

INTRODUCTION

[Jesus'] gaze, the touch of his heart heals us . . . enabling us to become truly ourselves and thus totally of God.

Pope Benedict XVI,
Saved by Hope

Somewhere deep inside each one of us is a burning desire to finally become the person God created us to be. Yearning to be fully alive, we long to give ourselves as a gift wholeheartedly back to God. Yet despite these stirrings, many of us hesitate and resist, fearing the very thing we desire. While we long to be made pure and whole, we avoid God's process of purification and healing.

I wonder if the Samaritan woman felt a similar reluctance before encountering Jesus at Jacob's well (see Jn 4). Do you remember her story? Her brief but powerful encounter with Jesus exposed the secrets of her heart and set her free to love again. She came to the well with an insatiable *thirst*. Her many worldly lovers had left these cravings for love unfulfilled. Neither could she satisfy their consuming appetites. One by one, they had thrown her away like a day-old beverage that had lost its taste. We can only imagine how hopeless and unworthy she felt before her encounter with Jesus. Consider her shock when Jesus approached her, asking her for water.

According to the customs of the time, a Samaritan woman would not be permitted to speak with a Jewish man. Furthermore, some scholars suggest she came this late in the day to avoid facing the people in her own village. But Jesus was not a bit surprised by their encounter. Coming to the well, Jesus too was *thirsty*, though he was seeking more than water. He thirsted for this woman, with a deep desire that was totally different from the way the other men desired her. While they sought to consume her for their own pleasure, Jesus longed to satisfy her thirst by pouring himself out on her behalf. He desired to fulfill her, not to use her.

Can you picture the scene as they greet each other and his gentle gaze meets hers? I envision her immediately avoiding eye contact with Jesus. But then sensing something unusual in his presence, I imagine her looking up, being drawn into Jesus' penetrating gaze. Piercing her shame and reaching to the depths of her soul with his words, he *sees her* and speaks to her heart as no one has ever done before now. His searing love purifies her heart, burning away the shame-based lies that have tarnished her self-respect. Her previously unreachable well, the well of her soul, is now overflowing with living water. Running into the village, she longs to offer a refreshing drink to everyone she meets. She is radically transformed by her encounter with Jesus. Seeing her own dignity for the first time, she now desires to give herself completely to God. She wants to tell everyone about this man who "knew everything" about her. She invites all of us to come and meet him for ourselves.



This kind of radical transformation is not just a nice story out of the Bible. Jesus offers the same kind of healing for each one of us today. I have witnessed similar kinds of transformation in our Healing the Whole Person conferences. The people who come and encounter Jesus' powerful love can't wait to tell many others. These conferences were originally developed in cooperation with Father Mark Toups as an intensive week of human formation and training

for the seminarians of his diocese. In time they have expanded to include participants from all over North America, including priests, religious, and lay people of all ages and vocations, and pastors and leaders from across the Body of Christ. We now believe it is time to share these treasured graces with a larger audience, in order to invite you to encounter the powerful love of Jesus in your life.

I encourage you to take an honest look inside yourself, as we embark on this journey of healing together. Are you thirsting for more? Do you long to be more fully alive but find yourself restricted by fear, shame, and disillusionment? Have you tried to fill empty spaces in your heart with unholy relationships or activities that never really satisfy? If so, this book is for you.

In the same way, if you are in a ministry where you desire to help others find greater freedom and healing in their life, I believe you will find much in this book that will benefit you greatly, but first I urge you to apply the material to your own life. Whether we realize it or not we are each wounded and in need of healing. I was involved in ministry for years before I saw my own real and deep need for healing. Now I realize that my healing process is never ending and ever deepening. Jesus meets us time and again, as he did the Samaritan woman, in the place of our deepest thirst.



Jesus brought healing to the Samaritan woman with majestic simplicity. He invited her into an encounter with himself; he revealed her brokenness; and he gave her the finest medicine—his love and truth—to heal her wounds. Jesus often heals each of us in the same simple way. For that reason I have chosen to organize the book into these three overall parts, depicting the three stages of the healing process: part 1, Encountering Jesus (chapters 1–4), part 2, Facing Our Brokenness (chapters 5–7), and part 3, Healing Our Wounds (chapters 8–10).

The intention is to guide you into your own healing encounter with Jesus. To support that objective, I have been careful to ground the

teaching in biblical truth, in keeping with the two-thousand-year-old healing tradition of the Church. Within each chapter you will find references from scripture and from various Christian authors involved in the healing ministry. The title, *Be Healed*, is based in the belief that Jesus' fundamental mission is to restore us to wholeness (see Lk 4:18–19; 1 Thes 5:23). Healing any part of us by necessity influences our entire being (CCC, 363–68). Whether we realize it or not, our physical illnesses, spiritual afflictions, and psychological infirmities are profoundly intertwined.

Throughout the book you will find engaging and at times amazing stories of personal healing experiences that illustrate this interconnection. Some of these come from my personal life and family. Others are drawn from the lives of people with whom I have had the privilege to pray with over the years. I trust that you will find aspects of your own story or ministry in several of these accounts.

To aid you in applying the teaching and stories to your own life, I have included various figures and tables to summarize teaching points in several of the chapters. To that same end, questions for personal reflection are offered in each chapter. For those who want to go deeper with this material, we also offer workbooks, CDs, and other resources through the *John Paul II Healing Center* at JPIIhealingcenter.org. Please contact us directly for those additional materials and for information about our conferences.

As you prepare to begin this journey, I invite you to read with the eyes of your heart as well as with your physical eyes. You may find it beneficial to read through the entire book the first time to gain a general understanding of the material. Then, on the second time through, I encourage you to read slowly and deliberately, praying as you go. Questions for personal reflection are offered throughout each chapter, and in the conclusion. For those who want to engage more fully in this process, I encourage you to form a small support group with a trusted community to go through these questions together. If you would like additional resources, we offer workbooks and CDs through the John Paul II Healing Center. You may contact us directly at jpiihealingcenter.org for these materials.

PART ONE

ENCOUNTERING JESUS

I worry some of you still have not really met Jesus—one to one—you and Jesus alone. . . . He loves you, but even more—He longs for you.

Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta,
Letter to the Missionaries of Charity Family

CHAPTER ONE

DO YOU WANT TO BE HEALED?

*Healing is an essential dimension of . . . Christianity. . . .
It expresses the entire content of our redemption.*

Pope Benedict XVI,
Jesus of Nazareth

I am in awe at Jesus' insight into human nature. I know he created us, but still his ability to see right into the heart of a situation always amazes me. No matter how badly bound we are, he seems to know the exact key to unlock our prison doors. Time and again throughout the gospels, we see his wisdom manifested in his interaction with each person he meets. His encounter with the man at the pool of Bethesda is a prime example (Jn. 5:1–9).

Can you fathom what it was like for this lame man to lay beside a “healing” pool for thirty-eight years but never get in? To put it into a modernday context, imagine someone lying beside the healing waters of Lourdes for thirty-eight years. Can you even imagine that? Day after day, year after year, this man of Bethesda waited helplessly for someone to assist him. Thousands passed him by until Jesus stopped and listened to the cry of his heart.

I'm sure Jesus approached this poor man with compassion, but I must admit I'm a bit troubled by his opening words: "Do you want to be well?" (Jn 5:6). To me, it sounds like Jesus is accusing the man of playing the victim. My initial reaction is to step in to defend this helpless man: *Of course he wants to be healed. Look how long he has been suffering.* But then, coming to my senses, I realize this is Jesus whom I am questioning. He must know something about the deeper paralysis of this man's soul that isn't immediately obvious to me. After all these years, it appears this lame man has given up hope that he will ever be healed. Who could blame him? Why hold on to hope, only to be disappointed again and again?

The longer I ponder Jesus' question to this man, the more I begin to feel a bit uneasy myself. He is not just asking this lame man if he wants to be healed. His question is directed to me and to you as well. After all these years of struggling with our various physical, psychological, and spiritual infirmities, have we somehow resigned ourselves to our broken condition, believing "this is as good as life gets"? Have we also given in to hopelessness, believing we won't be healed? Most of the time, we aren't even conscious of our resignation. We just accept our condition and bear it as best we can. Can you relate?

TAKE A MOMENT

Take a moment to examine your readiness for Jesus to heal you.

- Do you recognize your need for healing?
- Do you want to be healed?
- Have you given up hope that you can be healed?
- Do you believe Jesus desires to heal you?
- What attitudes of doubt and unbelief stand in the way of you receiving Jesus' powerful healing love?



You may be wondering what I mean when I use the term *healing* throughout this book. Simply stated, healing is the process of being made whole: body, soul, and spirit. It includes the restoration of our communion with God, our own integration, and reconciliation with those around us. This is consistent with most dictionary definitions, including the following from *Merriam Webster's*:

1. to make sound or whole <heal a wound>, to restore to health
2. to cause (an undesirable condition) to be overcome . . .
to patch up (a breach or division) <heal a breach between friends>
3. to restore to original purity or integrity <healed of sin>

These definitions are reflective of the way the word *healing* is used throughout the scriptures: to save, to cure, to make whole, to repair a breach, to restore communion, to give a therapeutic remedy, and so forth. The lame man of Bethesda's most obvious need was for physical healing, but Jesus saw that he needed a much deeper healing. Before losing hope, he had a natural and God-given desire to be made whole and to have all his relationships restored. Though paralyzed with hopelessness, he could still acknowledge these buried desires.

No matter how much we have suppressed our desires, you and I also have a deep yearning to be healed. Why else do we go to doctors, dentists, therapists, priests, and ministers? Why else do so many people spend a significant portion of their time, money, and energy in the pursuit of health and wholeness? According to the World Bank, health care currently consumes anywhere from 10 to 20 percent of our resources.¹

We pursue health and wholeness because God has built the desire for healing into the fabric of every human being. As Pope Benedict attests, healing is essential to our Christian faith. As Christians, we believe that Jesus came to earth for this purpose—to restore us to

wholeness and to bring us back into full communion with the Father and each other.



This faith, revealed in sacred scriptures, has been faithfully proclaimed by the Church for two thousand years: “Heal the sick’! The Church has received this charge from the Lord and strives to carry it out. . . . She believes in the life-giving presence of Christ, the physician of souls and bodies” (CCC, 1509). Stop a minute and let those time-tested words sink in. Jesus, the incarnation of God our Healer, is the ultimate physician of our souls and bodies (Ex 15:25–26). He not only forgives all our sins, but he also heals all our diseases, according to the Psalmist (Ps 103:3).

Jesus’ healing miracles, past and present, are expressions of the Father’s tender compassion and intimate concern for each of us in our brokenness and suffering. They point to the ultimate healing he won for us on Calvary. Pope Benedict’s assertion sums it all up: “Healing . . . expresses the *entire content* of our redemption.”² For the past two thousand years of Church history, all our worship, all our theology, and all our prayers are directed toward our restoration, as we are brought ever deeper into communion with the Holy Trinity.

Healing is a process, which will be completely fulfilled in heaven. But the process must begin now in each of our lives, as we face our various physical ailments, psychological difficulties, and spiritual afflictions. So the question Jesus asked of the man of Bethesda is directed to each one of us, “*Do you want to be healed?*” In some ways, we all resemble the lame man lying near the healing waters. As close as Jesus is, we can’t reach him by ourselves; we need his help. At the same time, Jesus will not heal us without our consent and cooperation. Many of us don’t realize we even need healing, or how deeply we need it. We mistakenly believe we are fine just the way we are. I was that person in my twenties and early thirties. Like the religious

leaders of Jesus' time, I thought I was fine and had no need of the Divine Physician (Mk 2:17). My pride blinded me, but Jesus opened my eyes to my tremendous need for healing.

As you hear my story, I pray you will be able to relate in some way. I have found that underlying our individual life circumstances, we all share a common brokenness. I hope that my experience will stir you to look at your own story and recognize your own brokenness. As you do, I pray you will encounter the powerful love of Jesus in your life like never before.



I am only half joking when I tell people that I began my career as a family therapist at the ripe old age of fourteen. I didn't actually earn my degree until the age of twenty-six, but by the time I finished my graduate training I had many years of informal experience "playing therapist" in my family of origin. Life circumstances thrust me into this role rather abruptly when my dad, an otherwise good and loving father, made some life-altering choices, which left me, my mom, and six siblings abandoned and left to fend for ourselves.

Dad's leaving broke my heart and devastated our entire family. Our once-secure world was shattered. Though all of us suffered enormously, the damage was most evident in my older brother Dave, who at sixteen found his solace in heroin. In 1969, he attended the infamous Woodstock gathering, grew his hair long, rebelled against authority, and found his identity in the emerging hippie subculture. Soon after dad left, Dave also left home. With their leaving, I lost my two closest friends and male role models. Watching them fall, I felt like one of the lemmings who stood in danger of being next over the cliff. I needed to do something to protect myself, my mom, and my younger brothers and sisters. As the second oldest, I took it upon myself to shoulder the emotional burdens of our large and distressed

family. In the process, I denied my own pain and became overly concerned about everyone else's well-being.

Losing Dad and Dave was only the beginning of a very difficult eighth-grade year. Within the next twelve months I lost everything and everyone I loved, with the exception of my mom and other siblings. Dad's leaving seemed to remove a hedge of protection from around our family, and we became open prey to the enemy of our souls. Things got considerably worse, very quickly.

Within weeks of Dad leaving, my basketball coach of four years, who was also my science and homeroom teacher, invited four teammates and me on a camping trip. While there, he climbed into my bed in the middle of the night and tried to molest me. I am grateful that I woke up and got away, but the wounds of betrayal remained. That same weekend, my first girlfriend and several of my closest friends back home engaged in sexual intimacies with one another while I was gone.

Having already been betrayed by my dad and coach, I was reeling. Whom could I trust? There was more to come. Five months later, I became enamored with another beautiful girl and entrusted my heart to her. As Yogi Berra quipped, "It was déjà vu all over again." I went away to basketball camp for three weeks, and when I returned, I found out she too had been unfaithful. I learned not to trust my heart to anyone and concluded that going away to camp could be dangerous.

During all this time we didn't hear from Dad for over a year. I remember lying in bed at night wondering whether he was alive or dead. My brother Dave eventually found him in another city, where he had started a second family. This was the final blow. It seemed my entire foundation of trust was ripped out from under me—and not just from me but also from our entire family. In the wake of the public humiliation, Mom decided she needed to start over, prompting her to move us away from our childhood home in Bethel Park, a suburb of Pittsburgh.

In the middle of my ninth-grade year, we moved as a family to South Florida, leaving everyone and everything of value back home

in Pennsylvania. I didn't want to move, but I had no choice. I loved Bethel Park, where I had lived all my life, and I detested everything about my new environment in South Florida. I realize that others have much more traumatic things to deal with in life, but for my short life, which until this point had been quite secure and happy, everything was turned upside down. Life was chaotic, and without my awareness, my trust in God was severely wounded.



In spite of all the upheaval, we managed to survive as a family, living on the Father's providence with a little help from food stamps. We each found our own unique ways to cope. After a year of struggle and feeling completely lost in the new environment, I began excelling again in school and sports. My role as "family therapist" for my mom and siblings also gave me a sense of purpose and meaning. Despite a few sports injuries and surgeries, I *thought* I was healthy.

At the time, I had no concept that my physical ailments might be pointing to underlying spiritual and psychological issues, which I hadn't faced. I managed to get all the way through high school, college, graduate school, and then into my profession without dealing with my inner pain and brokenness. As far as I was concerned, the past was clearly in the rearview mirror and I never needed to revisit it. Have you ever felt that way? That your past is behind you and you don't need to look back? Sometimes we even misquote the Bible to justify our unwillingness to face our pain: "Forgetting what lies behind but straining forward to what lies ahead, I continue my pursuit toward the goal" (Phil 3:13b–14a).

I was tenaciously goal-driven, achieving enough to be accepted at Columbia University, where I played football for four years. From then on, I was completely focused on starting a family and establishing a career. Before finishing college, I married my girlfriend and best friend from high school, Margie O'Donnell. A year after getting