

Lies That Keep Us Sick

Rich Nathan

October 27 and 28, 2001

“Renewing Your Spiritual Passion” Series

John 5:1-15

There was a retired Calvary Officer in Germany in the 18th century named Karl Friederich Munchausen who was famous for making up preposterous stories about his supposed adventures as a soldier and a hunter and a sportsman. These were grandiose tales. He was like the guy who used to be on Saturday Night Live. I don't remember what they called him, but he was the big liar. He would stop in mid-sentence to change the story.

“The other day I was in my garage and I killed a bug – I mean a bear, yes, yes, that's the ticket. I killed a bear, a grizzly bear. It was ten feet tall and I killed it with my rifle...I killed it with my Bic pen...yes, I killed a ten foot grizzly bear in my garage with a Bic pen that was in my pocket.”

Munchausen's stories were printed in English and sold like crazy in England. Ironically, it turned out that that was lie. An English author made up a bunch of stories and attributed them to Munchausen. You have fake authorship and fake stories. But Munchausen's name for the past two centuries has been associated with totally fake stories that someone can tell in a persuasive way.

Recently, psychiatrists have used the name “Munchausen Syndrome” for patients that fake or actually induce medical symptoms to garnish sympathy. In fact, doctors say that between 1-2% of all patients in hospitals are either faking or have self-induced their own symptoms.

Here is a very common story from a physician written on Munchausen Syndrome. This woman, who we will call Jenni was one of those invisible people you just sort of walk past every day. She was a secretary in this huge company working in a little cubicle, who hadn't developed many friends at work. But she seemed to find all the companionship she needed in the world from her live-in boyfriend. Her world revolved around her boyfriend until he announced he was leaving her. He had fallen in love with another woman and was moving out.

Well, in her loneliness Jenni found a way out of her pain and depression. She mobilized an instant support network by showing up at work one day and announcing, “I've just been diagnosed with breast cancer and its terminal.” It was also a lie. Jenni found a remarkable and very tragic way to gather around her an instant network of sympathetic coworkers. She enrolled in a breast cancer support group. She shaved her head to mimic the effects of chemotherapy. She dieted to lose fifty pounds.

The doctors said that the medical bills in one case of fictitious illness amounted to over six million dollars. The problem burdens the health care system and defies reason. Patients have bled themselves into anemia. They've taken laxatives to induce diarrhea. They've mimicked seizures so convincing that neurologists have hospitalized them.

In Jenni's case, she got well when one of the leaders of her cancer support group confronted her with evidence that she was lying. He referred her to a psychiatrist who was able to get to the roots of her very tragic behavior.

Even sadder than this is when a person, in order to garner some sympathy, falsifies an illness in another person they are taking care of. Often people will do this with their own children to communicate to the world that they are heroic caregivers. This syndrome is known as Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy. The perpetrators are almost always mothers of the children who are desperately seeking attention for themselves. This has been publicized in movies.

There are two women – one named Kathleen Bush and Yvonne Eldridge who had a tremendous amount in common. They both cared for children with remarkably complex medical problems. Kathleen's daughter, Jennifer, suffered from constant intestinal problem. Eldridge's two foster daughters experienced a host of ailments that left them weak and emaciated. These two women escorted their children to hospitals, from doctor to doctor. Jennifer Bush was actually hospitalized 200 times. She underwent an extraordinary number of lab tests and medical trials and surgical procedures. From the age of eight, Jennifer Bush had had more than forty operations, including the removal of much of her intestine.

These two women, Kathleen Bush and Yvonne Eldridge, received this highest praise for their devotion. Kathleen Bush was invited to the White House by Hilary Clinton in a rally for mothers. Yvonne Eldridge was named National Mother of the Year in 1988 by Nancy Reagan.

Prosecutors later found out that both Kathleen Bush and Yvonne Eldridge actually manufactured their children's illnesses to meet their own need for attention and sympathy. Bush deliberately poisoned and infected her daughter. Eldridge starved her foster children and reported symptoms that never really existed. With parents like these, some children have almost never experienced a day without being taken to another doctor, or confined to another hospital; generally the children are infants or toddlers and the perpetrator is their own mother.

Not too long ago we had a front page illustration of this form of child abuse here in Columbus. Two parents, a father and a mother, took their preschool boy from one doctor to another – thirteen doctors in all. By the time he was six, he had been hospitalized four different times, put on all different kinds of medication. His

parents went from doctor to doctor to find one doctor who would diagnose their son with the illness they said he had: Gender Identity Disorder.

These two parents dressed their son up like a little girl. They called him by a girl's name. They gave him girl's toys. They continually told him that really he was a girl. And doctors diagnosed him as being depressed, as having attention deficit disorder, having some form of autism. He was on lots of different medications prescribed by 11 different doctors. The National Transgender Advocacy Coalition weighed in on the side of the parents. Here were loving, caring parents they said, whose only crime was to call attention to the suffering of a little girl upon whom nature had played a cruel trick by giving this little girl the body of a little boy.

Fortunately, Children's Services did not listen to The National Transgender Advocacy Coalition. The child was removed from his home. The last I read, perhaps some of you know something further, but the last that I read, once this little boy got away from his parents, his depression lifted, and he began to assume the identity of a little boy.

Not amusing lies that Officer Munchausen used to tell to regale the troops in his troops, not funny lies like the Big Liar on Saturday Night Live – but tragic lies, debilitating lies sometimes told by a person about themselves and at other times lies told by someone else. But whether they are lies that we tell ourselves or lies that someone else makes up about us, a person is kept weak, dependent, sick and disabled by lies.

I've called today's message, "Lies That Keep Us Sick." Let's pray.

John 5:1-15

Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for a feast of the Jews. 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?"

"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."

Then Jesus said to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked. The day on which this took place was a Sabbath, and so the Jews said to the man who had been healed, "It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat."

But he replied, “The man who made me well said to me, ‘Pick up your mat and walk.’”

So they asked him, “Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?”

The man who was healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there. 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.” The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.

The text opens up in verse 1 with this statement: *Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for a feast of the Jews.* I think it is very unfortunate that most Christians know almost nothing about the Old Testament Jewish Festivals. Because the Jewish Festivals, particularly in the book of John, provide so much background and richness to understanding the ministry and message of Jesus. As I said last week, Jesus the fulfillment, he’s the climax, he’s the culmination of all that the Law and the Prophets pointed to. All the promises of God in the Old Testament find their fulfillment and yes in Christ. That’s why, after Jesus’ resurrection, he opened the scriptures up to his disciples and beginning with the Law and the Prophets, he showed them everything concerning himself.

At some point, I may do a brief series on the Jewish holidays for you. The holidays provide such a rich background for understanding Jesus’ life. So Jesus is in Jerusalem to celebrate a Jewish Festival. He was by a pool. Archeologists discovered the pool back in the 19th century. We have some very concrete, hard evidence for the setting of this story. In fact, the Dead Sea Scrolls that were discovered by that shepherd boy back in the late 1940’s, discusses the pool at Bethesda, as a place where the sick, dying, blind and lame would gather waiting for healing. That’s what it says in verse 3. *Here a great number of disabled people used to lie – the blind, the lame, the paralyzed.*

The reason I mention this to you is to say to you friends, that there is such an abundance of evidence from sources outside the Bible that corroborate Bible stories. The Bible is not a book like some fairy tale that says, “Long, long ago in a faraway place...” We know where this place was. We know what people used to do. We’ve dug it out. You could visit the pool at Bethesda today, if you took a trip to Jerusalem. We are talking about literal facts, not just religious beliefs.

So what is it that keeps people sick? We read in verse 3, *Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed.* Lie number one is that something other than Jesus will make me well.

In the ancient world, people believed that this pool had some healing properties. An ancient myth suggested that an invisible angel would stir the pool and that the

first person who got in would get well. You can see that there is a later addition to John's gospel, which made this suggestion. But it is likely that this later addition, which you will see in a footnote at the bottom of your bibles, was actually generally believed to be the case at that period of time.

Throughout history, people have turned to alternatives to Christ. They've turned to witch doctors. They've turned to Shamans, to magicians, to get rid of what made them sick. Now people turn to various New Age teachers – people like Deepak Chopra, who promotes a form of spirituality that's completely alien to Christian spirituality. People are turning to energy-based therapies, therapeutic touch, aroma therapies, therapies, Iridology, visualization, hypnosis – something other than Jesus will be my healing pool.

By the way, if you have questions about alternative medicines, there is a wonderful new book out called *Alternative Medicine Christian Handbook*. It is a comprehensive reference guide, endorsed by the Christian Medical Association. If you have questions about the use of various kinds of herbs, or different sorts of alternative medical techniques – acupuncture, hypnosis, or whatever – you may want to pick that up.

But what I'd like to do is to examine the text in the context of one of the most common healing relationships in our day and that's the counseling relationship of a person with their therapist or with a friend. Counseling, of course, takes many forms. It can take place in a pastor's office, between a pastor and a church member; counseling can occur in the context of a psychiatrist, psychologist, or social worker meeting with a client. Counseling could take place in an informal setting where two friends are talking in a car. One friend asking the other for advice. Or when one couple gets together to mentor another married couple to develop marriage skills.

But in all of the permutations of the counseling relationship, there is a grave danger that a major lie will be told that disables and weakens a person who is looking for help. The major lie that could be told, and generally not explicitly, but implicitly is instead of Jesus the pastor, the therapist, the friend, the mentoring couple is looked to as the source of healing like the way that the people gathered around the healing pool. They didn't look to Jesus when he came on the scene. they were still waiting by the healing pool.

You see this all the time, friends the pastor is quoted continually. Not the Bible, but just this pastor. The person becomes totally dependent upon the therapist. Can't live without two to three visits or phone calls to the therapist every week. The friend is looked to as the fount of all wisdom. Some person becomes the healing pool. This individual becomes the focus of attention and relationship. Their love, their advice, their perspective is all important. It is all based on a lie that someone or something is better than Jesus will ultimately get a person well.

See, real Christian counseling, no matter whose giving it to you – whether it's coming from a pastor, or it is coming from a friend, or it is coming through a psychiatrist – real Christian counseling is so different. Real Christian counseling sounds like this: Friend, I don't have all the answers for what you need. And I don't want you to look to me like that lame man looked to the pool in Bethesda. I never want you to become dependent upon me. But together, let's both of us go to Jesus to find the answers that he has for your marriage. Jesus has the answer. Let's both go to Christ to find the answer that he has for your depression. Let's both go to Jesus because he has the answer for your career decision, for your career move. For your ministry, for your child raising dilemma, for your eating disorder. His spirit alone can reach into your soul and heal your hurts from the past. He alone can touch the pain that you suffered through abuse or betrayal or simply living with out God.

Let me ask you a question. I want you to think of a situation where you went to another individual for help. Or a situation where someone came to you for help – counseling, marital help, emotional help. Did you or the person you went to, did the attention focus on Jesus? I don't mean a little prayer at the beginning and then listen to me. I mean was it in the discussion, thoroughly woven together – well, let's consider what Jesus says. Let's look to him for wisdom. Did you become more dependent upon Christ? More of a Christ-centered person? If you did, that's Christian counseling. But if you became more of a therapist-centered person, a pastored-centered person, then that is just another form of the healing pool in Bethesda.

Lie number two that keeps a person sick is the belief that the problem has gone on too long to ever change. Verse 5 we read, *One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years.* The man had this problem for thirty eight years. Thirty eight years is a long time to be sick. It's possible by the way, in this thirty eight years some oblique reference to the wandering of the Jews in the wilderness for thirty eight years and finally their entrance into the Promised Land. This man enters the Promised Land after thirty eight years of being sick. That's a long time. And it's not like he hadn't sought help. He did. He went to the place that he knew of to receive healing – the pool at Bethesda. Day after day he went back and he still didn't get well.

One of the great lies that keep people sick is the belief that because my healing didn't happen yesterday, it's not going to happen today. Or it won't happen tomorrow. It is incredibly tempting to throw in the towel. To just give up and quit when your problem is chronic and long lasting. And despite all your efforts, it still hasn't gone away. Why bother even praying any more, or seeking help for my marriage? After all, he's been this way for years. We've talked about it. We've sought out a counselor. She'll never change. He'll never change. He'll always be like this.

My chronic pain, my problem will just have to run its course. I've had this addiction for years. I've tried to battle it, but I always lose. I'm past getting upset. I don't get mad any more. I'm just worn out and I give up.

Let me ask you something. Is there a person or a situation in your life that you've just given up on because no answer has come to you up to this point?

This man never expected to meet Jesus after thirty eight years of waiting. He never expected the intervention of Jesus. That Jesus would show up. Why Jesus didn't come the day before when the man was laying there? I don't know. Why he didn't make the man wait two weeks longer? I don't know. But Jesus picked the time and place and after thirty eight years of waiting, Jesus healed him.

In Luke 18 Jesus tells us to always pray and never give up. Boy, that's hard, isn't it? Not to give up? Don't ever give up praying for the salvation of someone you care about until they die. They may be super hard, every discussion about spiritual things may end up in an argument. They may mock you, or worse of all, be totally indifferent. They may respond to your talk about Jesus with a shrug of the shoulders and say, "Whatever. You have your beliefs, however insane they are. I have mine. Leave me alone and get out of my face."

Don't ever give up praying for another person's salvation. Do you know, Jesus can crack the hardest nut. He has available to him a nutcracker that can crack the hardest nut. I remember a few years ago getting a call from a terminally ill man. He just happened to pass by the church. He wasn't a church goer at all. He called me and basically said that he was dying and would I meet with him.

He was well up into his 60's and was dying of cancer. He had lived a hard, mostly alcoholic existence. His family was a mess. He was a widower and at odds with his kids. Years of sin had taken its toll on everyone that he knew.

But Christ chose that moment to step into that man's situation – the moment of his great need, when he was dying. And that extremely hard drinking, cynical, crusty, mean old guy was busted open as I explained the gospel to him. He began to cry. The Spirit of Christ illumined the scriptures as I shared them with him. They just became alive for the guy.

Over the next several nights, he had some prophetic dreams from the Lord. Jesus spoke to him while he was sleeping. And he was led not only to a healed relationship with God through Jesus, but also to reconciliation with a couple of family members before he died. At his funeral, I was able to say, "You know, John did not live a great life. Let's not kid each other. You know him. He didn't live a great life. But I can tell you God's honest truth, that John died well."

Wouldn't you want that for a parent? For a grandparent? For someone you know? No person, no sickness, no relationship, no workplace, no national problem, no international problem, no addiction – no situation is so far gone that if Christ chose to show up, if Christ stepped in that even at this late date he couldn't work a radical change.

Friends, let me ask you an honest question: Have you given up praying for a change? Have you stopped really praying and trying to believe God for the salvation of a loved one? For a gay family member? For an elderly atheist? For the breaking of a sinful habit? For the Taliban in Afghanistan? Before you throw in the towel, consider the man who laid by a pool for thirty eight years.

Do you know that grace is stronger than any sin? That the grace of God is stronger than any problem, than anyone's history, than anything that anyone has done to you? The grace of God is stronger than anybody's hardness, anyone's indifference, anyone's illness. Christ can say to a disabled man who lay on a mat for thirty eight years, "Rise up" and the man rose up. One day, Christ is going to say those identical words "Rise up" to people lying in the grave and they will rise up.

Never give up hoping. Never give up praying. Never give up working for change. As Yogi Bera once said, "It ain't over, until it's over."

I'm going to save verse 6 for a moment. But here's Lie number three – Something outside of me keeps me from getting well. Look at verse 7, "*Sir, the invalid replied, "I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I'm trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me."*" I can't get well because no one will help me. I can't get well because other people jump in the pool first.

I can't get well until...

I can't get well because...

I can't get well until my husband changes.

I can't get well until my wife...

Until my mother...

Until my father...

Until my boyfriend...

Until my roommate...

Until my job situation changes...

Until this other person begins to treat me right...

Until I start getting love from my parents...

Until I get the response that I'm looking for from a man...

Until something happens that is not under my control, I will remain sick.

The problem is out there the man says in verse 7, not with me. It's out there.

If only my boss weren't so demanding...

If only the economy would pick up...

If only my husband was more sensitive...
If only he was a better listener...
If only he was more tender...
If only my parents understood me...
My present situation is not my fault.

Friends, I want to say this in love, but do you understand that Christian change is always from the inside out and never from the outside in? Forget about all the things that you can't change and everything that you have no control over. I regularly counsel people who are miserable because they are in a relationship with someone who treats them terribly. They are depressed. They are angry. They are frustrated because they have been treated terribly by someone else.

One major reason why people get depressed or throw in the towel is because they feel helpless. I'm stuck and I can't do anything about being stuck until this situation or this other person outside of me changes.

Listen to me. Listen to me. You can't make your spouse change. You may not be able to make more money. You may not be able to heal your own body. Trust me, you cannot fix your parents. You may not be able to fix your kids or your boss or the world, or your job or your school. You can speak to other people. You can pray for other people. You can challenge others. But the only one you have control over is you. Your reactions and your choices, your responses to what life has dealt you. And with Jesus' help, you can choose a different path for your life.

Victor Frankl was a Freudian psychiatrist who believed that whatever happened to you was simply a result of your upbringing and that governed your whole life. He was a psychiatrist and a Jew. He was imprisoned in concentration camps of Nazi Germany where his parents, his brother, his wife all died in the camps. Their bodies were burned up in the crematoriums. Frankl himself suffered torture and horrible indignities to his body. He never knew from one moment to the next whether he would live. One day when he was naked and all alone in a small room, he began to become aware of what he called "the Last of the Human Freedoms." Freedom that his Nazi captors could never take away from him. They could take away his family. They could take away his liberty to move around. They could take away his clothes and his property. But Victor Frankl discovered with himself that he could decide, he could choose how all of this was going to affect him. He had the power to choose his response.

Never say there is nothing I can do. That's just the way I am. That's just the way things are. He makes me so mad, I had to hit him. I had to have an affair. My mother, my father did it to me. With Jesus' help you can choose a different approach. With Jesus' help, you can choose your feelings. You can choose your behavior. With Jesus' help you can choose your response to any situation.

That's what responsibility means – your ability to choose your response with Jesus' help. See, friends, if the Holy Spirit working inside of many of you could convince you that you are not a helpless victim, that as a child maybe you were, but you are now an adult and no longer just a helpless victim. I am not preaching positive thinking here. I am talking about looking reality square in the face. Looking at your past square in the face and saying, "This is what happened. This is what my life situation was. But with Jesus' help...Help me Lord Jesus, help me to choose to forgive. Help me Lord Jesus to let me choose to let go of my past. Help me Lord Jesus to choose to pray. To choose to not quit. To choose to be joyful. To choose to spend time with Christian people. To choose to get out of the house. To choose to go to a small group. This is my reality. Maybe I can't change my environment, but no one can take away from me my ability to choose my response, to choose a different response with Jesus' help."

Almost every message you are going to hear in our culture right now is a deterministic message. Whether you go to a non-Christian therapist or you listen to a college professor or a politician, there is going to be some kind of determinism that says to you, "Here's why you are unable to choose a path different for your life." Some people consider it compassionate to label you a helpless victim. To say, "You poor thing...you can't change your attitudes. You can't help your behavior. You have simply been victimized by something or someone."

Friends, compassion does not leave a person lying by the pool and say, "You poor thing. You've been laying there for thirty eight years. You need to lay there another thirty eight years." Christian compassion says with Christ's help, with Christ's energy, with Christ's power, pick up your mat and walk.

Let me read a testimony to you that was sent to me this week from a member of our congregation. Here's what she said:

Growing up in a Christian home, I always believed there was a God. What I didn't know, however, was what kind of God he was. I was taught that the Lord was good, loving and trustworthy by my father. But my dad used to turn to drugs and alcohol to fill his own void. And therefore, he completely denied the truth that he proclaimed.

Very quickly my dad became an absent father, which caused me to try to make sense of the world with only the understanding of a child. That's why I grew up believing that not only was my father ashamed and annoyed by me, but that my Father in heaven was as well. By the age of 11 I had several ulcers from worrying and was struggling with suicide and depression. Then I was abused physically, emotionally, mentally, and sexually by a boy. I began doing drugs about the same time. Once I found that being high can keep you from reality and help you not to think about the things that hurt too much, I chose to be high as much as I could.

Up until this time, I had been in and out of rehab, to numerous psychologists and psychiatrists, and on too many different types and combinations of medications to count. I became a regular at the doctor's office and at an early age, being diagnosed with what seemed like a new problem every few weeks. But as the different diagnoses, the medications changed and I only felt worse and more hopeless than ever. I found that with every new problem, I was labeled with a new label. I literally began to take on the qualities and characteristics of each new label the psychiatrist gave me. Their efforts to fix me only caused me to sink further and further into myself and away from any type of healing. It felt as if they were handing me a new burden to carry along with each problem they said I had. My counselors continued to affirm me in having those problems so I felt more and more ashamed and hateful toward myself than ever before.

It wasn't until I first experienced the Lord's presence that I began to have hope. I never was more aware of how alone I was without him until I felt his presence for the first time. I remember sitting down and just talking to God for the first time when I was at my lowest point. I opened up my heart to him completely and was completely honest with where I was at and how I felt.

To my amazement, God met me right there and then. He gave me a picture of how my way of life was heading away from him and a picture of what my life would be like if I put it in his hands. My heart broke when I saw that there was a real God who truly loved me and wanted me to follow him just as I was.

Then I found that the more I stepped out and experienced God through prayer, worship and talking with other Christians, the walls that I built up around me began to fall away. For the first time I was able to leave my past behind. He broke away the addictions, the labels the doctors tried to put on me, the depression, an even the pain of my past, which up until then I couldn't even bear to think about.

Here's how she closes: I am constantly amazed by the way God loves me. His love is what draws me to Him and away from my sin and my past. One of the biggest lies that the devil ever got me to believe was that my pain, my problems, my diagnoses – that all of that stuff was what made me special and different from anyone else. Even though I was completely alone and a mess, I actually found my identity in all the things that were wrong with me.

But the Lord came and showed me that I had been lied to and that He is what makes me special and complete. I know what it feels like to be completely alone and separated from God. But if anything, I am thankful

for my past because I totally understand how extraordinary is the goodness and fulfillment I have in Jesus Christ.

Isn't that a great testimony? As Christians we can admit that our homes and our environments and our genetics all play a powerful role in shaping us. But as Christians we can look at a kid who has been abused, a kid who has been shuttled around to ten different foster families in seven years – we can say to that kid, or that adult, “Your life script has not been written yet and we are not going to label you this or that. If you turn to Christ, you can help write a different end to the story of your life.

You can write a different end to the story of your marriage.
You can write a different end to the story of your parenting.
Or the story of your relationship with your own parents.

Yeah, the determinists would all say you are hopeless. You can't form an intimate relationship. You are too broken. You've been sinned against too much.

But, friend, your life script has not been finished being written. Just like the girl in the testimony I read, your life script is not being done written. And if what I'm saying is not true, then we ought to shut down the church and all go home. If ultimately, the gospel of Jesus Christ can not radically change a person's life, that ultimately the presence of Jesus breaking in cannot radically change a person's life, if the reality is that your mother, father or someone else holds the key to your future happiness, then let's all go home.

But Jesus holds the key. Jesus holds the key.

Here's the last lie: If Christ really breaks into your life, then everything will instantly get better. We read in verse 8, *Then Jesus said to him, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.*

At this point, we would say, “You know, this guy's life is completely different. And it is. Jesus came to him. Jesus healed to him. We might think okay no more problems for the rest of his life. He's encountered Jesus.

But immediately we read in verse 9 and 10, *The day on which this took place was a Sabbath, and so the Jews said to the man who had been healed, “It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat.” But he replied, “The man who made me well said to me, “Pick up your mat and walk.” So they asked, “Who is this fellow who told you to pick up your mat and walk?” The man who was healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there.*

All of a sudden, this man faced opposition. A lot of people are shocked by the level of opposition they face when they begin to change and grow as Christian believers. When a person says, "I'm committed now to choose a different path for my life. I'm going to go after Jesus. Jesus has broken into my life. I've experienced Jesus. I've heard the gospel and I'm going to follow this Jesus." And a person begins to grow as a Christian. Very often you will hear this kind of testimony.

"My husband was okay when I was weak and dependent and insecure and needy and depressed. But now I am getting healthy, and we fight more than ever."

"So long as I was the black sheep in the family, the family functioned. Why can't they accept the fact now that I've got a good job, I've got my degree, I'm paying my bills, I'm not the screw up I used to be. I've changed. I'm not the screw up I was in high school or in my early 20's."

Do you understand that change, even good change, is going to threaten people, just like this man's healing threatened the Pharisees? That very often people around you get comfortable with you being sick? That the people around you in your family system have actually come to a place of comfort with your sin, your addiction? You get well as a married person and you are going to rock the boat of your marriage. If you break an addictive pattern in your life, your partner is going to be threatened. I guarantee you. It is unsettling, even if they've been complaining about it for years. It is threatening.

If you have been chronically ill and you start feeling better – guaranteed, someone is going to come along and try to convince you that you are still sick. Families, in particular, want to shove you back into the box that you were in. And there is nothing more threatening to people around you than when you come to Christ in a radical way. You talk about blowing up a sick system. You think people give you a hard time now with your problem, wait until you really start challenging their sick system, their whole power base, by you becoming a radical follower of Jesus Christ.

Everything doesn't immediately get better when you start following Christ. You get better. But every often you also experience additional opposition and the people you think will be excited because of the change in your life are not excited. They try to argue you out of it.

Well, let me finish with the question that Jesus asked the man in verse 6, *Do you want to get well?* Are you tired of being lied to and being told that you must remain broken, dependent, and victimized your whole life? Do you want to get well?

This is a marriage-saving church. If you want to have your marriage saved, this is a good place. We have weekends called Begin Again Weekends where dozens of couples have literally had their marriages saved. Couples who came to the weekend with divorce papers in their purses, their marriages were saved.

This is a church that you can come to and be saved from your addictions. If you are hooked sexually, we have groups and ministries that can walk along side of you – not get you dependent upon them, but who will help you get dependent on Jesus.

If you've been victimized, many of us have as children, here's my question: Do you want to get well? Are you tired of lying by the side of the pool and you want to get up and start walking? You know the first step of well is coming to Jesus. I don't know what your problem is, or what your situation is but I know that Jesus is the answer. Let's pray.

Lies That Keep Us Sick

Rich Nathan

October 27 and 28, 2001

“Renewing Your Spiritual Passion” Series

John 5:1-15

I. Deceptions that Wound

II. Lies that Victimize

- A. Lie #1 – Something Other Than Jesus Will Make Me Well (John 5:3)
- B. Lie #2 – The Problem Has Lasted Too Long To Ever Change (John 5:3)
- C. Lie #3 – Something Outside Of Me Keeps Me From Getting Well (John 5:7)
- D. Lie #4 – If Jesus Really Entered Your Life, You Would Get Instantly Better (John 5:8-13)