

WHEN YOU WANTED MORE BUT SETTLED FOR LESS

8 February 2026

SUMMARY:

This message explores the confronting question Jesus asks a man who had been paralyzed for 38 years: "Do you want to be made well?" The message challenges listeners to examine areas where they have settled for merely surviving rather than being fully alive. It emphasizes that God's grace doesn't fix broken systems to help us cope better, instead, it frees us from being trapped by them entirely. The message prepares the IMPACTERS community for Lent, framing it not as a season of punishment but as a time of becoming fully alive through honesty, consent, and obedience. It addresses how we often become fluent in explaining our limitations rather than desiring the wholeness that would require us to change. Bruce Downes emphasizes that God will not heal what we refuse to name and will not free what we insist on managing ourselves.

KEY POINTS

- Many people function in life without being fully alive, adapting to limitations rather than experiencing complete wholeness
- Jesus asks "Do you want to be made well?" before healing, awakening desire before providing transformation
- Relief leaves our structures intact; wholeness changes them completely
- We often become fluent in explaining why we are the way we are, using our past hurts and circumstances as cages that define and confine us
- God's grace doesn't improve broken systems. It frees people from being trapped by them
- Healing requires consent and obedience, not just understanding
- Sometimes we must move before breakthrough comes; God asks for obedience before explanation
- Long-term unwellness can become familiar, and we can organize our entire lives around our limitations
- God will not heal what we will not name and will not free what we insist on managing
- Lent is about becoming fully alive through honesty and consent, not about punishment or mere discipline
- Obedience doesn't guarantee approval from others, but it makes life truer rather than simpler
- Being made well often means relinquishing bitterness, control, and patterns of distraction

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES:

- John 5:2-9 (Primary passage about the paralyzed man at the Pool of Bethesda)

QUOTES

- It's so easy to be alive and yet not fully alive. And it's precisely in these moments, when people are like this, that God sometimes does His most serious work in us.
- Jesus doesn't simply see a condition. He sees duration. He sees history. He sees how long we have lived inside what confines us.
- Relief leaves our structures intact. Wholeness changes them. Relief allows us to return to the familiar patterns that we live in. Wholeness asks us to live completely differently.
- Before God heals, he often awakens our desire. And before he removes what confines us, he wants to know whether we are ready to live without what confines us.
- God's help is not primarily about fixing broken systems so that people can survive them comfortably. God's help is about freeing people from being trapped by them.
- God will not heal that which we will not name. He doesn't free what we insist on managing.
- Lent is the season of becoming fully alive. It's not about punishing ourselves for being broken. But it's about agreeing with God about what keeps us unfree.
- Sometimes in the kingdom of God, in our lives, we just make a decision, that's in my past, it's broken, I'm not going to fix it. But I will not allow it to damage me and confine me any longer.

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SMALL GROUP GUIDE

This guide is designed to help your small group dive deeper into the message.

OPENING PRAYER

Pray the IMPACTERS Community Prayer.

ICE BREAKER

Question: Share one moment this week when you felt "fully alive" - completely present, joyful, and free.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. **There's a difference between being alive and being fully alive** - We can function without experiencing true joy, peace, and freedom.
2. **Jesus sees our history, not just our condition** - He knows how long we've lived inside what confines us.
3. **Relief is not the same as wholeness** - Relief leaves our structures intact; wholeness transforms them.
4. **Explanation can replace desire** - We become fluent in narrating why we can't change rather than pursuing what we want.
5. **God won't heal what we won't name** - Wholeness requires our consent and honesty.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Section 1: Personal Reflection

1. The message described various ways people aren't "fully alive" - in relationships, work, prayer life, etc. Which of these resonated most with you? Where in your life do you feel you're functioning but not fully alive?
2. Think about the crippled man who had been at the pool for 38 years. What "pools" have you been waiting beside? What systems or circumstances have you organized your life around that might be keeping you from wholeness?

Section 2: The Question Jesus Asks

3. Why do you think Jesus asked, "Do you want to be made well?" instead of just healing the man immediately? What does this reveal about how God works in our lives?
4. The man responded with explanations rather than a simple "yes" or "no." What are the explanations you give for why things in your life haven't changed? Are these explanations protecting you from something?

Section 3: The Cost of Wholeness

5. The message said, "Wholeness asks us to live completely differently." What would wholeness require you to give up? What cage would you need to leave? What "mat" (symbol of your former identity) would you need to pick up?
6. Jesus said three things: "Stand up, take your mat, and walk." What might be the first step of obedience God is asking you to take right now, even before you see the results?

Section 4: Preparing for Lent

7. The message emphasized that "Lent is the season of becoming fully alive." How does this perspective change the way you've thought about Lent in the past?
8. The message stated, "God does not heal what we will not name." What do you need to name honestly before God during this Lenten season? What area of your life needs His healing touch?

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

This Week:

1. **Personal Inventory:** Set aside 30 minutes this week to journal on this question: "Where am I not fully alive, and why?" Be brutally honest with yourself and God.
2. **Name It:** Write down one thing you've been making excuses about or one cage you've been living in. Bring it before God in prayer daily this week.
3. **Take One Step:** Identify one concrete action God might be asking you to take (like Bruce buying plane tickets to visit people). Don't wait for all the answers—take the step.

Preparing for Lent:

1. **Read the Blue Pages:** If you haven't read the community's "Blue Pages," consider reading sections that relate to your spiritual growth.
2. **Plan Your Lenten Practice:** Don't wait until Ash Wednesday. Start thinking now about what God might be inviting you to do during Lent—what to take up, what to lay down, what to confess.
3. **Find an Accountability Partner:** Share with one person in your group what you believe God is calling you to during Lent, and ask them to check in with you regularly.

CLOSING PRAYER

"Father, we come before you in the name of Jesus. You do not condemn us for the cages we've lived in. You see us for who we can be and invite us out of the places we are. As we enter this Lenten season, show us where we are not fully alive and where you are calling us to be fully alive. Give us courage to stand up, pick up our mats, and walk into the wholeness you have for us. In Jesus' name, Amen."

FOR NEXT WEEK

- Come prepared to share one thing God revealed to you through your personal inventory
- Bring your Bible.
- Be ready to discuss your Lenten commitments with the group

LEADER'S NOTE:

Be sensitive to those who may be struggling with serious issues (illness, financial hardship, broken relationships). The message isn't that everything will be fixed, but that we can experience God's freedom even in difficult circumstances. Make space for lament as well as hope.