

What happens when God answers a prayer we never prayed? In Acts chapter 3, a man who had been lame from birth was carried to the temple gate every single day, hoping for a few coins to get him through another day. He had a routine, a predictable expectation, and a very limited vision of what was possible. Then two men walked up to him and everything changed. This message invites us to wrestle with a question that cuts right to the heart of our faith: are we limiting what God can do in our lives because we are only asking for what we can already imagine? The healing at the Beautiful Gate was not just a physical miracle. It was a picture of the deeper transformation God wants to work in every one of us. We come to God asking him to adjust our circumstances, and he wants to renovate our hearts entirely. The spiritual lesson here is both humbling and exhilarating. God sees what we truly need far more clearly than we do, and his answers are always greater than our requests. As we explore this passage together, we are challenged to loosen our grip on our own expectations and open ourselves to the possibility that God has something in store for us that we could never have scripted on our own.

Title: More Than You Expected: The Transforming Power of Jesus

Sermon Summary: Drawing from Acts chapter 3, Pastor Bo examines the healing of the lame man at the Beautiful Gate as a lens through which to understand how God consistently exceeds human expectations. The sermon traces how a man who sought only financial survival received complete physical restoration and an encounter with the living Christ. Peter and John serve as examples of Spirit-filled boldness, immediately deflecting glory to Jesus and using the miracle as a doorway to proclaim the gospel. Pastor Bo emphasizes that the miracle itself was not the destination but rather a means of pointing a crowd to the one who offers something far greater than physical healing or material comfort. The sermon calls believers to repentance, reminding them that turning to God brings not only forgiveness but genuine spiritual refreshing and transformation. Throughout, Pastor Bo anchors the healing account within the broader sweep of redemptive history, showing that God's promises made to Abraham, Moses, and the prophets all find their fulfillment in Jesus Christ. The sermon concludes with a challenge to stop asking God merely to improve circumstances and to instead allow him to transform the heart entirely, which is identified as God's greatest blessing.

Key Points:

- Jesus gives us more than we expect, often replacing what we ask for with what we truly need
- The Holy Spirit empowers believers to act beyond their natural abilities and comfort
- All glory for what God accomplishes through us belongs to Christ alone, not to those he works through
- Repentance is not merely feeling remorse but turning completely from sin and walking toward God
- True repentance brings spiritual refreshing and the complete wiping away of sin's record
- The entirety of Old Testament prophecy and covenant history points forward to Jesus as its fulfillment

- God's greatest blessing is not improved circumstances but a changed heart and transformed life
- The miracle at the Beautiful Gate was a doorway to the gospel, not the gospel's final destination

Scripture Reference:

- Acts 3:1-26, which records the healing of the lame man at the Beautiful Gate and Peter's subsequent sermon to the gathered crowd in Solomon's Colonnade

Stories:

- Pastor Bo describes his long-standing habit of studying the full menu at his favorite restaurant in Racine every time he visits, only to order the same meal he has ordered for thirty years, number 10 all-chicken, illustrating how human beings become so fixed on their own expectations that they miss what else might be available to them
- The biblical account of the man lame from birth who was carried daily to the temple gate called Beautiful to beg, and who received physical healing through Peter in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, far exceeding the coins he had hoped to receive
- The reference to Peter's prior cowardice in denying Jesus, contrasted with his bold proclamation in the temple courts, illustrating the transforming work of the Holy Spirit in a believer's life

Scripture References from the Sermon

- Acts 3:1-26 (primary text), Psalm 84:11, 2 Corinthians 12:9, 2 Corinthians 5:17, 1 Corinthians 10:31, Matthew 5:16, Isaiah 55:7, 1 John 1:9, Hebrews 1:1-2, Titus 2:11-12
- Acts 2 (the coming of the Holy Spirit and Peter's transformation, referenced when Pastor Bo connects to Pastor Dave's earlier message about Peter being filled with the Holy Spirit)
- Genesis 12:3 / Genesis 22:18 (the Abrahamic covenant promise that all peoples of the earth would be blessed through his offspring, referenced in Acts 3:25)
- Deuteronomy 18:15-19 (the prophecy of Moses concerning a coming prophet, quoted by Peter in Acts 3:22-23)
- Romans 8:28 (the theme that God works all things for good and gives what is ultimately best)
- Philippians 4:7 (the peace of God that surpasses understanding, alluded to when Pastor Bo describes the peace that comes through repentance)
- Ephesians 2:8-9 (salvation by grace, alluded to in the discussion of God doing the work of forgiving and restoring)

The lame man at the Beautiful Gate had a predictable routine built around his limitations -- in what ways might our own routines or expectations prevent us from recognizing the greater things God wants to do in our lives?

Peter redirected the crowd's amazement away from himself and toward Christ almost immediately -- how do you personally guard against the temptation to seek recognition for the ways God works through you?

Pastor Bo drew a distinction between asking God to improve our circumstances and allowing him to transform us -- which of these more honestly describes how you tend to approach God in prayer, and why?

Peter's boldness in Acts 3 stood in sharp contrast to his earlier fear of being associated with Jesus -- what role does the Holy Spirit play in closing the gap between who we are and who God calls us to be?

The sermon described repentance not merely as feeling guilty but as a complete change of direction toward God -- is there an area of your life where you have felt guilt without yet making that full turn, and what is holding you back?

Peter told the crowd that times of refreshing come when we repent and turn to God -- have you ever experienced that kind of spiritual refreshing after a season of distance from God, and what did it reveal to you about his character?

Pastor Bo pointed out that every story in Scripture ultimately points to God's plan of redemption through Jesus -- how does seeing the Bible as one unified story rather than a collection of individual lessons change the way you read and apply it?

God's promise to Abraham that all peoples of the earth would be blessed through his offspring was fulfilled in Christ -- how does knowing that you are a beneficiary of a covenant made thousands of years before you were born shape your sense of identity and purpose?

The sermon emphasized that the miracle at the Beautiful Gate was a doorway pointing to Jesus rather than the destination itself -- in your own life, can you identify moments where God used a striking circumstance or answered prayer to draw you or someone else toward a deeper encounter with him?

Pastor Bo closed with the observation that God's greatest blessing is not changing our circumstances but changing us -- what would it look like practically for you to surrender a specific area of your life to that kind of transformation this week?

Small Group Guide: Acts 3 -- More Than We Expect

Overview

In Acts 3, a man who had been lame from birth came to the temple gate expecting a few coins. Instead, he encountered the transforming power of Jesus through Peter and John. This passage challenges us to examine our own expectations of God, to give him the glory he deserves, and to understand that his greatest blessing is not improved circumstances but a changed life.

Key Takeaways

- God often has something far greater in mind for us than what we think we need or want.
- When God works through us, the credit belongs entirely to him.
- Repentance is not just feeling sorry for past choices -- it is a change of heart that leads to a change of direction.
- Every promise God has made throughout Scripture finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ.
- The greatest blessing God offers is not a better situation but a transformed life.

Discussion Questions

Opening Question

Think of a time when you expected one thing but received something completely different -- and it turned out to be better. Share that experience with the group.

Jesus Gives Us More Than We Expect (Acts 3:1-10)

1. The lame man had a predictable daily routine built around a limited expectation. In what areas of your life have you settled for a limited expectation of what God can do?
2. Pastor Bo pointed out that Peter was only able to act with boldness because the Holy Spirit was working through him -- the same Peter who had once been afraid to admit he even knew Jesus. How have you seen God work through your weaknesses in ways you did not expect?
3. Psalm 84:11 says that God withholds no good thing from those who walk blamelessly before him. How does that promise challenge or encourage the way you pray?

Give Jesus the Glory (Acts 3:11-16)

4. When Peter saw the crowd gathering, his immediate response was to redirect their attention to Jesus rather than to himself. Why do you think that is so difficult for us to do in our own lives?
5. Pastor Bo said, "If God uses us, the glory belongs to him." Can you think of a moment when you received recognition for something and had to make a conscious decision about who to credit? What did you do, and what did you learn from it?
6. Jesus said in Matthew 5:16 that our good works should cause others to glorify our Father in heaven. How intentional are you about making sure the way you serve and live points people to God rather than to yourself?

Repentance Brings Refreshing (Acts 3:17-21)

7. Peter described repentance as turning around and walking toward God. Is there an area of your life right now where you sense God calling you to turn in a new direction?
8. Pastor Bo said, "Sin leaves us exhausted." Have you experienced that kind of spiritual and emotional exhaustion? What did returning to God look like for you in that season?
9. First John 1:9 promises that God is faithful to forgive and cleanse when we confess. What makes it hard for some people to believe that God's forgiveness is complete? How can the group encourage one another in this truth?

God Always Keeps His Word (Acts 3:22-25)

10. Peter reminded the crowd that the coming of Jesus was not a surprise -- it was the fulfillment of everything God had been promising throughout Israel's history. How does knowing that God has never broken a single promise affect the way you trust him in your current circumstances?
11. Pastor Bo said, "Sometimes we wonder if God has forgotten us." Have you ever felt that way? How did you work through it, and what helped you hold on to trust?

God's Greatest Blessing Is a Changed Life (Acts 3:26)

12. Pastor Bo closed with this question: "Am I asking Jesus to just improve my life, or am I allowing him to transform it?" How would you honestly answer that question right now?

13. Paul wrote in Titus 2:11-12 that God's grace not only forgives us but teaches us and changes us. Where in your life do you see evidence that God's grace is actively shaping you?

Practical Applications

This week, choose one of the following to put into practice:

- **Examine your expectations.** Spend time in prayer this week asking God to reveal any area where you have been settling for too little -- where you have been asking for coins when he wants to offer you something far greater.
- **Redirect the glory.** Make a conscious effort this week to verbally give God credit when something goes well. Whether in conversation, on a phone call, or in a group setting, practice saying out loud that what happened was God's doing.
- **Take a step toward repentance.** If there is an area of your life where you have been walking away from God, identify it specifically. Write it down, confess it to God, and if appropriate, share it with a trusted person in your group for accountability.
- **Anchor yourself in a promise.** Find one specific promise in Scripture that speaks directly to something you are facing right now. Write it down somewhere you will see it daily and return to it throughout the week as a reminder that God always keeps his word.
- **Ask the harder question.** Pastor Bo challenged us to consider whether we are asking Jesus to improve our lives or to transform them. Journal your honest answer and bring what you discover back to the group next week.

Closing Prayer Focus

Close your group time by praying together over the following areas:

- That each group member would come to God with open hands rather than fixed expectations
- That God would give each person the boldness of Peter to point others to Jesus in everyday conversations
- That anyone carrying guilt or shame would experience the refreshing that comes from genuine repentance and God's forgiveness
- That the group as a whole would grow in trusting God's faithfulness, especially in seasons of uncertainty