

JOHN 5:1-15

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.

(verses 5-9)

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So often in the Gospels we encounter people coming to Jesus with heartfelt requests, trusting he is able, eagerly hoping he will provide the help they so desperately need.

I think of the leper, falling on his knees before Jesus and begging, *"If you are willing, you can make me clean."* Then there was Blind Bartimaeus at the side of the road near Jericho, crying out, *"Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"*, desperate to receive his sight. The Syrophoenician woman called out with similar words, begging Jesus to heal her daughter who was demon-possessed. Mary and Martha, sent Jesus panicked messages while he was a long way off, urging him to come quickly to help their ailing brother, Lazarus. Friends brought the paralytic to Jesus, expectantly lowering him right through the roof into his very presence, requesting healing. And then there was that chaotic scene on the doorstep of Peter's house in Capernaum, as person after person presented themselves, with various kinds of diseases and demonic affliction, eager for Jesus to heal.

Such eagerness and yearning and hope and nascent faith, expressed itself passionately, all of it reaching out in Jesus' direction. Each one received the answer to their request, sometimes in surprisingly unexpected ways.

But this scene at the pool of Bethesda is very different. The focus is not on Jesus at all, but rather on the pool. That's where everyone's hope is trained. The rumour seems to have been that a disturbance in the water indicated an angelic presence, and the first who plunged into the pool would be healed.

That hope, so far completely unrealized, is the reason this particular man is lying there this day. He's been an invalid for thirty-eight years. We don't know how many days and months and years he's invested in finding healing at that pool. But what we do know is that his expectation didn't centre on Jesus at all.

Thankfully, Jesus' attention focused on him. When he *"learned"* about the man's condition, either through word of mouth or direct divine perception, Jesus himself took action. He didn't wait for the man to turn his gaze in his direction. No. He himself stepped in. He took initiative.

"Do you want to get well?" he asked. The man gives excuses. No matter. Jesus persists. *"Get up! Pick up your mat and walk."* And at once the man was healed.

It's a wonderful picture of the initiating intervention of the Lord. The man is looking elsewhere, but Jesus interrupts. It's the Lord's initiative, pure and simple.

Which actually is an insight into the reality of each and every instance. It's always the Lord's initiative. Each of those who reached out to Jesus did so because the Lord himself had first initiated with them. As Jesus himself would later say, *"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him"* (John 6:44). A.W. Tozer, quoting an ancient writer, says, *"God is always previous"* – he's always there first.

And C.S. Lewis, in The Silver Chair, gives his own angle on it, recording a conversation between Jill (having requested to come into Narnia) and the Lion, Aslan. When Jill indicates she was the one who initiated by asking, the Lion, representing Jesus, responds simply: *"You would not have called to me unless I had been calling to you."*

It's true at the pool. It's true in the whole of life.

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Lord Jesus, thank you that you are continually reaching out to me. Help me this day, by your Spirit, to be responsive to your voice. Amen.

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Pray, Watch, Listen:

Pray the above prayer. Watch for the Lord's activity. Listen for his voice. Respond.