the way. Hope lets you see the big picture of what God is up to. Be open to hope; be open to hoping in Christ.

DISCUSSION What role does hope play in our healing? How does seeing healing in others impact our faith?

Application

We want to acknowledge our brokenness and trust Jesus for healing. How can we do this?

We want to become agents of God's healing on behalf of others. How can we do this?

As a group develop a list of how to be an agent of healing.

Example:

• We could be God's “presence” for someone in the hospital simply by sitting with them.

• We could be God's _____ by _____.

• We could be God's _____ by _____.

• We could be God's _____ by _____.

• We could be God's _____ by _____.

PRAY TOGETHER

God who heals, give us eyes to see our broken places and trust you for healing. When we're tempted to live for ourselves, make us the hands and feet of Jesus for someone else. When we are paralyzed by fear, teach us to trust you in all things. We want to be your agents of healing in our broken world. Lead us to those people and places where we can make a difference. You have blessed us to be a blessing. Make this idea a living reality in the coming week. Amen.

ADDITIONAL CONVERSATION AND REFLECTION

Stewardship

JOHN 6:1-14

To steward all that God has given us is to responsibly manage all that God has provided for us. In John 6 we find the story of the feeding of the five thousand, in which there is a profound thread of stewardship. In the face of seemingly very little (five loaves and two fish), there is a remarkable outcome (five thousand people are fed). God can do a lot with a little. But God calls us to be in the middle. Consider the places of scarcity that you're aware of today. How can God use you to bring a sense of abundance (of grace, mercy, peace, etc.) to those places?