

Spiritual Growth Lessons from Christian Ambassadors

Lesson 6, May, 1999

“Do You Want To Get Well?”

by Sharon K. Griffie

John 5:2-9 (NIV) - 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. Here a great number of disabled people used to lie -- the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. 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?” “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.” Then Jesus said to him, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.

Jesus had gone up to Jerusalem at the time of a Jewish Feast. Upon his arrival he found his way to a famous pool called Bethesda. This pool was deep enough to swim in, but the crowd of people who had gathered weren't there to go swimming. These people, who were suffering from all forms of illness, believed this pool had miraculous powers that could heal them.

This superstition had spread all over the ancient world and still exists in some parts of the world today. Beneath the pool was an underground stream which would bubble up every now and then, disturbing the waters. The belief was that the disturbance was caused by an angel and that the first person to get into the pool after the troubling of the water would be healed.

As Jesus walked among the numerous disabled people, someone pointed out to him a man who was lying on a mat. Jesus learned that this man's physical condition was not good - not good at all! In fact, he had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. Thirty-eight years is a long time to lie around waiting for the conditions to be just right to receive a miracle of healing.

Given the knowledge about this man's physical condition, Jesus knew it would have been very unlikely that this man would ever be the first to get into the pool after the water had been stirred.

Yet, the man sat on his mat year after year, hanging on to the slim chance that some sympathetic person would come along someday and help him into the pool at just the right time.

As Jesus approached him, the invalid surely thought, “Here comes my man. He's the one whose going to put me into the pool! My days of sickness are over!” Jesus walked up to the man all right, but he made no offer to put him into the pool. Instead he asked him a rather odd question, “Do you want to get well?”

This may sound like a very foolish question to ask, but to Jesus it was the wisest question he could have asked someone who had lived as an invalid for thirty-eight years. He wanted to know, point blank, if the man had considered what life would be like as a *well* person. Would he be able to handle the responsibility? Would he be willing to shoulder the burden of making a living, rather than depending upon others for handouts? Jesus wanted to know if he really wanted to change, or if he would rather stay as he was, depending upon others to feel sorry for him. Would his fear of the unknown keep him from experiencing new life as a well person?

The invalid responded immediately with what appeared to be an excuse. He told Jesus he wanted to be healed, but he just didn't see how he could be made well, with no one to help him into the pool. He said, “While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.”

Jesus knows all of our excuses. He has heard them a trillion times. He knows that a lot of people would be hopelessly stuck in their afflictions, if they believe all the conditions surrounding them had to be absolutely perfect for them to get well. At some point our excuses run out. We cannot truthfully say, “I can't...You don't understand...I don't have anyone,” when Jesus is standing there with the power to set us free.

Jesus was commanding the invalid man to think seriously about what he was going to do with the rest of his life. If you want to get well, then do

something about it. "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk!" At once the man picked up his mat and walked! After thirty-eight years the man finally decided he was ready to get well. He was now free to follow Jesus.

For the purpose of spiritual growth, I would like to show you another side to this story. What if the invalid had said to Jesus, "I can't, I'm too afraid to even try to get up?" Then this man would have continued to commit a sin that we don't always think of as "sin." It is called the "sin of omission." We commit this sin anytime we "omit" (ignore, leave undone, evade, or neglect) to do something God has asked us to do.

James 4:17 (NIV) - Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.

To successfully follow Jesus we must live by His principles, not "react" out of fear to conditions around us. Recently I got a letter from an inmate who was only three weeks from being released. This was the first time he had ever written to me. His request was straightforward, "My son and I have lost everything we own...We need help...Please send me a US Postal Money Order in the amount of \$500...I'll pay you back right away!...See you soon!"

As an ambassador *for* Christ, my question to him must be the same as if Jesus were standing directly in front of him, "Do you want to get well?" ("Are you ready to live responsibly?") With merely three weeks left before his return to the streets, perhaps it seems easier for this inmate to simply appeal to my sympathies. Keep in mind, Jesus doesn't ask us to do what is easy. He asks us to do what is right. If I were to send him the money, it would not contribute to his spiritual growth. It would only keep him in bondage, hindering his spiritual growth.

Why do we sit back like the man at the pool of Bethesda, expecting someone to come and rescue us? Why do we call upon Jesus, or His servants, only as a last resort? Sometimes it is our pride that stands in the way of getting our relationship right with Jesus. In our stubbornness, we think time will heal everything wrong in our lives. Time doesn't heal our lives without Jesus! We need Jesus in our time of need (which is every hour of every day) so we can heal and be made whole. Sitting in a prison cell cursing the

darkness, year after year, without turning on the light of Christ, serves no purpose whatsoever.

A man who doesn't have peace of mind, is a man who is self-destructing on the inside. For twenty-two years, my friend Larry (a prison inmate), carried within himself a deep dark secret. Overwhelmed with shame and immobilized by a sense of terror, he kept his secret hidden from everyone. What happened to him at the age of fourteen traumatized and affected his entire life, until he broke his silence at the age of thirty-six.

Three years ago, Larry decided twenty-two years was too long to live in his self-imposed mental prison. Thanks to God, Larry was set free from his torment by sharing his experience with a trusted friend. He now shares his nightmare with prison inmates through this lesson, in the hope that others might be made whole.

At the age of fourteen, Larry was sexually molested by a family friend whom he trusted. One day after school, this man pulled up in his car and offered Larry a ride home. Instead of taking him home, however, the man drove him away from town. When Larry became suspicious, the man said, "Relax, I'm just going to stop by a friend's house for a minute." Once at the friend's house, they told Larry they were going to smoke a couple of joints and drink a couple of beers, before they took him home. Still unaware of their real motive, fourteen year old Larry was getting high. While Larry was in a weakened, drunken condition and unable to flee the scene, both men held him on the bed and forcibly raped him.

Larry knows through his experience as a teenager, that sexual assault is a life-changing trauma. He wants you to understand that through the help of Jesus Christ, victims of rape don't need to be mentally imprisoned. The day Larry decided he wanted to get well, is the day he became responsible for his own life, becoming a free man on the inside. The question remains. Do YOU want to get well?