
Spiritual Formation Part 7

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Barriers to Following Christ Part 1

What Blocks us from Encountering Jesus Christ?

GOD AS OUR SAVIOR

John 3-5; 14-15 Barriers??

What God Desires

Verses

Others ↑ ← ← ME → → ↓ Self

Our Environment and Experiences

John 5:1-15

Have you ever wondered what blocks us from increasing our trust and faith in Jesus Christ?

In the last several studies, we have been discovering causes and motivations that block us from encountering Jesus Christ, and what blocks us from knowing Him as Savior—as in, what prevents our conversion. For this, we looked at a man who desired to know the truth but was cut off with the barrier of pride and traditions. Then, we looked at what prevents us from growing in our faith and those barriers that keep us stagnate. For this, we saw a woman, who by her choices of sin and rebellion, built a wall of shame around her, cutting off the living waters that renew and refresh. Yet, our Lord goes to these people and presents a battering ram to a seemingly impenetrable barrier and leads them to the ultimate reality and purpose in life which is He, Jesus Christ the Lord!

Now, we are at the threshold of a turn of events in the Gospel of John, after the introduction of the Word and the miracles that proved Christ's claims, and we see the events that lead to our Lord's Passion. We see an encounter with a sick man that rattles the comfort zone of the religious leaders to the point that they seek the destruction of the Christ. For thirty-eight years, a man sat by a pool that supposedly had healing properties. He sat and was determined to be healed, but somehow he was not able to get into the water to be healed. He was a man with all kinds of excuses and reasons why he could not get in and get on with his life. He faced a barrier to growing further, a choice concerning doing more with his life and his relationship to God, and he chose to sit and wait; the result was nothing but despair and excuses. So, what does our Lord say to this man, one who had lost all hope, which causes such a fervent response from

the religious leaders? *Do you want to be healed?* This is a seemingly strange question, for who would not want to be healed or restored to a better place in life? This healing brings our Lord toe to toe with the religious leaders of His day. They ignore their own law while they lift up their presumptions and rules as if they were gods, and in so doing, repress the people away from the truth. The uproar ultimately leads to our Lord's persecution and crucifixion.

These events take place at a pool that people flocked to for healing. You may have seen stories on TV where an image of the Virgin Mary attracts swarms of devotees claiming healing and miracles, or a TV preacher waves his hands and utters phrases as people fall backward, claiming to be healed. These places for healing were very popular. Perhaps the mineral salts and the hot temperature provided the body with the nutrients to promote healing; perhaps it was just psychosomatic; but, culturally, it was a place to go to be made well. During our Lord's time on earth, before modern hospitals and medicine, these places for healing were overflowing with people who were desperately seeking relief from their ills. They were called "healing shrines" and were common in the ancient world. Jesus stops by at a time when the pool was even more crowded than usual, as the people were hoping for an extra miracle of healing because of the feast day, possibly the "Feast of the Tabernacles" (Ex. 23:16; 34:22; Lev. 23:34-43; Num. 29:12-40; Duet. 16:13-16).

It is interesting to point out that this pool of Bethesda was considered a myth by liberal attackers of the Bible until it was discovered and excavated around 1967. The pool is located in the north part of the Temple Mount, near what was called Sheep Gate—just as the Bible described. There you might be, sitting in a mineral bath, wondering what that smell was, and it was because of all the sheep going in and out right beside you!

Undoubtedly, healings did occur there. Just as today, healings take place in these special areas where people go; believing one can be healed is a very powerful motivational and psychological event. When people believe they are going to be healed, and they are in a place where healings supposedly occur, and they do the expected thing, many of them are healed. Perhaps it is a miracle, as I believe; perhaps some fake it for attention, while others are only temporarily healed as their will power overtakes their symptoms for a while. Thus, the pool at Bethesda had established a reputation as a place where people could be healed. Here is a man who labored for thirty-eight years to get in the water first so he could be healed—a seemly example of sheer determination and perseverance!

I used to think that this man lay at the pool at Bethesda for 38 years, but the Bible does not say that; it says he had been ill for 38 years. We do not know why, but it was probably because of some wasting disease—perhaps cancer, tuberculosis, or multiple sclerosis. Some ailment immobilized him and prevented him from walking, or walking well enough to get where he wanted or needed to be. In any event, his disease made him unable to walk for 38 years, almost as long as his ancestors wandered in the desert. So, here was a great crowd of people—paralyzed, blind, lame, sick—all waiting

for the water to be stirred. Out of that crowd Jesus picked one man. He did not empty the five porches, healing everybody. He did not invite them all to come down so that he might lay hands on them; He went to only one man. Perhaps, because he was the neediest and the most helpless, Jesus was drawn to him; after 38 years, he would seem to fit the bill.

Perhaps, we all can see ourselves in a similar situation; perhaps you are in a similar situation and are physically ill or stuck in your journey of life. You may not be literally in a healing shrine, but you feel incapacitated in your spiritual walk or stagnate in your life. To the point, you feel helpless, weak, crippled, and lame. Whether you are literally lying at a healing shrine or seeking a change from the situation you are in now, you need help. We all find ourselves paralyzed at times, unable to do the thing we want or should do, or what we are called to do. Maybe we have come to a barrier in our spiritual growth that has stopped us dead in our tracks. We can see where we need to go, but we have no idea how to get there. We have hit a roadblock where the Lord has called us to go in our spiritual journey and growth. We have come face to face with a barrier that lames us; thus, spiritually, we cannot walk very well.

John goes on to say what Jesus did.

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?" (John 5:6 NIV)

Maybe you are thinking what a strange question that was to ask of a man who had been sick for 38 years! *Do you want to be healed?* How can someone not want to be healed? After all, he showed his persistence. But, Jesus never asked a silly or irrelevant question. Obviously, this question was important for this man to answer; maybe it is for us, too! The simple question is—*do we want to grow deeper in the precepts of the Word and character of Christ?* In other words, *do we want to go through the barrier that stops us dead in our tracks?* Jesus asks that question just as if you were in a 12 step program where you have to admit your need and your higher power before you can go anywhere out of your drunken state!

Discovery Questions

Read John 5:1-15 and make some observations:

1. Why do you suppose that healings, miracles and TV preacher attract swarms of devotees? Even if none of those healings or miracles have ever been verified?
2. Do you believe in healings and miracles? Keep in mind the Bible teaches these as so, even if they may be rare or sometimes allegedly preformed by fraud.
3. Look at this question again and in prayer, what blocks you from increasing our trust and faith in Jesus Christ?

4. Perhaps you are in a similar situation to this man and are physically ill or stuck in your journey of life. If so what do you need to do?
5. Do you want to be healed? What about growing more in our Lord?
6. How can someone not want to be healed?
7. What does it take to want to be healed?
8. Do you want to grow deeper in the precepts of the Word and character of Christ?
9. Do you want to go through the barriers that stop you dead in your tracks?
10. Have you come to a barrier in your spiritual growth that has stopped you or you feel you are in a rut?
11. What would you tell someone who has hit a roadblock in their spiritual journey and growth?
12. What can you do to see where you need to go? What if you have no idea how to get there?