

Do You Want to be Well?

by Leslie Vernich

In John 5, Jesus asks a man a puzzling question. He asks him "Do you want to get well?" Seems like a crazy question to ask someone who had been paralyzed for 38 years, lying on a mat, begging his entire life. Why would Jesus ask him if he *wanted* to get well? Of course he would, wouldn't he?

Here is where we must stop, press pause and think more deeply or we might gloss over this familiar story and miss what we need to hear.

The man answered Jesus, "I can't, sir. I have no one to put me into the pool when the water bubbles up. Someone else always gets there ahead of me."

Why didn't this man tell Jesus, "Yes, I want to get well. Please, heal me." Instead he came up with the reasons or excuses why he was never helped or healed.

I wonder if Jesus asked this man if he *wanted* to get well because he knew that getting well would mean significant changes in this man's life. Was he ready for them? Did he want to learn how to live differently than he always had? For example, he would no longer be entitled to beg for his sustenance. He'd have to find work to do. What about his friends? As a crippled man, he had no one to put him in the pool. How would that change as an able-bodied person?

God has given each of us an incredible and powerful gift, and that is our freedom to *choose*. We get to choose how we spend our time, what we do with our negative emotions, what we dwell on and meditate on, moment by moment, day by day, and week by week. These small choices repeated over time form habits, and these habits shape our character and our lifestyles. Sometimes we get so used to being sick, we don't even realize that we have a choice.

Do you know you can learn to make different choices, become whole and live differently? Each week in my coaching and counseling practice, I talk with people who are afraid to get well because getting healthy requires changes that they aren't prepared to make. They might have to learn to communicate more constructively, give up some bad habits, and/or change the way they see themselves and others. They will learn to think differently and see things differently which is all good, yet scary.

The apostle Paul refers to this process as "renewing our mind" (Romans 12:2) and "putting off our old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (Ephesians 4:22,23).

Let me ask you the question Jesus asked this man. Do you want to get well? I believe God wants to heal you and heal me. He wants us to be whole, holy, and happy. But your *will* is involved.

As Moses encouraged the Israelites as they were being set free from the bondage of slavery and entering into the Promised Land, I hope you choose life! (see Deuteronomy 30:11-20)