

# THE MAN AT THE POOL OF BETHESDA

## THE WORD

JOHN 5:1-15

## Discussion Guide

### Connect to My Experience

Share a time you felt powerless or hopeless.

- What did it feel like to be powerless, even if only for a season? What were some of the most frustrating elements of that time?
- Some respond to powerlessness with anger while some become passive and apathetic. Silently consider where you fall on that scale.

Discuss the ways the experience of powerlessness, real or perceived, manifests itself in our lives.

### Transition:

In our passage, a man has been disabled for many years. He feels trapped by circumstances beyond his control. Jesus bursts onto the scene and heals the man, instructing him to get up and walk. The man is invited to new life, both physically and spiritually. The scene takes place on the Sabbath, stirring up anger amongst the Jewish leaders, revealing once again their hardened hearts and blinded eyes.

### Connect to the Word

*Read John 5:1-6, then discuss the following:*

Jesus was in Jerusalem once again for the celebration of a religious festival. During His time in the city, He encountered a great number of people with physical ailments gathered around a pool. Jesus approached one individual from among the crowd of

disabled—one who had been disabled for many, many years—and asked him an unexpected question, “Do you want to get well?”

- Jesus focused His entire attention on one man when there was an entire crowd of people in need of healing. Why might Jesus have approached this man in particular?
- Of all the questions Jesus could have asked, He asked the man if he wanted to get well. What might Jesus’ question reveal about the state of the man’s heart and mind?

*Read John 5:7-9, then discuss the following:*

Unexpectedly, the man did not express a desire to get well, nor did he deny it. Instead, he offered an explanation of his situation. Perhaps he did not know Jesus or His reputation as the healer. The man’s response seems to indicate a deeply engrained sense of powerlessness as he cited others’ behavior as the reason for his continued status. Unhindered by the man’s response, Jesus issued a three-fold command: Stand up, take your mat, and walk. The man was healed, but the man’s response was surprising—immediate obedience to Jesus’ command.

- What did the man’s initial response to Jesus’ question reveal?
- Jesus did not engage with the man’s explanations, but instead took action to heal. What does Jesus’ decisive action reveal about Jesus’ power and God’s redemptive intentions?

Only after the healing does the gospel writer reveal that it took place on the Sabbath. Jesus knew that both His behavior and command to the man would cause conflict with the Jewish leaders.

- Why did He proceed? Why not simply come back and heal the man the next day?
- What might Jesus be implicitly declaring with His behavior?

*Read John 5:10-15, then discuss the following:*

After following Jesus’ command, the healed man was confronted by Jewish leaders who took issue with the man’s behavior—specifically with his carrying of his mat on the Sabbath.

- The leaders were so distracted by Jesus' command to "take up your mat and walk," they missed (or ignored) the fact that Jesus made the man well. What does their narrow-minded focus reveal about the state of their hearts?
- Is there a danger for the church to lose focus on what's important? If so, in what ways?

After the healed man's encounter with the leaders, Jesus pursued and confronted him. He reminded the man that he had been freed from his physical ailment; now he was to leave off sinning and be free from his spiritual bondage.

- What does Jesus' holistic concern for the man's well-being demonstrate about His desire for the man, and for all God's children?

While the text is not clear about the man's response to Jesus' call to leave off sinning, we learn that he reported to the leaders that it was Jesus who had healed him. After this report, the Jewish leaders began to persecute Jesus (v. 16).

- Why might the man have responded to Jesus' command in this way?
- In what ways might our testimony of what God has done, or is doing, in our lives result in persecution?

### **Connect to My Life and the World**

Each one of us is familiar with the experience of powerlessness and brokenness in our own way. Some face the challenge of chronic illness or pain; others carry the weight of depression or anxiety. Some of us bear the heavy burden of past regret and sin, some of which still bear consequences in our daily lives. We can trust God's redemptive, restorative intentions for our lives. We are invited to lay aside fear, apathy, bitterness, and anger, and instead allow the Holy Spirit to empower us to grow in Christlikeness. Obedience to Christ is the only path to wholeness and freedom.

- In today's story, Jesus acted on behalf of both the man's physical needs and spiritual needs. What does this demonstrate about the heart of God toward us as holistic beings—mind, body, and spirit?

The man had lain by the pool for 38 years. Healing introduced a completely new way of being in the world.

- Consider what would change in your life if you surrendered yourself to God's will and way.

While one man was healed, dozens remained unhealed that day. While that is not the outcome we would prefer, it does not diminish the presence of God in the lives of those unhealed that day.

- How can we faithfully receive God's "no" when our hearts long for "yes"?