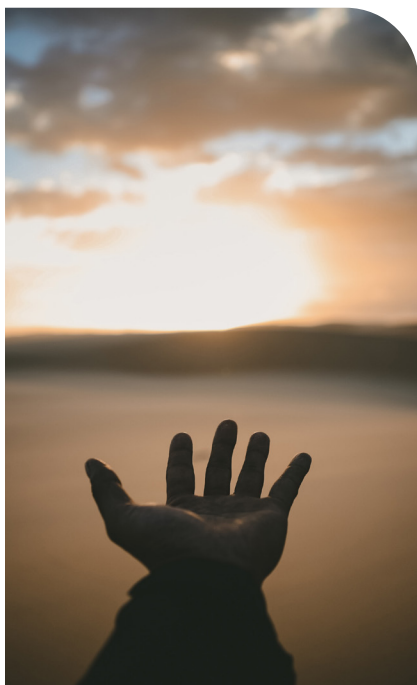


# Hands to heal the world

## Stewardship Sunday 2022 worship guide



### Introduction

This worship guide offers an exegetical summary of John 5:1-15, the healing of the man at the pool of Bethesda, from the unique perspective of stewardship. As a pastor, you will embody this message in a way that resonates in your own spirit to reach your faith community. Within this outline, there are various resources to adapt for your worship service. Blessings to you in your preparation for preaching and helping others enter into worship.

### Early image of this story

In Dura-Europos is one of the world's oldest churches, which has a depiction of this story from John on a wall. This might be an apt illustration for your bulletin or in your worship service.



*Photo credit: Yale University Art Gallery*

Dura-Europos, located in modern day Syria, was a thriving mid-size cosmopolitan city located along the Euphrates River within the Roman empire. It was full of ethnic, religious, and linguistic diversity and filled with bustling commerce.

In the 1920-30s, archaeologists began excavating the ancient city, finding fantastically preserved artifacts, which give us a glimpse into life there. The earliest artistic depictions of Jesus were found in this church, which dates to the mid-third century. The walls are covered in paintings of scenes from the New Testament.

One such painting, the healing of the paralyzed man, was prominently displayed on the wall above the baptistery, reading almost like a multi panel cartoon. We see the man lying on his mat, the figure of Jesus, and then the healed man carrying his mat. The placement of the painting above the baptistery suggests the worshippers linked this miraculous story of healing to the healing and redeeming baptismal waters that new believers entered.

## Call to worship

We join together today to delight in God's presence in us, for us, around us and with us. We join with the Psalmist to say: "Blessed are those who have learned to acclaim you, who walk in the light of your presence, Lord. They rejoice in your name all day long; they celebrate your righteousness."

As we worship together today, we will focus on healing. Healing is much needed in our own lives, in the lives of our neighbors, and in the world around us. Jesus is the Great Healer. But healing requires action – the action of accepting God's offer for healing. Healing also requires good stewardship of our resources so that we can be an extension of God's healing presence to those around us. This is our calling as Christ-followers; to bring God's Kingdom here to earth.

## Prayer of invocation

God of healing power, during this time of worship and throughout the upcoming week, be present *in* us, O God. Be present *for* us, O God. Be present *around* us, O God. Be present *with* us, O God. Amen.

## Hymns and chorus

### Praying for church, community and world

Our God, you have revealed yourself as love, and taught us by your word that whoever lives in love lives in you. In times of trouble and uncertainty, renew our hope in this promise. Help us to receive afresh your gift of love, that with generosity we may share it in the service of others to promote the common good.

God of mercy, whose son, Jesus Christ, lived among the poor and oppressed; hear our prayer for those who are fearful, vulnerable and isolated; be their strong defense in times of need, and grant us the compassion and courage to minister Christ to them – the Christ who is alive and reigns, now and forever. For it is in the name of Jesus we pray, Amen.

## Children's lesson

(Prepare enough Band-Aids for each child with the words - Jesus heals us – written on the paper covering or the Band-Aid itself.)

Begin by sharing a brief description of John 5:1-15, highlighting the fact that Jesus met a man who had been unable to walk for 38 years! One day Jesus came by where the man was lying down and asked the man if he wanted to be healed. What do you think the man said? (Fill in other details from the story that are age appropriate to the children gathered)

Jesus does heal people, but not always quickly, and sometimes in ways we don't expect.

- Sometimes we get a cold and feel bad for a while but then our body heals itself. That is one way that God heals, by helping our body get better.
- Sometimes we take medicines that scientists have made and sometimes we go to the doctor for help. Sometimes God uses people with special training to bring healing.
- Sometimes people don't get healed. That can be sad, but God gives promises that he is still with them even if they don't get well. God can bring comfort by healing our feelings and mind to accept what has happened to us.

Can you name a time you were sick or hurt and in need of healing? How did you feel when you got better? The man in this story went to the temple afterward. Maybe he went there to thank God for being healed or to share with his friends about the experience.

Today we want to remind you that God has given us amazing bodies that can sometimes heal themselves. We also want to be grateful for the times we can find healing through doctors and medicine. The Bible encourages us to ask God to heal people we love and to be with them and heal them when they don't feel good. The Bible also teaches us to take care of our bodies, to eat good food and not to do things that can harm us. This is called being a good steward when we try to live healthy lives and care for this gift of life God has given us.

I'm going to give each of you something you have probably used at one time or another. What is this? (Hold up a Band-Aid) On this Band-Aid are the words Jesus heals us. You can save this and use it the next time you or a friend get a scratch that needs to be covered. As you use it, remember to thank Jesus for our amazing bodies and for the times that God heals us when we are hurt or sick. Whether we get better right away, later on, or not at all, we know God is still right here with us!

### **Children's prayer**

God, thank you for always being with us and for listening to the way we feel, both in good times and sad times. Thank you for all the things you give us like our bodies, for being our friend, and always hearing us. Amen.

## Scripture reading: John 5:1-15

### Sermon: Do you want to be well?

#### **Introduction**

John tells the story of the healing of the man at the pool of Bethesda. This guide provides insights to shape a worship experience focused on this healing from the perspective of Christian stewardship, and the church's role in removing barriers for others who are hurt and unwell.

#### **Background**

This story is the third in a series of healing stories, after the redeeming of the Samaritan woman at the well and the healing of the royal official's son. The stories reflect the breaking of multiple barriers: gender, ethnicity, politics, religious piety, and purity laws. The stories together paint a clear picture that Jesus is not here for one group but for all – as evidenced by his openness to interact and heal across boundaries that divided people.

While all of the gospels have stories of healing, this one is only found in John. Chapter 5 is the beginning of a new section of John's message. This is the turning point in the narrative from the introduction of Jesus to how he interacts with earthly authorities. In his commentary, Willard Swartley describes this chapter as when Jesus' "trial" begins (Swartley, 146).

Beth-zatha translates to "place of mercy." John's words in his descriptions are clear and understandable. One of John's goals is likely to tell an account of Jesus that explores clearly who Jesus is and the impact of his earthly ministry.

Verse one states that Jesus went to Jerusalem during a Jewish festival there. One commentator suggests that, due to this story's placement in the broader narrative, this was likely the Feast of Tabernacles (Keener, 262) or the Feast of Booths. This festival takes place at the end of the harvest season, serving as a time of thanksgiving for the bounty and as a time of purification (Swartley, 147). The story does not focus on the festival that was drawing a crowd to Jerusalem. But it sets the context around the pool near the sheep gate, which would have been crowded with pilgrims.

## Two approaches to the story

### 1. Consider key questions

*Do you want to be made well?* Jesus poses this question to consider what it meant for this man to be made well. He has been a beggar for 38 years. The time this man has spent on a mat is longer than some in antiquity would have lived. He has sustained himself by the charity of others and likely the alms from devout Jews. By becoming well, he not only gains mobility – he must enter a new way of living. Without a family to place him in the pool, he doesn't have a support network to go to after his healing. "Do you want to get well?" also means "Do you want to leave everything you have ever known and enter something new?"

*How are you made well?* "Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool..." This man lacked access to the resource of healing. Who are the people in our lives and our community who lack access? Access to financial resources, education, or services for a healthy life. How do we help break down barriers that prohibit access? What relevant systems can we influence? Can we use our status and position to help open the door to well-being for others?

*Are you ready to be made well?* If we are made well by Jesus, we no longer need our mat. The mat was security and comfort for this man for nearly four decades. Where do we continue to sit as Jesus encourages us to "get up and walk?" What are the "mats" in our lives that we are called to leave behind?

### 2. See the perspective of each character

*Jesus:* He found himself in Jerusalem during this festival. There were many pilgrims like him who had journeyed to celebrate this feast. He was at the pool, where many people with disabilities and sicknesses lay in a normal time, but which was also crowded with people coming for the feast. Of all the people there, Jesus sees one man.

*The man:* He has remained by the pool for most of his life. A stranger comes to him, asking if he wants to get well. The question feels so far outside the realm of possibility that it almost seems unfair. He does not reply, "Yes." And yet this stranger miraculously heals him.

*The Jewish leaders:* At a festival, your role is to help moderate the practices of the event. Your routine is derailed by a man carrying a mat. Seems like a simple offense on the Sabbath, when you can shout your warning and go about your day. Instead, you hear something extra troubling, which is the result of a miraculous healing.

## A call to action

As you conclude your message, consider what call to action to leave with your listeners.

- What are the modern-day challenges in this teaching that are relevant to your faith and witness in your community?

- What are the ills faced by your neighbors and what losses may come along with any healing that might take place?
- What resistance might develop by an offer from our church to help bring healing to the pains of the poor and disenfranchised in our community?

How might your church be called to be a steward of the many gifts that God has placed in your care? How might you be called to be a healing balm for this world? 1 Peter 4:10 reads, “Each one should use whatever gift they have received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms.”

### Hymn or chorus

### Offertory prayer

God, as you stirred the waters at Bethesda, stir our hearts. Stir generosity in us. Stir compassion in us. Stir love in us. As you stir us, we respond in gratitude. Thank you, God, for healing us and for the opportunity to be your hands to heal the world. As we give our tithes and offerings today, may we be stirred with gladness and joy. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

### Sending prayer

Dear God, every morning your love is new. All day long, you are working for good in the world. You are the one who made us and continues to heal us in mind, body and soul. We commit ourselves again this day to care for these temporary dwellings we’ve been given. Stir in us a desire to serve you, to live peacefully with our neighbors and all your creation, and to devote each day to your son, our savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

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