

defect in order to embrace the new thing that God wants to do in your life? Are you willing to take responsibility for the person you want become? Are you willing to confront the challenge of change? Without a decisive and positive response to this question, you cannot experience the freedom that Jesus wants to give.

Thirdly, Jesus' question points to the risk of obedience. Let us take another look at today's story. Despite the paralytic's initial resistance toward the challenge of change, Jesus yearned to liberate him. Immediately after Jesus had asked the paralytic whether he wanted to be well, he gave him the direct command, "*Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.*" (5:8) This instruction encouraged the paralytic to live more freely and fully beyond his paralysis.

The paralytic immediately obeyed Jesus' command. It must have taken immense courage and faith. When Jesus told him to get up, he might have some thoughts. 'What happens if I fall?' 'How will I cope not begging for a living?' 'Can I trust this man's word? Will he help me if I obey?' Whatever he may have been thinking, the paralytic did what he was told to do. He picked up his mat, and he walked. If he had not taken this risk of obedience, he would have come to the end of his life still sitting beside the pool, still paralyzed. God begins to work miracles when we take a step of risky obedience.

Do you want to get well? Do you really want to be free to live and love more deeply? Do you want to be set free from the bondages in your life? God wants to free us, but we need to be willing to open to the willingness of change and the risk of obedience. We will be free and get well when we get up and to begin to walk again.

### Questions for Reflection

1. Describe one freedom that God has brought into your life and relationship. How did this gift of freedom come to you?
2. Where do you experience "paralysis" (or "stuckness") at the moment?
3. What do you sense the risen Christ may be saying to you with regard to this particular paralysis?

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Questions God Asks Us (5)  
**Do You Want to Get Well?**  
John 5:1-9  
Rev. Dr. Charles Yoon

When the Spanish priest Carlos Valles who worked in India was cycling through the warm Indian countryside, he became aware of a strange stillness in the air. Nature seemed to have stopped, as if waiting for something to happen. Sensing danger, he stopped pedaling, got off his bicycle, and looked around. Suddenly, he understood the reason for the eerie silence. In the low grass a cobra stood up with its hood spread and its tongue flicking. Carlos followed the snake's gaze. It was fixed on the branch of a bush just ahead. On the branch sat a little bird, completely paralyzed. He writes: 'I had heard that snakes do that to birds. Now I was seeing it. The bird had wings, but could not fly. It had a voice, but could not sing. It was frozen, stiff, mesmerized. The snake knew its own power and had cast its spell. The prey could not escape, though it had the whole sky for its range.'

Carlos decided to do something. He stirred the breeze with his presence. He tried to break the snake's hypnotic hold on the bird by waving his arms. He shouted human sounds. Eventually his efforts were successful. Reluctantly the cobra lowered itself to the ground and slid off into the grass. The countryside came alive again with its surrounding sounds. And the bird, freed from its paralysis, found its wings and flew. It discovered its voice and began to sing once more. (Carlos G. Valles, *Let Go of Fear: Tackling Our Worst Emotion* (Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 1993)

Many people today find themselves caught in the hypnotic gaze of the snake. Some are immobilized by fear or depression or despair or by some other dark feeling. Some are trapped in destructive and addictive patterns of behavior. Some go through all spiritual exercises and disciplines, such as praying, reading the Bible, or going to church, but somehow feel stuck in their relationship with God. As a result, like the little bird, they become paralyzed. They long for a new

freedom. They have wings, but do not fly. They have a voice, but do not sing. Perhaps you know what I mean.

If you feel paralyzed like this little bird, there is some wonderful good news in the Bible. God wants to free us. But we need to be willing to embark on a journey of change, risk, and obedience. This is the message of today's healing story. One Sabbath day, Jesus came to the pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem. Those who were sick, blind, and lame gathered there in hopes of a miraculous healing. Jesus noticed a paralyzed man who had been lying there for thirty-eight years. But instead of healing him immediately, Jesus asked him a question, "*Do you want to get well?*" (5:6)

This is the same question God asks us when we find ourselves paralyzed in one way or another. Do we really want to be well? Do we really want to live beyond paralysis? Before we answer to the question, let us look at the meanings of today's question.

First of all, Jesus' question today points us toward the freedom that he offers. When Jesus asked the paralytic if he wanted to get well, he was saying to him, "I want to offer you a freedom beyond your paralysis, a freedom that this world cannot give you. A freedom that can bring you release from all the things that hold you captive. A freedom that bursts with new possibilities and potential for living. It's a freedom that comes from God. Only I can give it you."

You know the pool of Bethesda was a well-known healing place. It was situated in Jerusalem, just north of the Temple. The pool still exists, and if you go to Jerusalem you can see it for yourself. The people believed that whenever the waters were stirred, the first person to get into the pool would be healed. However, the shrine was not that successful in practice. The pool of Bethesda spoke of the possibilities of a new freedom, but failed to deliver on its promise. Years would go by without any healing or the liberation they longed for.

A similar thing happens today. Think about all the promises of freedom that our world offers. However, they don't seem to be

working too well. Many people still live in bondage to fear, depression, despair, addiction, and meaninglessness.

Wonderfully, Jesus came to make available a new freedom to all – to live, to love, and to serve. Today, in the power of his risen presence he continues to come to us who are paralyzed in different ways. His question, "Do you want to get well?" brings with it the hope that we can live beyond paralysis. The hope that we can be set free from whatever holds us captive. The hope that we can fly again. The hope that we will find our voice and sing once more.

Secondly, Jesus' question confronts us with the challenge of change. Certainly that is what it would have meant for the paralytic. Was he really willing to let go of his old way of life? As he had become so accustomed to some of the benefits of being paralyzed, he really might not want things to change. After all, he had people, friends, or relatives who fed him and took care of him. He didn't have to take responsibility for his life; others had to do that for him. Perhaps he felt a certain amount of comfort with his situation. To be healed would mean having to get up and take hold of life again.

Clearly Jesus wanted to know where he stood on this issue. Did he want to get well or did he prefer to remain sick? If he wanted to make the shift from a life of paralysis into the radically new freedom that Jesus was offering him, he had to be willing to make the necessary change.

We also sometimes avoid changing those aspects that would help us to live more freely. We prefer the attention and sympathy that we get from talking about our struggles. We also battle to let go of old patterns of destructive behavior in order to move into healthier ways of relating. We don't really want to take responsibility for living life fully again. These are several ways that we resist the challenge of change.

Today God asks you, "Do you want to get well?" How are you going to respond? Are you willing to let go of some behavior or character