

Healing for the Soul

Passage: Luke 5:12-26 | From the series: Luke

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Good morning! My name is Dan, and I am one of the pastors here. It is a joy to be with you to open the Word and hear from God together.

As we get started, I want to consider this question: When was the last time you thought: *I need help?*

I felt this recently when my 3rd grade son was invited to participate in the Math Olympics at his school. Some of the practice problems that his teacher sent home were... humbling. I consider myself to be decent at math and figured that 3rd-grade word problems should be doable. Yet at more than one point, I found myself thinking, "I need help." Thankfully, there is ChatGPT for that.

And yet, the reality is that there are some problems that ChatGPT can't help with.

If we rewind 10 years before the 3rd-grade math olympics, Linzy and I were in Maui on one last trip before our first son was born.

A number of years ago, when Linzy was about seven and a half months pregnant with our first son—right on the edge of when you're supposed to stop traveling—we took a trip to Maui. One of the things we really wanted to do was drive the Road to Hana. If you've ever been there, you know the road—fifty miles winding along the cliffs on the east side of the island, hugging the edge of the ocean, cutting through dense rainforest. Before you go, you always check the weather, because if a storm rolls in, those roads can get dangerous fast.

That morning the forecast looked clear, so we set out. But the forecast was wrong. About fifty miles into our fifty-mile journey of Hana, a storm blew in that practically brought the island to its knees. Highways closed. Power went out across much of Maui. And we were on a narrow cliffside road with torrential rain pouring down so hard we could barely see through the windshield. Rivers of water were flowing across the pavement. Every time we drove through one, I found myself praying we wouldn't slide off the edge into the sea below. I remember gripping the wheel, praying out loud that we wouldn't end up stranded on the side of a mountain overnight or worse.

In that moment, my prayer was simple and desperate: "God, I need help."

When was the last time that you felt that? That you were in a situation that was over your head, beyond your ability to fix, and you thought, *I need help*. And more importantly, what did you do in that situation?

In our passage for today, we meet two men in need of help. In fact, they were both in desperate need. Both are sick, but sick in different ways. One man's illness has led him to be ostracised from

community, outcast and alone. The other man, though ill, is surrounded by friends who love him like a brother. One man wrestles with shame from the way he has been rejected. The other man is presumed to be guilty and is suffering the consequences of his sin in his body. Both men make their way to Jesus.

Taken together, these two men illustrate for us the various and complex ways that sin has broken the world -- that sin has broken each one of us. And taken together, these men teach about the glory, the wonder, the beauty of our salvation and the Savior who wins it for us.

Cleansing the Leper

With that, let's meet the first of these two men -- a man that we are told is full of leprosy. We meet him in Luke 5:12-13:

While he was in one of the cities, there came a man full of leprosy. And when he saw Jesus, he fell on his face and begged him, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean." And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, "I will; be clean." And immediately the leprosy left him.

To understand the significance of what happens here, let me paint a picture of what this man's life would have been like.

First off, this man had a debilitating physical illness. Leprosy, which actually referred to a number of related skin conditions, would have left him with lesions and blisters all over his body. He may have been missing fingers or toes as this disease caused him to lose sensation in his extremities, making it easy to seriously injure them. His body was literally decaying day by day.

However, his physical misery was not his biggest concern. As a leper, he would have been considered ritually unclean, according to Leviticus 13. Because of this, he would have been unable to offer sacrifices or pray in the temple. He was, in effect, cut off from the presence of God. He would also have been forced to live outside the city, isolated and alone, because his uncleanness was contagious; if anyone touched him, they would also become unclean. Because of this, ever since he became leprous, he hadn't received so much as a hand on the shoulder, much less a hug or a kiss. When he saw others on the road, he would have to shout, "unclean, unclean!" to warn people to keep their distance -- and you can be sure they did.

While this man was in great physical pain, his emotional distress was far worse. His main problem wasn't the blisters on his skin; *it was the shame in his soul.*

Brene Brown describes shame as **"the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging."**¹ Shame is that feeling that there is something wrong with me -- so deeply wrong with me that I am not worthy to be loved, that I am not worthy to be known, that I am not worthy to belong.

You can imagine that after years of shouting "unclean," of having people avoiding him -- after years of not being touched by another human or allowed to participate in communal worship -- this man's soul was full of shame.

Can you relate? Shame is not something that is limited to people with leprosy. Shame is a universal human experience.

Today marks the close of the 2026 Winter Olympics. Does anyone know who the most decorated Olympian of all time is? Michael Phelps.

In the 2008 Olympics, Phelps won 8 gold medals. Over the course of his career, he has won 23 gold medals and 28 total Olympic medals, making him the most decorated Olympic athlete of all time and something of a world celebrity.

After the 2012 Olympics, Phelps retired from swimming. However, as he did so, he found himself a man without an identity. His life has been wrapped up in swimming, but when he stepped out of the pool, took off the gold medals, and tried to move on to the next chapter of life, he found himself saying, "I don't know who I am without swimming."

This existential crisis spiraled into heavy drinking, and 2 years later, he was arrested for his second DUI. As a public figure, his downfall became a public event. It felt like the world was watching him implode. And Phelps felt deeply ashamed. He began to isolate himself -- from friends, from family, from the world -- believing that he was too broken to be loved.

While you and I may not be world famous, we are certainly familiar with shame, aren't we?

Shame is when you make a mistake and think, "What's wrong with me?" It's when you mess up, and your first response is, "I'm such a failure." Shame is when you think to yourself, "If that person really knew me, they would never love me."

Shame drives us to isolate ourselves -- to cut ourselves off from friends, from family, from God.

This leprous man lived a life of isolation, cut off from society. But he was desperate. He was so desperate that he found the courage to go to Jesus. He doesn't shout "unclean." He doesn't keep his distance. He falls on his face at Jesus' feet, risking the one thing he feared most in all the world: rejection. And he begged Jesus. Jesus, if you are willing, make me... What? Clean.

Yes, he is asking for physical healing. But more than that, he is asking for a chance to belong. He is asking for the opportunity to be loved—which is what we all crave most, no matter how much we may have convinced ourselves that we are ok.

So Jesus reaches out and touches him. For the first time in... months, maybe years, maybe decades... he experiences human touch. And Jesus says, be clean. And immediately, the leprosy left him.

What was supposed to happen when someone touched a leprous person? They were supposed to become unclean. Uncleaness spreads from the unclean person. But not this time. Instead, as Jesus touches this man, holiness spreads from Jesus. Jesus makes him clean.

One thing still remains for this man's full healing, and we see this in Luke 5:14:

And he charged him to tell no one, but “go and show yourself to the priest, and make an offering for your cleansing, as Moses commanded, for a proof to them.”

Going to the priest was not necessary for this man’s physical healing. Jesus already took care of that. But remember, this is a story about shame. According to the Law of Moses, a priest had to confirm a healing from leprosy for the person to be restored to society. So Jesus sends the man to the priest to be declared clean so that he can return to his friends and family. Now the man’s shame has been completely removed; he no longer needs to hide.

Like Michael Phelps, our tendency in the face of our failure is to hide -- from others and from God. But this story teaches us that in our shame, we can go to Jesus.

So, **in your shame, go to Jesus**. The good news of the gospel is that you don’t have to hide. You don’t have to clean yourself up. You don’t have to fix your issues or overcome your failures. You can come to Jesus just as you are.

You see, our shame doesn’t keep us from Jesus because he can’t be around us. Our shame keeps us from Jesus because we fear that we can’t be around him.

But Luke tells us a different story. We can come to Jesus just as we are. No need to shout “unclean.” No need to keep our distance. No need to hide our flaws. He loves us and accepts us just as we are.

¹<https://brenebrown.com/articles/2013/01/15/shame-v-guiltwent/>

Jesus Escapes to Pray

Before we meet the second man in our story, we see Jesus doing something curious. Look at what happens in Luke 5:15-16:

15 But now even more the report about him went abroad, and great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities. 16 But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray.

Word was spreading about Jesus, and many people were seeking him out. However, Jesus does not heal all of them. He doesn’t meet every need that comes his way. Rather, he regularly and routinely escaped to desolate places to pray.

I am not going to say more about that here other than to note the obvious: If Jesus needed to escape the demands of life to refresh his connection with the Father, maybe we need to do the same. That is another whole sermon for another time, but I have to at least mention it here: escaping the hustle of life to be with God is the most important thing you can do to sustain the life that God has given you. I am just going to leave it at that.

Healing the Paralytic

With that, let's meet the second man -- a man that we are told is paralyzed. We meet him starting in v. 17. Let's read Luke 5:17-19

On one of those days, as he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there, who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was with him to heal. And behold, some men were bringing on a bed a man who was paralyzed, and they were seeking to bring him in and lay him before Jesus, but finding no way to bring him in, because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down with his bed through the tiles into the midst before Jesus.

There are a few things that stand out about this story right from the start. First off, we meet another man with a great need. This man is paralyzed, unable to walk on his own.

In the ancient world, there was a strong connection between physical illness or disability and sin. We see this reflected in the story of the blind man in John 9. The question people ask about him is: "Is he blind because of his sin and his parents' sin?" The assumption is that he is disabled because of sin. The question is whose sin?

The Old Testament makes this connection in many different places, such as Psalm 103, where the psalmist declares that God "forgives all of our sins and heals all of our diseases."

So, the assumption about this man was that he was guilty of some kind of sin -- something that we will see Jesus affirm in just a moment.

The leper's main issue was shame. The paralyzed man's name issue was guilt. If shame is the feeling that *I am bad*, guilt is the feeling that *I have done something bad*. Shame comes from getting caught with your hand in the cookie jar. Guilt comes from stealing the cookie in the first place. Shame is about who I am. Guilt is about what I have done.

And the assumption about this man is that he had done something wrong. When he came to Jesus, he didn't risk rejection like the leper. He risked condemnation: a guilty sentence.

Yet, this man also went to Jesus. Unlike the leper, he didn't hobble his way to Jesus on his own; he was clearly unable to do that. Rather, this man, surrounded by community, was carried to Jesus by his friends.

The crowd around Jesus was so dense at this point that his friends made their way up on the roof. Houses in that day were built with flat roofs consisting of horizontal beams overlaid with reeds and dried mud. These friends dig through the reeds and mud and lower their friend between the beams at the feet of Jesus.

As they did this, it is clear that they were seeking healing. Physical healing. They wanted their friend to walk again.

How will Jesus respond? Will he heal him? Will he reject him? Will he see through to the sin that this man supposedly committed and condemn him?

Look at what Jesus does in Luke 5:20:

And when he saw their faith, he said, "Man, your sins are forgiven you."

This is remarkable for several different reasons. First, Jesus sees their faith and forgives his sins. That is not a comment on the lack of faith of the paralyzed man himself. Rather, it is an acknowledgement that they were the ones who actually took action and carried this man to Jesus. The paralyzed man himself presumably shared their faith.

What is more remarkable about this is what Jesus actually does. Instead of healing the man, which is what he was hoping for... Or instead of condemning the man, which is what we might have expected... Jesus forgives the man, which takes us totally by surprise.

This man is driven to Jesus because of his need for healing, but Jesus heals him in a way that goes deeper than he dared to dream of: he heals his soul. He forgives his sin. He cleanses him of his guilt and makes him right with God.

And as he does, we see that Jesus wants to do the same with us. He wants to forgive our sins as well.

What we learn here is that in our guilt, we can go to Jesus. **In your guilt, go to Jesus.**

Just as our shame tends to keep us from Jesus out of fear of rejection, our guilt tends to keep us from Jesus out of fear of condemnation. But for all who have faith in him, Jesus does not meet us with condemnation, but with forgiveness.

Two years after our road to Hana experience, I found myself needing help once again. This time not because my life was in danger, but because my soul was in danger. I was two years into parenting, and an anger was surfacing in my life that I was previously unaware of. After one particularly intense explosion of anger, I felt so guilty. I knew that my behavior had been inappropriate... sinful. While I knew there was grace in Christ, I feared that when I actually came to Jesus, I would face rejection. However, as I went to Jesus in my guilt, as I met him in my sin, the theoretical grace of God became the actual grace of God in my life. Rather than condemnation, I was met with love. And I knew that I was forgiven.

This is the promise that we have in Christ. If we come to him in our guilt, whether we carry ourselves to him or come on the shoulders of faithful friends, we will be met with love and forgiveness.

Jesus, the Healer of the Soul

No one was expecting this. The paralyzed man wasn't. His friends weren't. And the Pharisees certainly weren't. We see the reaction of the Pharisees in v. 21. Luke 5:21:

And the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, saying, "Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

The Pharisees understood exactly what Jesus was doing. He was claiming to act on behalf of God. And they called him out for blasphemy. Jesus responds in v. 22. Luke 5:22-25:

When Jesus perceived their thoughts, he answered them, "Why do you question in your hearts? Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Rise and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he said to the man who was paralyzed—"I say to you, rise, pick up your bed and go home." And immediately he rose up before them and picked up what he had been lying on and went home, glorifying God.

This response of praise didn't just stop with the man and his friends. It extended to all around them. Luke 5:26

And amazement seized them all, and they glorified God and were filled with awe, saying, "We have seen extraordinary things today."

The question that Jesus poses here is brilliant. Which is easier: to say "your sins are forgiven?" Or to say "get up and walk"? Well, it's much easier to say your sins are forgiven, because you can't prove that it actually happened! While it is much harder to forgive sins than to heal the body, it is easier to claim to give sin than to claim to heal the body.

In order to validate his authority to forgive sins, Jesus does the impossible: he heals the man and restores his ability to walk.

But Jesus is going more than just validating his claim to forgive sins. He is also painting a picture of the kind of Savior he is. He is not a Savior who is merely concerned with our shame and guilt. He is not merely concerned with our "spiritual" problems. He came to bring healing and wholeness to our whole selves -- our bodies, our minds, our spirits, our souls.

In the first few centuries of the church, it was common to refer to Jesus as the Healer of our Souls. This was an attempt to try to explain the holistic nature of the salvation that he brings.

When Jesus touches the leper, he brings physical, emotional, and spiritual healing. When he speaks to the paralyzed man, he brings physical, emotional, and spiritual healing.

When we come to Jesus in our time of need, he longs to bring physical, emotional, and spiritual healing.

So here is my last invitation of the morning: **For help and healing, go to Jesus.**

No matter how big or how small your need, go to Jesus. No matter how minor or major your sin, go to Jesus. No matter how sick or how well you feel, go to Jesus. No matter how rich or poor you are, go to Jesus. Jesus wants to touch you. He wants to remove your shame. He wants to remove your guilt. He wants to bring healing to your body and your soul.

But remember what Jesus did when the crowds pressed in after he healed the leper? Though many others came to him with their illnesses, he escaped to the desolate place. He left some people physically sick.

But what these two stories teach us is that though Jesus may not heal our bodies until he returns again, we have the promise that healing for our souls is available to us here and now, if we look to him in faith.

Ten years ago, on that road to Hana, I looked to Jesus in faith. I knew I needed help, and I asked him for it. You know what happened? He sent a Jeep. Two Jeeps, actually -- one in front of me and one behind me. Together, we made it through the storm and back to safety.

Eight years ago, as I cried out to Jesus for help in the midst of my anger, he met me--not only with compassion and forgiveness, but also with healing. Yes, I still get angry, but there has been healing. Jesus is smoothing out the rough edges of my soul.

Here is the promise for all who come to Jesus for help and healing: if you come in faith, Jesus will meet you there. And he will offer healing for your soul.

We want to respond like the leper, the paralyzed man, and all who watched: by praising God. Let's pray, and then let's worship God together.