

HEALED BY PRAYER

Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the ninth hour, the hour of prayer. And a man who had been lame from his mother's womb was being carried along, whom they used to set down every day at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, in order to beg alms of those who were entering the temple. When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he began asking to receive alms. But Peter, along with John, fixed his gaze on him and said, "Look at us!" And he began to give them his attention, expecting to receive something from them. 6But Peter said, "I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene—walk!" And seizing him by the right hand, he raised him up; and immediately his feet and his ankles were strengthened. With a leap he stood upright and began to walk; and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God; and they were taking note of him as being the one who used to sit at the Beautiful Gate of the temple to beg alms, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him. Acts 3:1-10

He is one of the many nameless people in the New Testament whose life was radically changed by the power of God. It is amazing that so much can be said about a person in just a few short sentences. We know that he had been lame from birth. It means that he had some type of birth defect, which kept him from ever standing on his own two feet. Perhaps for as long as two, three or even four decades he had been carried from place to place. All of his life he was dependent upon the care of other people. He could not get up to leave a room without family and friends. Being crippled since the age of one myself, I have a sense of his longing to be whole, to be able to carry his own load. He lived long before leg braces and wheelchairs made mobility a possibility.

He existed in a paradoxical situation. As a male member of his family, he knew the only way to maintain his dignity was to be a breadwinner. At the same time, the only way to earn money was by begging, an occupation for those who have lost their dignity. However, necessity won out and every day his friends would carry him to the temple gate called "Beautiful." He would take his place among other helpless victims, hoping to catch the eye of a few temple worshippers. Do you notice the irony of placing those considered grotesque by the world in front of a place designated "Beautiful."

As he sat in a position that had become all too familiar, this lame man had already been about the task of begging for many hours. The sun had long since crossed the sky and the morning shadows were eaten by the bright reflection from the temple walls. Several hours earlier, friends had brought a cool drink but its effects quickly dissipated. Now, all he had to look forward to was someone coming to help him make his way home for the evening.

Placing his hand inside his pouch, the lame man fingered the few coins that had been tossed his direction by uncaring, duty-bound temple visitors. It had not been a very productive day, but truthfully, no day is very worthwhile when it must be spent begging for a few tokens. He pondered his future and slowly slipped into despair, realizing that he might spend another twenty years in this same spot.

It was nearly three o'clock with several hours of sunlight left, so the beggar put his thoughts aside and returned to the task at hand. There was still time to turn a profit. The "ninth hour" was the "hour of prayer" and there would be an influx of people entering the gate. He needed to put forth his best efforts.

Two men approaching the temple at a brisk pace caught his eye. Their path would bring them within a few feet of his outstretched, crippled legs. As they got close enough to hear his cry, the lame man, using his most pitiful voice, captured their attention with his request for alms.

As they stopped in front of the man and looked down at his face, he knew he was about to receive a sizable donation. Seldom did he ever have a face-to-face encounter. Usually, people casually tossed coins in his direction without even a glance. His expectations quickly turned to disappointment as he heard one of the men say, "I do not possess silver and gold..." Why did they stop? Was this some kind of cruel hoax? Did they just pause to offer sympathy? He didn't need sympathy, he needed money!

Yet, these two men, Peter and John, gave this lame man something far more valuable than gold and silver. They even awarded something worth more than health. Before we look at the prize given to the lame man, it is important to notice something about Peter and John that made their gift possible.

Everything that occurred in this encounter between Peter, John and the lame man is built upon the foundation of prayer. Peter and John were going to the temple to pray. The healing of the lame man was made possible because of their commitment to pray. Prayer is more than a closing statement to a worship service or an opening statement at a meal.

Prayer equips us for effective ministry to the world. As we think about ministry to the world, we are prepared through prayer. We marvel at the power and effectiveness of the early church. It is important to realize that they operated on the power of prayer. Through prayer, we are equipped to make a difference in our world. We can anticipate that God will accomplish significant ministry through our lives. As we examine the healing of this lame man, we will discover the effects of prayer on our ministry.

EQUIPS US TO RECOGNIZE THE NEEDS OF OTHERS

When you pray for the ministry of your church, one of the things you can expect is a new sensitivity. You will have a heightened awareness of the spiritual, physical and emotional needs of people around you.

How many people walked into the temple that afternoon without even noticing the crippled man? Day after day, perhaps for years, this man had occupied the same spot, and no one ever really noticed his need.

Now, for some reason, Peter and John saw him from a whole new perspective. These were men of prayer, going to a place of prayer, equipped by the power of prayer. Consequently, they now saw needs around them that were concealed to everyone else.

For several years I worked as a Police Dispatcher. One of my duties was to answer the 9-1-1 phone calls. I remember the first few days thinking that every call was an emergency. My adrenaline would pump with every ring, which was exhausting because the phone seemed to ring constantly.

However, after awhile I learned how to distinguish a true emergency. I could detect something in the voice or the manner of the caller that revealed a serious need. I was able to recognize those people who had an emergency situation.

From a spiritual perspective, we also need to get to the point of recognizing the real needs of people around us. We walk by them every day and do not notice. Hurting people are all around us. They are our neighbors, co-workers, friends and family members. We encounter them at the mall, in the office, at the ball game, everywhere we go.

Perhaps the reason we do not see their need is because our eyes have not been opened to the possibility of ministry. As you commit yourself to ministry based upon prayer, expect to have new insight into the needs of others.

EMPOWERS US TO RESPOND TO THE NEEDS OF OTHERS

The disappointment of the crippled man as he heard Peter say, "I do not possess silver and gold..." was quickly changed. Peter finished his sentence with these words, "...but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene - walk!"

He did not have time to even think about the meaning of these words. Immediately he began to feel a new strength in his legs. The useless limbs began to move and he was overwhelmed with a sense of divine power.

Peter reached out and took the lame man's hand. With the strength of a man who had hauled in numerous nets filled with fish, Peter lifted the man to his feet. At that very moment, "his feet and ankles were strengthened."

Listen to the next few words and try to capture the emotion of this experience. "And with a leap, he stood upright and began to walk..." Perhaps you cannot realize the joy of being able to walk. Occasionally I will sit on the side of the bed and contemplate what it must be like to just get up and walk across the room without putting on the braces and picking up the crutches. Now this man knew!

I mentioned earlier that Peter and John gave him something worth much more than health. They gave him freedom. For the first time in his life, he was free. The bondage to his crippled legs; the bondage to dependence on other people; the bondage to being confined to a place was suddenly gone.

By living within the confines of prayer, Peter and John were empowered to respond to the needs of this man. Through prayer we appropriate the power of God for ministry.

David Buehler was a man my age who contracted the fatal disease, ALS, commonly known as "Lou Gehrig's disease." He was an active member of our church. In fact, the church was David's family. He did not have a biological family to look after him, so our church cared for his needs.

David was rapidly losing his health, and out of necessity was moved to a nursing home. One Sunday evening, David sat in a class that I was teaching and I noticed that he was struggling, getting weaker each week.

During the worship service our Pastor was leading in a time of prayer when he stopped and did something unusual. He asked David to come to the altar. He then requested several men in the church to come and place their hands on David as the church offered a special prayer on his behalf.

It was a very moving experience, for David and the church. You could tell that David had been strengthened by the prayer - not physically, but spiritually. The next morning, lying in his bed with several church members at his side, David died. He left with confidence in the Lord, peace in his heart and a testimony on his lips.

I remember after church that Sunday evening asking my wife how the pastor knew that David needed a special ministry. What made it possible for him to respond to David's need?

The answer is simple - prayer. As he was praying, God empowered him to minister to the needs of this dying man.

As you approach ministry motivated by prayer, expect to enjoy this same power and ability. Just as Peter and John, men of prayer, were able to make a difference in the lame man's life, we will have that same effectiveness. Lives will be forever changed because we minister in the power of God.

ENABLES US TO REJOICE IN THE HEALTH OF OTHERS

Once the crippled man overcame the shock of being able to stand on his own two feet, he led a strange looking procession into the temple. His actions are described by two words:

Three times this man is described as walking. He was enjoying the freedom given to him by God. It was probably hours before he was able to sit down. Try to imagine the joy of this man, of his family and friends as he walked and jumped with his new found strength.

The second term that describes his actions is "praising." This man is leading the chorus of praises to God but he is certainly not alone. We are told that "all the people...were filled with wonder and amazement." It was a spontaneous worship service.

Peter and John, the ones who had provided the ministry of healing, certainly became a part of this rejoicing. Do you know the joy of having a positive impact on someone's life? This kind of powerful ministry brings a feeling of satisfaction that can be found in nothing else.

When you minister under the leadership of God and with the power of God, it will impact people's lives. Often you will never know the effect of your ministry. However, there will be times when the impact is immediate and obvious. The rejoicing that occurs will be a wonderful experience.

There is no greater thrill than to praise God alongside someone who has found wholeness in Jesus Christ. As you move out of your prayer into a ministry in the world, expect to have great times of rejoicing with neighbors and friends. Their lives will be forever changed because your ministry has been forever changed.

Gregory McPherson had a free afternoon so he took his three stepchildren to the creek to go fishing. The youngsters soon tired of the creek and began to explore the surroundings. Their father warned them not to go too far, but as is often true with children, their definition of far did not match his.

Twelve-year-old Melissa led the way for Bud, age nine and little brother Austin, only 5. They decided to climb the rocky incline that led to a train trestle, twenty feet above the creek. The curious children made it to the bridge and determined to walk the length of the track to the other side of the shore.

Still fishing in the quiet, shallow creek below, Greg was unaware the children were so far away. The first thing that caught his attention was the booming sound of the train whistle as it rounded the corner. The engineer spotted the children in the middle of the bridge and sounded a futile warning.

The kids reacted quickly, grabbed hands and began to run to the far side of the bridge. Greg, realizing what was happening, felt helpless twenty feet below the bridge. All that he could do was scream for them to run faster. His shouts were drowned out by the sound of the roaring train. He stood helplessly as the three children, running hand in hand, were overtaken by the massive train.

This is one of the most tragic stories I have ever heard. Yet it reminds me of the way we often are as Christians, standing by helplessly, as those around us are being overtaken by destruction. Our shouts to run for safety are unheeded and we watch people struggle through life without the Lord Jesus Christ.

You have an opportunity to change all of that. Through prayer, God has prepared you to go into the world to make a difference. You can have an impact. Your voice will be heard because you will be speaking with the voice of God.