

Welcome family who have joined them on Today. We love these kids, Tommy and Samantha. I've known them for years, and they're just some of my favorite people. And then meeting Zach and Lane, they're my next door neighbors now, so they end up on my porch a lot. And I couldn't be happier when I see them walking up the steps.

Today we are continuing series that we started a little while ago. My little boot here is a good way to introduce it. Of all the infirmities one can get, a stress fracture is probably the least satisfying. There's no obvious broken bones, there's no bleeding, no open wounds that people can gap at and give you lots of sympathy. Until I wore the boot, I just suffered in silence.

Now, when you put the boot on, woohoo. The world changes. People care. All of a sudden, as injuries go, a stress fracture is pretty lame. Bob Kern, if you're in the room, this is your kind of joke.

Walking around on a boot feels a little silly. It's cumbersome and makes you walk funny and getting it on, I don't know if you guys have ever wore a boot before, but, man, you think it's simple. It's velcro. After all, how hard can that be? Second graders master that.

But my word, getting this thing on is like, oh, it's just sometimes easier just to go, I'm just going to just walk around in pain today. Don't do that. But maybe you're here today and you also have at times felt like, man, it's just easier to give up and just live with the pain. Live with the pain of your circumstances, live with the pain sort of in your family situation, your life, it's just too hard. So let's just give up and quit hoping.

And so today, as we open the scriptures, I'm praying that you'll be encouraged that God has not given up. So if you've got your scriptures, go ahead and turn to John chapter five. We're going to be staying there primarily through most of the sermon, and then I'm going to pray and we'll get started. Jesus, I'm thankful for this community that you've placed us in. I'm thankful for the families that you've called here.

I'm thankful for the neighborhoods and people that you've surrounded us with, the places that you've called us to enter into, places where we are surrounded by the spiritually, the physically, and the emotionally at risk. Those who are tempted to just give up and surrender to their circumstances and their trauma because of the hopelessness of their circumstances or the seeming hopelessness of their circumstances. Father, today as we look at Jesus, I pray that just looking at Jesus would encourage us. It would strengthen our hearts and strengthen our will to follow Him more closely, to trust your Word more faithfully. We pray this in Jesus name.

Amen. So if you're in John chapter five, we're going to begin sort of at the beginning sometime later. The scripture says Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Jerusalem sits up on a hill and that's why they say up went up to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals. It doesn't say which.

I suppose it doesn't matter if the scripture doesn't say maybe Passover. When the Jewish festivals happened, Jerusalem became packed like Mitchell during Persimmon festival. Just a

crazy amount of people and all sorts of people. If you're from Mitchell and are familiar with the Persimmon festival, you know all sorts of people show up there. But there is in Jerusalem, near the sheeppgate, a pool which in Aramaic is called Bethesda, which is surrounded by five covered colonnades.

If you go down to the French Slick Springs Hotel, you can walk along the veranda there sort of a colonnade with the post and sort of similar. The scriptures say that a great number of disabled people used to lie under that colonnade in the shade. The blind, the lame, the paralyzed one who was there had been an invalid for 38 years. It's a long time, 38 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 envelope replied, I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred and while I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me. And Jesus said to him, okay, get up. Pick up your mat and walk. And at once the man was cured and he picked up his mat and walked. Now, the day on which this took place was a Sabbath.

And so the Jewish leaders said to the man who had just been healed, pay special attention to this. It is the Sabbath and the law forbids you to carry your mat. But he replied, the man who made me well said to me, pick up your mat and walk. So they asked him, well, who is this fellow who told you to pick up and walk? The man who was healed had no idea who it was for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there.

Later, Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, see you're well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you. The man went away and told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who made him well. Our story begins at a pool, a pool that sits just a very short distance from where the temple would have stood if and when we go back to Jerusalem. It doesn't look like it's going to be happening in March, but we will return to Jerusalem.

I believe in faith and when we go, we will visit this pool. It's currently a tourist spot, but in Jesus' time it was a place where pilgrims to Jerusalem coming in for Passovers and other high holy days, other religious festivals would gather. There were some baptismal, like baptismal pools there where they would go in and do ritual cleansing before they went into the temple. But it was also a place where the infirm believed they could be healed because of an old tradition. It was a crowded and bustling place.

The word Bethesda is translated house of grace. I love that. Bethesda turn to your neighbor and say, Bethesda, house of grace. Good job. You didn't have to do it, by the way, but I'm glad you did.

And it's here at this house of grace, this pool of grace, that a miraculous miracle takes place. So I want you to just picture this Jesus making his way through this throng of festival attenders and sick people and homeless people who have sort of landed there for 36 years. We know his

attention is drawn to one particular person. There one man in a crowd of thousands, and he stops, and I believe he begins a conversation. I wish I could have heard that.

John doesn't record the bulk of the conversation, but in the conversation, Jesus learns that the man has been lame for 35 years. And then if Jesus asks him the question, do you want to get well? It's a great question, isn't it? It is a fantastic question, not just for us, but for those we minister to. And the guy responds not with like a yes, Lord, I want to get well.

He sort of prevaricates. Such a great word, prevaricates. He sort of hedges and haws a little bit. Instead of responding with a simple yes or no, he responds somewhat I don't know, maybe even evasively. He says, Well, I don't have any help.

But the question was not about the help he had with his family and friends. He says, Other people have more advantages. To me, they're closer to the pool. They got people. But the question was not about your disadvantages.

The question simply was this do you want to get well? Are you at a point in your life where you are ready for something different? This book gets me a lot of sympathy. My mom, who is a lovely woman, but she never has waited on me hand and foot with this second cup of coffee. Plate of cinnamon rolls, no problem.

Let me get it for you, honey. You just sit right there. If I'm still wearing this at Thanksgiving, it is going to be a second helping game changer, I'm telling you. Thinking about getting an arm sling just to add a little bit more sympathy.

Not all who are sick want to get well. Sometimes our ailments, our sin, our dysfunction puts us in a place where we get lots of attention. Do you want to get well? Well, Jesus? Not until after Thanksgiving.

After that, yeah, we're good. Do you want to be well? There are many who aren't who have found their illness and their mat that they're laying on and the poolside that they're sitting beside to be more comforting than the hope of something different. But in this case, I think there's something else going on. You see.

How long has he been infirm 35 years? Being able to answer yes, I want to get well is beyond the ability of those who have sort of given up hope. They're like, I don't even know how to answer that question. This week, we're going to be offering something. Over the last year, faith leaders in our community have gathered regularly to discuss the issue of domestic abuse.

In our community. It's one that has caused a lot of pain. It's caused a lot of trauma, it's caused a lot of brokenness, caused a lot of shame. And quite frankly, churches have not done a great job speaking into this issue. We've certainly not done a good job of caring for the victims of domestic abuse.

And sometimes our silence in the issue has made situations worse. So our area churches, we want to change that. We're going to be offering some training this coming Wednesday from 930 till about 130 in the afternoon. Lunch is included. It's targeted towards pastors and business leaders, community leaders.

But if anyone here feels like I want to be part of this conversation, you are welcome to talk to Nate or myself about getting on that list. We would love to make room for you, because what we want to do as a church, to be the best church for our community, is we want to actually help people get well. Any work that Jesus does in our very rarely, so rarely that it's almost impossible to find an occurrence where it happened. Does Jesus just zap us? Maybe the little boy who was in the coffin, he touched the little boy, and the boy was made well.

He brought the dead to life. That's an instance where nothing was required other than just to be there when Jesus was there. But in almost every other situation, Jesus asks us to participate in some way with our getting better, doesn't he? He always meets us where we are, but he also invites us to be part of what's going on here. In this instance, Jesus asks the man, do you want to be well?

And the man has a hard time answering. So Jesus says, okay. If you don't really know the right answer, can you just simply obey? Do the next thing that I'm going to ask you to do. And he asked him to do three things.

He asked him to get up. He asked him to pick up his mat, and he asked him then to walk. Get up is oftentimes the hardest first step of faith that we are presented with. My dad had knee surgery on Tuesday. After the surgery, we walked in the recovery room, and he is still just like the meds.

His lips are shaking, he's shaking. He is in excruciating pain. Man, it hurt to watch my dad, who's always been just a symbol of strength, suffer like that. But the nurse assured him and us that as soon as he got up, the knee would lock into place. The medications would begin to really work around that area, and he would feel really good.

Now I'm sitting there on the side watching him shaking in pain and going, oh, I cannot imagine putting any weight on a knee that has just been axed open. Really, if you've seen the videos, you know how they do it. It is traumatic to even think about. And I'm going, oh, I can't do it. But here's the truth.

As soon as dad got up and even just getting up, it began to work. As soon as he lifted himself up, he began to feel so much better. Dad trusted the nurse in ways that I had a hard time doing. We need to trust Jesus, who says, Get up. Just getting up begins the process of getting well.

And then pick up your mat. Now, what is a mat to a crippled man? Have you ever thought about that? I see guys walking around here with their backpacks on and their stuff, and I'm going to be honest with you. Sometimes it stinks.

It's a little grungy. And you're like, Can I get you a new backpack? At least something a little cleaner? You see, a mat, to us, just looks like a dirty, cheap, worn out blanket. But for this guy, for 38 years, it has been his home.

It's the thing that sort of marks out the parameters of his place in the world. And without that, who is he going to be? It's his security. Even in pain, my dad felt much more secure laying on the bed than standing up. I could see it in his eyes.

But Jesus says, pick up that dirty blanket, fold it up, and put it in your backpack if you have to. But Jesus says, your life is much bigger than a mat. Your life is much bigger than a bed. You see, we were not made we were not created for beds and mats. We were created to walk in the fullness of joy.

Amen. And the walking is the first part. Whoo. So dad gets up, he puts some weight on his leg. He leaves the comfort and stability of the bed, and the nurse says, okay, start moving.

And when dad started moving, he could feel the difference in that knee. The old broken knee is gone. Behold, all knees have become new. It's like, oh, my word, start walking. And dad did.

And he starts walking. He's walking around. He's like, this is amazing. I feel better than I felt in years. Now, part of that is very potent medication, but even with the medication, he says, I can feel a difference in my leg.

Jesus tells the man, Start walking. And the man does. Picks up his mat, and he takes walking. Jesus slips away into the crowd, the guy starts walking. And almost immediately, what happens?

Some religious police decide they need to tell him now that he's up and walking, how he should start living his life. They said, hey, you can't keep doing that. Oh, no, you can't do that anymore. Used to do that, but now you got to do this.

Isn't it sad that instead of seeing an amazing 38 year old miracle walking around the streets of Jerusalem, all they could see were the infractions to their religious rules and expectations? So here's the deal. We've talked about this in weeks past. To be the best church for our community means that we do not add expectations on people that Jesus did not put on them. Amen.

We do not do that. So if you are new to the faith, and I'm only going to use this example because I've heard it a couple times, if you think I'm talking about you, maybe I am. If we're back there having coffee and you let a cuss word slip out, it's all right. It's all right. Now, do I want people cussing around the church?

No. We're trying to raise children that we want to learn good words, not bad words. But can we just look at each other and say, we are all walking miracles. Jesus is not done with us yet. And here's the deal.

If Jesus is going to find us, this is a great place to find us. We are all works in progress. So if you hear it, don't get excited. Just say, hallelujah, we're glad you're here. Let me teach you a new word.

Oh, did Jesus heal you of this? But you still struggle with that. There's no condemnation. Instead, we together recognize that we are all in this process of Jesus making us who he wants us to be. And all of us are on that journey at different places in our lives.

And all of us wrestle with things that other people don't. And that's all right. Jesus is not done with us yet, because Jesus finds this guy. He's healed him. He's up walking, but Jesus is not done with him yet.

That is not the end story. The physical healing is just one aspect of this guy's new life. The scriptures say later, Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, see you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you. Now, notice first of all that Jesus finds Him.

I love that. I love that. Grace finds me not. I don't have to go searching and begging for it. Jesus finds us.

Jesus found Him and he finds Him in a good place. He found Him at the temple. He finds him at church. This guy has recognized something amazing has happened, and he goes to the place where he instinctively knows is the right place to be. He goes to the temple to give thanks for this work that has happened in his life.

Along the way, he gets accosted by very well meaning, I'm sure, religious people, but not helpful in the least. He's come to this place to give thanks to God, and here is where Jesus finds them. And to be the best church for this community means that we're going to have people sitting around us that need a second touch from Jesus. Turn to your neighbor and say, I need a second touch from Jesus. Periodically, we all need a second touch from Jesus.

He is not done with any of us yet. When Jesus finds him, he picks up where he left off. He says, now that you're no longer in physical risk, let's talk about your spiritual risk. He says, Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you. And these are harsh words on the face of it, aren't they?

It's like, wow, Jesus, man, come on, give me a break. It's been 15 minutes. But Jesus says, no, this is important. You see, physical infirmity cripples the body, but sin cripples the soul. And the crippled soul will not see the kingdom of heaven or experience it here.

So he says, walk, but walk in a new way. Matthew Henry, the commentator, says this we're all by nature powerless in spiritual things. We're blind, we're halt, we're withered. But full provision is made for our cure if we attend to it, if we say yes to Jesus. So how do we attend to it?

How do we pay attention? How do we move into the fullness of life that Jesus has promised us? Well, the first thing is getting up. It's scary. Maybe you've been in pain for a long, long time, and maybe getting up feels like it's just going to be more pain.

It's like, oh, no, I'll just stay right here. But Jesus says, get up first. Timothy tells us that God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of self control. Doing the next right thing, shaking off fear and unbelief and getting up is that first step of faith in getting well and then picking up your mat. Watch your mat.

I can tell you right now, no matter how much you love it, if it's keeping you crippled, if it's keeping you down, if it's keeping you helpless, if it's keeping you hopeless, then it's really just a dirty. Jesus says, no, pick that up. Take control over that. That doesn't control you. You control it.

Sometimes it means disconnecting from the familiar dysfunction of your previous life. It's hard to do. It is. But your life is intended to be more and bigger than an old mat. You were created for something bigger.

Hebrews Twelve tells us to throw off everything that hinders and sin that so easily entangles. We've been given God given freedom and we're expected to use it. Don't be controlled by anything other than the Holy Spirit. And then we walk. We walk in the newness of life.

Hebrews goes on to tell us, let us run with perseverance. The race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. So how do we walk? We walk in two ways. One, with perseverance.

We don't give up. We stick to it. It's going to get hard. There will certainly come against us adversaries and problems and challenges, but we don't give up. We move through them.

Sometimes we move through them slowly. Sometimes we just plow right through them. But we don't give up. We keep going. How do we keep going?

With our eyes fixed on Jesus. Not the stuff around us, but our eyes fixed on Jesus. And if we do that, the scriptures say we'll experience a new life. That's what the man at the pool experienced, a new life. Otherwise, Jesus says something worse can happen to us.

Now, what could be worse than being a cripple for 38 years, an eternity separated from God? That's worse. The story of the healing of the man at the pool of Bethesda is all about grace. All about grace. 38 years, a lot of people have given up on this guy.

He's a hopeless case. Yeah. Can't do anything about that. Can't do anything about him. He begun to believe it himself, but not Jesus.

Jesus extended grace, and this man, even halting and feeble and weak and doubting accepted it and said yes. And he got up and he took his mat and he began to walk. I want this church to be a

pool of Bethesda. I want this to be a church of Bethesda, a house of grace for those in our community who need physical assistance to help them walk when they can't help themselves. We partner with Becky's Place, providing shelter for women and children.

Bertha's Mission, providing food for those who are lacking food. Partner with Hope Resource Center, helping these young, scared new moms and dads see a future beyond their current fear. And of course, the Men's warming shelter. By the way, it's starting up. If you want to be partners with that and help us serve on Thursday night, we'd love to get your name so we can start putting our teams together now.

Jesus didn't heal everyone at the pool. Did you notice that? A thousand people. And Jesus chose one.

This is hard for me. Brad's son is dealing with brain cancer. I've got a little almost nephew who's going to be having heart surgery. We're going to pray for both of those guys at the end of the service. Little Ella has been out of hospitals all last two weeks.

And I'm like, Jesus, of all the people you could heal, heal the ones who are noble and who have good backstories and are sweet and precious and we love them so dearly. I want you to heal them. I don't care about that guy. God's grace is so mysterious at times.

I don't understand why he chooses that one man, the stinky middle aged guy who had laid there for 38 years and complained about having no one in his life. Why did Jesus touch him and not heal? Ella, I don't know. But I know it has something to do with God's grace, because why did Jesus touch me? Why did he touch you?

It's grace. It's grace.

We can't fix everything in our community. Jesus didn't even do that, so we can't. But let's not take the easy route where we just say, Yep, let God sort it out. Instead, we want to say yes to opportunities that God puts in our path, and we want to follow Jesus wherever he leads us. And so this morning, I want you to do the same thing.

I want you to follow where Jesus leads you, and it may be your own life. Just saying that I believe my life can be different. You may have grown so comfortable there on your mat that you can't even begin to think that something could be different in your life, that things could be better. And Jesus says, hey, I'm noticing you. And I'm asking you, do you want to be well?

And if so, how are you going to respond?

As we come to this place of communion, we need to recognize how far we are from perfect health. We all come blind, halt and lame to this place where we give thanks for God's grace in our lives. We may find ourselves discouraged when we consider how far we have yet to go in our own minds, but I don't think this is the moment for that. Certainly, if there's ongoing sin,

confess that. But I want you this morning, just think and remind yourself what a walking miracle you are.

You may let a cuss word slip out every once in a while, but God's working on that. You may have a little temper where you want to kick the dog, but confess that and say, Jesus, I want everything in my life to conform to you. There's stuff that's still stinky and gross. Get that out. But in the meantime, I want to thank you for what you've done so far and You've brought me here.

Let's pray.

Jesus, we want to love you with our heart, soul, mind, and our strength.

And strength comes oftentimes before we know we've got it.

Lord, we want to surrender in obedience to you because we know that you came not just to heal our hearts, but to renew our strength. And so this morning, as we take the bread and the cup, these two signs and symbols of Your grace and our need, we acknowledge our weakness. We pray for strength to run this race. For many of us, a long race of perseverance with grace to cover our sins. Lord, we thank you for Your love for us.

Help us to get up, take up our mat and walk with you. In Jesus name. Amen.

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