

## Weekly Study of Sunday's Message

April 12, 2026. ***"What do you want? questions that question us". "Do you want to get well?"***

### I Intro.

We're past Easter and fully in this new series. We're glad you've chosen to use this resource. You'll want to keep up with everything that's happening at NCC. Stay connected through our social media to keep up with everything that's going on. Welcome to our companion devotional to Sunday's message. It's just a part of all we have to offer to you. Whether you were able to participate in this service or not, this devotion is free-standing. We hope you find this tool helpful on your spiritual journey. We don't want you to miss out on anything. We consider you part of our community. We have many ways you can plug into life at NCC. You can find all those through our website, app, and social media sites. Our app is the best way to livestream our services, but you can also livestream on FaceBook and YouTube. You can revisit past services, sign up for events and even give. We're encouraged by your presence when you gather with us. New and familiar faces join us every Sunday. If you join us online, we appreciate your presence. We are fully committed to our virtual attenders. We are your church family, and if there is anything you need, prayer, or anything else, please let us know.

### II Recap.

We began this series on Good Friday asking the questions: ***"What do you want?" "Why are you here?"*** To get us to examine our motives and intentions when we come to church. So, for the month of April we're hitting just a few of the questions Jesus asked, that force us to ask ourselves some important questions. And it begins with that first question. When you come to church. When you seek God. We asked last week, on Easter we asked: ***"Who are you looking for?"*** When you're looking for something, someone bigger than yourself. **What are you needing, hoping, to find?** Today we ask the question that challenges our tendency to just settle for the life we find ourselves in. ***"Do you want to get well?"***

### III Sunday.

Let's talk about: Learned Helplessness. (FUN huh?!) When we find ourselves in a tough situation, possibly threatened, and especially one we've been stuck in for a while, we have three default responses. Think about which one is your natural default. **Flight. Flight. Freeze.** We know a little about the first two. But we don't talk about the third one enough.

**Fight-** Everything we encounter is an invitation to a battle. We know these people. This may be you. You're not going to show weakness, be taken advantage of, lose. So, anything that stops you in your tracks becomes something you just mow over. You can feel your body tense up, and there is this energy that is piling up inside of you that's just looking for some outlet. Someone's going to get it.

**Flight-** This is the automatic impulse to escape, run away, or do anything to avoid the situation. You don't believe you can overcome what's happening. So, you run away to live...another day. You feel this restlessness and the energy building inside of you. But there is nothing inside of you that wants to fight. You just want to hide from your situation, and what's happening inside of you.

**Freeze-** Nothing ever changes, you feel small, powerless, unable to have any influence over the things that happen around– and to you. You can't make a difference. And if you do anything, it will turn all the attention on you. So, you become paralyzed. You're stuck in uncertainty, indecision. You're

just stuck. There's a sense of dread, hopelessness. Fear of trusting. What if I'm wrong? Even worse... What if I'm right... then what? You don't have the energy to Fight or for Flight. So, you just Freeze. Let me give a big warning about Freeze. It can lead to some form of **nihilism**. **Nihilism**- is the feeling, belief, lived out in our choices, that life has no value. What we thought was true, what we thought we could trust in- we just can't. The world we live in is uncaring, and indifferent to our situation. Everything we don't like about the world is because of outside things. It's in our politics, our language, the way we treat each other. Since everything is the worst, unchangeable, let's burn it all down. I want to give us a viable answer and alternative to nihilism. To give us hope.

We're going to divide our scripture into three smaller parts. This will work us through what Freeze looks like, what it does to us, and how we can avoid sliding into the nihilistic belief that nothing matters, or we can't change anything. This story introduces our primary question right from the start. **John 5:1 Afterward Jesus returned to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish holy days. 2 Inside the city, near the Sheep Gate, was the pool of Bethesda, with five covered porches. 3 Crowds of sick people—blind, lame, or paralyzed—lay on the porches.[b] 5 One of the men lying there had been sick for thirty-eight years. 6 When Jesus saw him and knew he had been ill for a long time, he asked him, “Would you like to get well?”**

I left the verse numbers here, because I wanted you to notice something.

**1. Footnote [b] and missing verse 4.** [b] is an important footnote. If you notice it jumps from verse 3 to verse 5. Some manuscripts add an expanded conclusion to verse 3 and verse 4: ***“waiting for a certain movement of the water, 4 for an angel of the Lord came from time to time and stirred up the water. And the first person to step in after the water was stirred was healed of whatever disease he had.”***

Most reputable ancient sources don't have this in their version of this story. So, it's not really considered authoritative. But this belief did float around with this story. Most likely any movement in the water was just bubbling that happened naturally from the flow of the stream into this pool. But a superstition built around it. And we love some superstitions. **Do you have a lucky piece of clothing for your sports team?** So, we can understand how these types of stories happen. It really doesn't reveal any important theology for us to wrestle with as we talk about this specific question. But it does provide some interesting insight to what we may have to push through in answering the question; ***“Do you want to get well?”*** Have we let odd beliefs creep into our situation?

**2. History of the Pool of Bethesda.** We don't know a lot about the pool of Bethesda. There are three different pools that have been uncovered around that place. Building pools around natural springs and rivers was very common. Civilizations before the Romans would build dams to control the flow and distribution of water. People would then begin to use these dammed up pools for ritual cleansing. Most historians believe the Romans built a temple at these pools for their own religion. So, these pools had this odd mix of significant history, and modern spirituality mixed together.

**Do we get desperate, so stuck at times, that we'll believe and chase anything that seems like a possible solution?** This is often where Freeze can take us. We're so desperate, stuck, discouraged, we'll turn to anything to look for a solution. Even magical thinking and superstition.

**3. The number 38.** Now we also need to delve into numerology. This most likely was not literally 38 chronological years. The purpose of specific numbers wasn't to give you a historical account. Those things really didn't matter to the people back then. People weren't asking how long he had been coming to this pool. 38 means a long period of waiting, in brokenness, from either poor choices,

unhelpful beliefs, or just giving up. What we call living in Freeze. Simply giving up, and thinking nothing matters. Also— 38 means just falling short of 40. Which means completion or finished. Let's connect with that place of 38. We're going to highlight the 'in your face' question stuck in the middle of this story. ***"Would you like to get well?"*** so, we ask you: **Have you ever felt like you were stuck in your own 38?** Maybe you can see the other side, the finish line, how things could be better. Or at least imagine it. But for some reason you could just never seem to reach there. It's that bad dream. You're running in slow motion but the destination always remains out of reach. We experience this all the time in our regular life. Health, finances, relationships, feeling settled, even our spiritual walk. Since we can't seem to get there, we stay stuck at 38. And it becomes sadly comfortable. *"This is just my life."* Everything wrong in our life is because of things that happen around us. This is why we Freeze, and can slide into nihilism.

So, we have to come face to face with our question today. In the middle of whatever season of 38 we find ourselves in. Stuck in Freeze, maybe even discouragement. I want you to find some empathy, understanding, compassion for this man. We also have to answer the question Jesus asked; ***"Would you like to get well?"***

Freeze and nihilism can lead to excuse making. Next verse we see that very thing, stuck in 38, in this man's response to Jesus' question.

***John 5:7. "I can't, sir," the sick man said, "for I have no one to put me into the pool when the water bubbles up. Someone else always gets there ahead of me."***

**Did you notice that this man never really answered the question?** Classic response of when we Freeze. We embrace powerlessness. We dwell more on how we can't do something, making excuses, rather than open ourselves up to want to change. Excuses are great. Because they tend to be connected to the problem. But we've retrofitted our stuckness with the reason why we're just laying down and accepting it. They're usually formed in a way they can't be specifically addressed. And excuses allow us to say we want relief, without having to change. The man said he couldn't get well because no one else would do the thing he said he needed. So, the question to challenge us:

**What is your 'pool' that's inhibiting you from getting well?**

**What are your excuses for justifying why you live in Freeze?**

We have to justify why we're not doing anything about the situation, circumstances, we find ourselves in. And we don't have to learn how to be a new person, live a new way.

The healing, courage to unfreeze, and the fallout. Now the healing (moving from a learned helplessness, living in 'Freeze' into life) and the fallout that came with it.

***John 5:8-10. Jesus told him, "Stand up, pick up your mat, and walk!" Instantly, the man was healed! He rolled up his sleeping mat and began walking! But this miracle happened on the Sabbath, so the Jewish leaders objected. They said to the man who was cured, "You can't work on the Sabbath! The law doesn't allow you to carry that sleeping mat!"***

What I'm amazed at in this story, is that even though this man was stuck at 38, for who knows how long, the second he is healed, he finally reaches 40, he knows it. He stands up and walks away. It seems even though he had gotten used to living in 38, he had never given up. And that is such an essential truth I want us to wrestle with today. Moving from 38 into 40 demands our participation. Even though this man was stuck, he was willing to pick up his mat and walk.

If you are stuck– in Freeze. If you feel like you had planned for your life to look differently, to go in a different direction. And it didn't. You've basically just given up. Accepting 38 as what your life would look like– forever. You live in this nihilistic place; "everything is garbage, and I'll just learn to live in it". There is always hope. That's why we wrestle with today's question; ***"Would you like to get well?"***

**Healing can be hard.** Healing often comes at a cost. There are always people rooting against you. Against your healing, success, forward movement. And they're not always haters. Sometimes they're people who are stuck themselves. They don't have any legitimate excuses. If they see you "*pick up your mat and walk*" it calls out their lack of effort. They live in Freeze, and celebrate their nihilism. You will be a reminder that Freeze may be familiar and comfortable. But it's not what God wants for you. But, this man is not released from the bondage to a system that didn't work. A system that said people like him have no worth, or value, and are unloveable. He not only couldn't walk, he had allowed himself to accept being less valued because of that. Rather than living into how to be a person with his disability. He allowed his disability to define who he was. And he wasn't bound by that anymore. No more living in 38. He was now living in 40. But he had to learn to live in his 40 in a world that had labeled him as a 38. And he would have to live in that broken world. And we do too.

#### **IV Challenge.**

This question challenges where we allow ourselves to settle in our lives. Living in and accepting that Freeze was okay. Nihilism– the world is cold and uncaring, was normal. We need to look honestly and deeply at our lives. How we're living, choices we're making, and more.

**Is how you're living bringing the life you feel like you were created for?**

***"Would you like to get well?"*** is a crazily probing question. It makes us wrestle with whether we are just wishing we would get well, or do we really want to get well. And having the will to get well.

**Are you ready to actively participate in your own healing?**

**Are you pushing past Freeze and a slide into nihilism?**

Jesus is inviting you into a new way of living. But you have to lean in and trust him to be healed. Jesus is not going to force you to either change or want to change. Jesus asks you if you're ready to participate in your getting well. Jesus wants you to ask, voice your desire to get well, before he acts. Not just changing your condition. But who you actually are. This question forces us to return to the earlier questions.

***"What do you want?"*** And. ***"Who are you looking for?"***

When you grow your ability to answer these first questions, you will find yourself moving towards having the courage to answer today's question.

***"Would you like to get well?"***