



**June 4, 2023 - Pastor Jason Carter**

Identity is directly connected to faith. Our faith determines how we live. There are some other things that may affect our ability to walk in confidence with God because we have practiced “learned helplessness”, been affected by group dynamics or often in live self-imposed prisons.

Some questions to ask yourself:

***What has happened that put you on the mat?***

***Do you want to be made well?***

***What is holding you back from moving forward?***

Two perspectives we are influenced by when seeing an issue:

- Our personal perspective- the way we see something
- Other people’s perspective- the way others influence us to see something

The **only** thing that matters:

***What does God say?***

***What is heaven’s perspective?***

**John 5:1-6** “Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals. Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight 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?”

**Learned helplessness:** the idea that we are powerless to do anything to change our life or situation.

There may be times in your Christian walk when you feel powerless to make decisions or move forward. You might come up against something bigger than yourself and you become stuck.

Reasons for learned helplessness:

- Poor identity: a consistent belief something is bigger than you or your ability
- Major failure: a moment turns into a condition
- Underdeveloped life skills: new things and new ways can be intimidating so you won't even try
- Highly controlled or reactive/restrictive environments growing up: mistakes were swiftly punished (overreaction) so you have learned not to try
- Loss of spouse/job after a long time
- Social media and news media: beware the algorithms!
- Experience extreme disappointment: church, job, relationship, took a risk by trying something new

All of us have an experience that has caused an area of our life to stop and it has impacted our true identity.

**John 5:** Pool at Bethesda

- Some researchers think it was hot spring that bubbled.
- Some translations say an angel would trouble the water but some earlier manuscripts do not include that verse.
- There was a belief that if a person got in the water when the water was stirred up, healing could happen.
- This man had been in this situation for 38 years.

Identify: **what put you on the mat?** How did you get here?

We generally know or can figure out what caused us to get where we are at.

**John 5:14** "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."

- Not everything that knocks us down in life is sin; life circumstances, the consequences of other people's decisions, or things out of our control can all be effects of living in a fallen world, but it doesn't necessarily change where we are (the mat).

Next, Jesus asks the question "**Do you want to be made well?**"

Jesus knows the condition the man is in and how long he has been lying on the mat. This is why the question is so powerful.

- *"Before you heal someone, ask him if he is willing to give up the things that made him sick."* -Hippocrates

If the man says yes, his life will change drastically:

- The man had a very clear idea of what would make him well, but if healthy, he would have to work, be a part of the community, contribute to the society. Is that what he really wanted?

Breakthrough is often preceded by God changing perceptions. **Wrong thinking always leads to wrong living.**

**John 5:7** *"Sir," the invalid replied, "I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me."*

- He wanted to get in the pool. That was not the question.
- How many of us would have been offended at the question Jesus asked?
- How many have interpreted God's conviction or His prompting as unkind? Or aggravating? Or a bother?
- Do you take a fatalistic approach- "It's too late now; Nothing can be done; There is no hope"?

**This is learned helplessness.**

God may ask us:

- Do you want to deal with the issue?
- Do you want to be free?
- Do you want to reengage?
- Do you want to put aside the excuses?
- Do you want a different perspective?

Sometimes we settle in our condition. Every day for 38 years, this man was placed by others. Someone had to care for him. In his mind, 38 years is too long and there is no hope. Did he think "To make change now would be difficult."?

*-How do you identify with the man at the pool?*

*-What are things that you want to be healed of?*

*-Have you settled into your condition?*

*-What does God say about your situation?*

Finally, **what is holding you back from moving forward?**

**Numbers 13** 12 spies were sent out to check the land and the produce of the land as well as the people (strong or weak, few or many).

God had promised this land to the Israelites. It would be a place where they could settle, raise families and be a nation that served Him.

**Numbers 13:30-33** "Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, "We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it." But the men who had gone up with him said, "We can't attack those people; they are stronger than we are." And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored. They said, "The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size. We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them."

This is the power of negative and incorrect group think. **This is why you must have a biblical mindset.**

The ten spies will hate the two because they choose to think differently. God had given a promise and led them to the doorstep of that promise. Yet, ten people with poor identity caused a nation to wander in the desert for 40 more years.

We tend to gravitate to those who are in the same condition or mindset.

- Gossips find gossips
- Complainers find complainers
- Fear minded always find fear minded
- Joyful find joyful
- Problem-solvers find problem solvers
- Leaders find leaders

Have you ever taken stock of who is influencing you?

- Whoever we choose to be our "people", that is who we become.
- Be careful who you allow to frame your problems and your potential.

**Proverbs 13:20** "Walk with the wise and become wise. For a companion of fools suffers harm."

**1 Corinthians 15:33** "Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character."

*-Do the people around you have a biblical worldview?*

*-Do they believe nothing is impossible with God?*

*-What is the narrative, the language that you are around all the time?*

-Is God's truth greater than your current situation?

**What has happened that put you on the mat?**

**Do you want to be made well?**

**What is holding you back from moving forward?**

Story of Aron Ralston:

*"Aron Ralston was forced to amputate his own arm after a falling boulder pinned his arm to a canyon wall. He was trapped for five days. Finally, Ralston was able to pull himself free but only after breaking and cutting off his own limb."*

*Aron: "I never even got to the point where I could really experiment with trying to get it through the bone. I just knew that without a serrated blade, that wouldn't even be possible..."*

*My mindset was that I had to use the knife to get through my arm, and if I couldn't get through the bones, I couldn't use the knife to get my hand free. It was mindset that kept me there for the length of that six days.*

*It came to me almost like divine inspiration that, interacting with me, spiritually a miracle started to happen when I realized for the first time that I could break the bones by bending them, and that was what was going to get me free - I didn't have to use the knife. The riddle that I had been trying to solve was how to use a dull knife to cut through my arm. The real riddle was how do I get my arm free.*

*"For six days, I was considering myself a dead man, to the extent that I'd made my farewell messages, and my last will and testament in a video for my family and friends. The moment I figured out how I could get free, it was the best idea and the most beautiful experience I will ever have in my life. It was all euphoria and not a bit of horror. It was having my life back after being dead."*

*Aron is bleeding and he knows he has little time before he passes out. He still must rappel down and find someone to help. This is what he had to tell himself:*

*"Yeah, as I'm facing the other direction and trying to work it through with my hand and my teeth and it's "ZZZZZZZ." And I just barely got my foot down on it to stop it from falling all the way over the edge. Had I lost it, I would have died, and knowing that, it was just one more thing. No stupid mistakes, Aron. Double back your harness, Aron. No stupid mistakes. Don't pass out when you're going over the edge while you're on rappel. No stupid mistakes. Don't go the wrong way when you get to the canyon intersection. No stupid mistakes. So, it was this voice, this inner drive that kept me*

*focused. And there were times when - the fact that I cut off my arm was the least of my concerns."*

He went back to visit where the accident happened, and this is what he said:

***"It was revisiting both my grave and my birthplace at the same time."***

Getting off the mat can be like visiting your old grave and seeing the place of your rebirth.

Aron did what was necessary to live. There was another option and the same is true for us. We may not always like the other option, but it is there. Regardless of the situation, God determines possible. We determine if we will engage Him on it and if we will believe what He says. **Let this truth resonate in your spirit.**

Positive Psychology article:

<https://positivepsychology.com/internal-external-locus-of-control/>

NF: Happy

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vhumOLNSSJY>

Article with Aron Ralston

<https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=101420504#:~:text=Aron%20Ralston%20was%20hiking%20in,cutting%20off%20his%20own%20limb.>