

Choose Life

We are now in the fourth week of the series, Journeying Together. Today we are going to explore life and the choices we make.

We've been noting over these last few weeks that life is a journey.

As we journey with people, there comes a point where we want to help them find some direction, guidance, insight and wisdom for their life. The choices we make, determine the direction we take, and our direction determines our destiny.

Sometimes when we journey with people it might be for a very short time or a much longer time.

During my working life for a number of years I registered deaths. I worked in a London Teaching Hospital that sadly saw a lot of deaths sometimes as many as 30 plus over a bank holiday weekend. It was a privilege to journey with people at the most difficult of times in their lives especially if they turned out to be Christians. On the other hand when I had a serious breakdown in health I sought the help of a counselor who journeyed with me for 8 years.

So how can we *'live life well'* as Paul had encouraged the Thessalonians?

When Jesus talked about life, He used three different words.

The three words, in Greek, were for three different **dimensions** of life. To journey well with people, it is important to understand three-dimensional living ...

1. External life outer world (Bios)

2. Internal life inner world (Psuche) Psyche

3. Eternal life (Zoe)

Journeying is about helping people find direction through facing choices in all of these three dimensions of living.

So let's look at [the man by the pool of Bethesda](#).

Firstly some pictures of the pool and it's location.

There are eight main gates into Jerusalem, but this isn't one of them; it is a gate where sheep are driven by sheep traders into the city. Inside was the daily cattle market: a noisy place, with thousands of sheep wandering everywhere.

'Now a certain man was there who had an infirmity thirty-eight years' (John 5:5). This was part of his external life; outer world.

His outer world (*bios*) was:

A busy and unpleasant place

Shepherds, who were buying and selling sheep at the market, would wash their sheep in the pool. And so the pool was smelly, and polluted by sheep. And there were not only thousands of sheep but also 'a great multitude of sick people, blind, lame, paralyzed'.

The sick were crowded there, sitting under the five arches to avoid the blistering heat of the sun. They were there because, once in a while, an angel came and stirred the water with healing properties and the first person to get in, out of all the thousands, would be healed.

An uncertain and competitive place

Things could change any minute. Will an angel visit today? Will there be any one to put me in? Will I be first? Will my circumstances change?

There was a continual underlying anxiety and it was a competitive environment. Every day, thousands vied for the opportunity to be healed. If the water moved slightly there was pandemonium.

The ruthless crowd surged forward – like a Boxing Day or Black Friday sale – all banking on getting into the pool first.

It was 'every man for himself' and a daily battle not to lose your place in the pecking order.

This man, who had been sick for thirty-eight years, lived every day in this miserable, uncertain and competitive place.

Every day he hoped that the waters of the pool would move; that his turn would come; that 'today' his world would change. But he was only to be disappointed at the end of the day.

Is this a picture of life today?

People lie by the lottery pool, the promotion pool, the church pool, hoping the water will suddenly move and they'll be able to 'get in' – but living with the constant struggle and disappointment of it never happening for them. In the meantime, they are trapped on the treadmill of life.

The burden of busyness

We live in a busy world.

We live life juggling mobile phones, networking, texting, emailing, tweeting and multitasking. We are swept along with the 'busy, busy' syndrome. Bottom lines, targets, deadlines, driven by endless appointments and meetings. Everyone wants everything yesterday. The in-tray of life never empties. Never enough time in the day to get it all done, struggling to hold it all together.

So consumed with our own busyness (maybe hoping something will change in our world through some pool we are living by), we just 'haven't got time' to come alongside someone else to journey with them.

Today, there are many courses that claim to train people on 'time management'. However, there is no such thing as time management. It's a misnomer because time is constant.

It's not about managing time, but about managing ourselves in relation to time. It's about personal management in relation to the resource of time that God has given to us, and we have choices and decisions to make about the busyness of our own lives.

The challenge of choice

So, on this day, Jesus came by the man lying by the pool who had suffered for thirty-eight years. Jesus comes to where he is, surrounded by this frenetic daily activity, living by this disappointing pool.

Now you might think that Jesus would heal this man by praying for him or helping him into the pool, but He doesn't. The Bible tells us that He asked the man a question and so offered him a choice: **'Do you want to be made well?' (John 5:6).**

Jesus was speaking to **his inner world**. It was a simple 'yes or no' question: 'Do you want your world to change? Do you want this circumstance to be different?'

After lying by this miserable pool for such a long time, you'd think his immediate response would be, 'Yes sir! I have been waiting for this all of my life.'

But he didn't respond like that. He was now held hostage by the **inner** and **outer** world in which he lived.

In his inner world he had certain things that he wanted to hang on to:

Self-pity

The man was saying to Jesus: **'You don't understand my problem. I am waiting here for the water to stir but when it moves, I've got nobody here to help me. I have no friends. I'm here alone, by myself in this.'** Caught in this terrible world of busyness, with these terrible struggling circumstances, he is ready to blame others for his inability to get into the water.

Given up and become passive

Seeing that others are quicker, he's resigned, believing that there will always be someone quicker, so he has accepted his lot. He's telling Jesus: **'I'm stuck here struggling, stuck in a freeze frame of life.'**

He was settled in a victim mentality

Instead of responding, 'Yes Lord', he responds with self-pity. He has adopted a victim mentality, which means he's consistently looking for reasons why life isn't working for him: **I am the victim of circumstance. Other people did stuff to me; things have happened I had no control over.**

When we journey alongside people we may find this outlook has developed in them. Very often this is because their struggle has lasted so long. They are caught up in their world of busyness, demands, responsibilities and troubles.

Counsellors often call this 'Problem presenting solution refusing'

By journeying with them, we can help them begin to understand and face that mentality. We can say: 'Hang on a minute, I can bring some hope, perspective, direction and encouragement to your life.'

Eternal life. We can choose to live God's kind of life

Jesus gives this man further direction. Not only to stand up and walk, but to change his direction.

'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"'. This suggests that the man was by that pool because of a wrong choice. Jesus is saying, 'I have called you to choose, you have made that choice, now continue making right choices, choosing the right directions, choosing the God kind of life'.

Journeying together is not just a matter of helping people re-order their external world. But we can help people understand what is going on in their *external world*, and see how that is affected by their internal life.

That their external disorder is often created by internal disorder, that their outer world only reflects their inner world.

Journeying Together is coming alongside those like this man; journeying with them, helping them take back control of choice, and choosing life.

The time had come for this man to stop wallowing in self-pity, to get up and do something to change his life. With a victim mentality he was pitiful. But Jesus said he

could be powerful.

By taking his God-given power of choice, standing up, picking up his mat walking forward in a new direction.

Journeying together is helping people pick up their mat and walk one step at a time.

What is the mat? Whatever has been our comfort zone; whatever is making our present uncomfortable situation comfortable; whatever we have been using as an excuse for lying by the pool.

This man was pitiful but became powerful. Being powerful is not what we achieve, but it is what we choose. That's the wonderful joy of journeying with someone through this enabling process.