# **"GET UP AND WALK"**

Passage: John 5:1-9

**8** Then Jesus said to him, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.”

# **INTRODUCTION**

I would like to begin this message by telling you something that happened recently in my life. In September of last year, my mother, who is 82 years old, had an accident. She slipped and fell to the ground; she couldn't stand because of pain in her hip. We took her to a public hospital in Guatemala City where we live. After waiting about five hours, they took some X-rays, and the doctor said: "She has cracked the hip bone. We need to operate and put in some screws. Since other patients are a priority, she needs to wait in the hospital for 30 to 40 days." While all this was happening, patients kept arriving at the emergency room at a rate of one every 15 minutes—suffering from work accidents, being hit by cars, motorcycle accidents, gunshot wounds, etc. When my mother heard the doctor's diagnosis she said: **"I cannot stay here for even 2 days, listening to the laments and complaints; seeing people die; I will become depressed; please get me out of here."**

The Apostle John tells us in chapter five of his gospel that Jesus went up to a pool in Jerusalem called Bethesda. He went there to visit a person with physical paralysis. That visit from Jesus completely changed the life of that paralytic man. Without a doubt, the life of that paralytic was never the same after Jesus' miracle. Physically, mentally, and spiritually, his life was transformed.

Jesus Christ is with us at this Latin American conference titled, “**His Endless Love**,” and He wants to transform our lives just as He did with that paralytic at Bethesda. So let’s allow God to work in our lives during this conference. Amen

In case you're wondering what happened to my mother... We prayed to God for her health and sought a second medical opinion. The doctor suggested waiting to see if the bone would heal on its own. People came to visit her and told us: "You'd better resign yourselves and prepare to care for her, because she probably won't walk again; she's too old." After a few weeks of being bedridden and using a wheelchair, God healed that 82-year-old bone and she walked again. Her paralytic condition lasted about two months. Despite what many people said, she is walking for the glory of Jesus Christ. Amen.

In verse 3 we see that under the 5 porches of the Bethesda pool lay a multitude of blind, lame, and paralyzed people—those who were sick and had physical disabilities. In my city, it's common to see such people in crowded places, hoping to receive money from passersby's charity. But here we see that these people were waiting for something unusual; they weren't waiting for money or alms; they were waiting for the movement of the water in the pool.

In verse 4 we see that an angel of God appeared at certain intervals and stirred the water. And as we understand in verse four, the first person to reach and immerse themselves in the stirred water would be healed of their disease. **What an unusual way of healing people…. If we told this to an atheist university student, it would surely cause** laughter and mockery. They would say: "Why did God heal people this way?" **For some reason, it was a way that God healed the sick.** People had great faith in this unorthodox method. Surely there were many, many testimonies of people healed this way, because the passage doesn't say there were four or five people waiting, but a whole multitude.

Let's imagine for a moment what that precise instant was like when the angel stirred the water. It was literally a fierce competition between the blind and paralytics to get there first. There were pushes and blows; I think not even in a soccer match would there be so many elbows, slaps, and jersey pulls. But one had to arrive first—there was no second place. If you weren't first, you were a loser.

Surely, for many of these people, it was their last alternative. Perhaps they had spent their money on doctors and specialists–had tried some kind of alternative treatment, but nothing had worked. Or maybe some hadn't even visited a doctor because they were poor and had no resources. That was the reality.

Verse 5. Wow! It was 38 years that this paralytic in our story had been there. Almost 4 decades... We don't know how often the angel appeared to stir the water, but those 38 years that the paralytic had been there gives us the idea that the angel didn't come every 15 minutes. Possibly, it was weeks or months. Maybe this movement of the water happened only a couple of times a year. Definitely, that was an opportunity that couldn't be missed.

Please, let's imagine what it would have been like to be in this place: the five porches of the Bethesda's pool, full of sick and disabled people, poor people wearing rags because they couldn't work, people who had perhaps been abandoned by their families and had made their home there. People couldn't easily go to the bathroom to relieve themselves or take a shower. Surely the smell was unbearable. This was a depressing place where nobody wanted to be.

The sick people at Bethesda's pool had no more options. Their only alternative was to wait and wait; they couldn't live peacefully while waiting for the exact moment to compete to be the first to arrive. Surely, just like the paralytic in the passage, many people had made Bethesda's pool their home. Not only the 38-year paralytic, but most of those people had gone from having hope to facing a reality, making Bethesda's pool their new home.

The paralytic of Bethesda had been lying on a mat for 38 years. Surely, as is usually the case, at the beginning everything was hope, faith, and much encouragement. Perhaps at first he received support and visits from many relatives and friends who said: "Cheer up, Carlos! Little by little, don't get discouraged, Ruben, we'll try again." Week after week, month after month, fewer and fewer people encouraged him. Until this paralytic was left alone. There was no longer hope, only resignation.

The problem of this paralytic person in our story was no longer limited to physical paralysis. After 38 years of being under these conditions, his problem was no longer so much physical but mental, emotional, and spiritual. It was 38 years in which this paralytic had to compete with other sick people. We human beings are like that paralytic; we suffer as spiritual paralytics, we have become accustomed to living in an aggressive and competitive world to survive. From an early age, our parents mentally prepare us to compete hard in a world that as time passes gives fewer and fewer opportunities. We compete to enter university, then for a job, we compete for acceptance within a social group. We suffer disappointments, disillusions, blows that make us lose faith and get used to a life of failure, sadness, and disappointment. After so many blows and sufferings, we reach our own conclusions: "It's not possible, it's impossible. I don't have enough resources."

We see in Verse 6 that Jesus Christ approaches this paralytic person and asks him: **"Do you want to get well?"** When we study the life of Jesus Christ, we see that he constantly asked people questions. For example, when they brought him a young lunatic who suffered from epileptic attacks, Jesus asked: **"How long has this been happening to him?"** When a woman with blood flow problems touched the hem of his cloak to be healed, Jesus asked: **"Who touched me?"** To Peter he said: **"Peter, do you love me more than these?"** This is very curious if we know that Jesus knew everything. Peter told him: **"Lord, you know everything."** What need did Jesus have to ask these questions to people? Jesus did this questioning so that people could meditate deeply in their hearts. That's why it's important to analyze the questions that Jesus Christ is always asking in our lives because they will make us meditate deep in our hearts.

Now the question to the paralytic is: **"Do you want to get well?"** A question that might seem... obvious or even absurd. The paralytic was supposedly there, in that unpleasant and depressing place, with the purpose of winning a competition and being healed. However, it had been 38 years. In 38 years, absolutely everything can happen.

As absurd as Jesus' question may seem to us humans, these words were loaded with love and hope, because he came to give hope and love to humanity. He has love and compassion for sinners like this paralytic, and he wants to transform our lives, so he makes us meditate in our minds and hearts.

I want to repeat it once again, **"Do you want to get well?"** That was Jesus Christ's question, a very simple question. This question could have been answered with a simple word, a **yes** or a **no**. However, the paralytic gives a long and interesting answer–a **response that seems to be loaded** with conformity, resignation, and acceptance of a sad and disappointing reality. **"Sir, I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred."** That was the paralytic's response. 38 years had passed since he had arrived there with much hope, yet every time the water was stirred and the competition began, this man only received physical and psychological abuse from other people. Please think: What would the spirit and self-esteem of that person be like? All these unpleasant experiences had led him to draw his own conclusions in his mind. Now it was time to accept a painful reality. "Lord, I have no one to help me."

I invite you, please, to think: What would our answer be if Jesus asked us today about what we desired five or ten years ago. "Lord, I don't have enough money." "Lord, I didn't even finish College." "Lord, there is no cure for my illness." "Lord, I have been beaten down too many times, no more Lord." Surely our answers would be very similar to those of that paralytic.

Twenty years ago, I had the illusion of being able to raise a group of disciples on campus. I would go fishing at the university campus, prepare invitations, and begin to talk about Jesus Christ. I have many fishing experiences, many of them beautiful and many of them unpleasant. If Jesus asked me about the desire I had as a young man, I think some of my honest answers would be: "Lord, I've tried several times already, I think I'm just wasting my time," or "Lord, students don't want to take Bible study seriously."

Let's look at Verse 8. In response, Jesus said to that man: **" Get up! Pick up your mat and walk."** These are very powerful words that transformed the life of that man, words that surely that paralytic did not forget for the rest of his life. Jesus didn't tell him: "try to get up." He didn't give him a hand to lift him up. He gave him a direct order: **" Get up! Pick up your mat and walk."** That man who complained about not receiving help from anyone, now receives an order from Jesus Christ: **"Get up!, by yourself," "pick up your things and walk."** It's not just an order, it was a powerful word from Jesus Christ that caused a miracle in this man's life. The word of God is powerful and can make a paralytic walk and a blind person regain sight. **I**t can give a defeated, dispirited person new strength; it can make a person accustomed to failure have victory.

God is not only concerned about our physical healing. Jesus could have prayed and the paralytic would have been healed. However, he placed a challenge before him. For God, our emotional and spiritual healing is more important. That man who was accustomed to depending on his luck and other people, that man who had a hurt heart, who held so much resentment in his heart for not receiving help from others, now received the instruction from Jesus Christ to do something for himself... **to rise up.**

Although most of us don't have a physical condition, today God wants to heal our hearts. He knows that the hearts of many of us are accustomed to disappointment–to so many blows, to so much rejection and frustration that has thrown us to the ground, like spiritual paralytics. Today Jesus Christ asks us to get up in his name and the power of his word.

Verse 9. That man, using what faith he had left, got up and walked. That which he had desired so much, that dream he had for 38 years of walking out of there, now became a reality. It was not by his own effort, not in the way he expected by getting into the pool, it became reality by the power of Jesus Christ's word.

If you want to know a little more about the life of this paralytic, in verse 14 he said: **"** “See, you are well again.” **See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you ."** Jesus Christ decided to visit the pool of Bethesda to change the life of this paralytic. Although he was a sinful man, Jesus has great love for sinful people. With this, Jesus demonstrates **His Endless Love to the paralytic.** He completely changed his life despite being a sinner. I think if I had the power to heal paralytics, I would heal good paralytics, not sinners. But Jesus went to the pool of Bethesda for a sinful paralytic, **because Jesus has endless love–**love that we humans often cannot understand.

We also see that this paralytic person, faced with Jesus' challenge, was obedient. Jesus told him: **" Get up! Pick up your mat and walk. "** Jesus clearly told him: **"Pick up your mat"** and the now ex-paralytic "Took up his mat from the ground."

I wonder, what could that man want with an old rag that brought bad memories? Surely he wasn't going to need it anymore. It was just memories of a miserable life. But apparently, it was important for Jesus that the paralytic take his mat. The paralytic was obedient to the word of Jesus Christ and picked it up from the ground, that dirty and smelly rag. Why would Jesus ask for this?

Jesus Christ doesn't want us to forget that one day we were spiritual paralytics, thrown onto a foul-smelling bed of sins without any hope. He wants our old mat to allow us to give a testimony of who we were, and who Jesus Christ has transformed us into.

I pray to God that he allows us to have victory over all fatalistic thoughts, and allows us to be obedient to his command: **Get up and walk.** And we can tell other people who we were and who we are now in Christ Jesus. Amen.

My name is Saul Lopez, I was born and raised in Guatemala City. Like many children and young people in Latin America, I grew up in poverty. When I was 6 years old, my father had an accident—he was shot due to the violence that exists in my country. Since my father couldn't work, my mom worked very hard to support me and my sisters. These are things that mark your life and make you think differently, similar to a spiritual paralytic.

In the year 2000, I attended a Sunday service at the UBF chapter of San Carlos University for the first time, where I graduated in Engineering. Although that was 25 years ago, I remember very well that Sunday the message given by Missionary Joshua Ham was precisely about this Paralytic of Bethesda. I remember that Missionary repeatedly and with much energy repeated the phrase: **" Get up! Pick up your mat and walk."** That message impacted my life because I saw myself precisely as a spiritual paralytic, lamenting many things, and that word from Jesus Christ helped me at that moment to find direction in my life. At that time, I never imagined being here, 25 years later giving this same message. Now God has me here.

I could tell you a lot about my own paralytic's bed: suffering scarcity, pain, mockery, insecurity, sadness, low self-esteem, depression, pessimistic thoughts.

Just as it happened to the paralytic, my sins brought consequences and suffering to my life. As a consequence of living a life away from God, I suffered the pain of losing my family in a divorce, something that hurt me a lot because at some point my family was my main motivation. I had become a spiritual paralytic again, spending whole days lying in my bed, sunk in a great depression, resigned to failure, with no desire to live, asking God why he allowed so much suffering and frustration in my life. I expected a miracle from God in my own way, just as the paralytic of Bethesda expected to be the first at the movement of the water.

Through this word, God spoke to my life and made me see what my condition as a Spiritual paralytic was like, with a defeated mentality. Of course, Jesus Christ performed a miracle in my life. He gave me an order; he told me: don't stay there: Get up and Walk. Jesus Christ gave me the instruction to get up, to serve God, and to give glory to him with my life. I am no longer a spiritual paralytic.

One Word, Jesus told me: **Get up and Walk.**