



BESIDE  
*Bethesda*

— 31 DAYS —  
TOWARD DEEPER HEALING

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— DAY 1 —

*Do Not Pass Me By*

IF YOU SPEND ANY TIME at all with me, you will know that I love the old hymns. I love to hear them, and I love to sing them. But for me, it's something more than nostalgia or enjoying a particular style of music.

I don't just sing hymns because I want to.

I sing because I have to.

I remember darker days when I was first injured and in the hospital. I wanted so much to cry—and to just go on crying for the rest of my life. Instead, I would stifle

the tears and comfort myself with one of the old hymns of the church:

Savior, Savior,  
Hear my humble cry;  
While on others Thou art calling,  
Do not pass me by.

When I sang those words, or even hummed the melody softly to myself late at night in my hospital room, it always reminded me of the pool of Bethesda in John chapter 5. When friends visited me at the hospital, I often asked them to read that passage to me.

John speaks of one man who had been there, lying beside that pool, for thirty-eight years. The account goes on to say that “when Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time” (verse 6), He approached the disabled man and asked him a question.

I can't tell you how many nights I would picture myself there at the pool of Bethesda, on a blanket, perhaps lying

next to the paralyzed man on his straw mat. In my mind's eye we would lie there, waiting. He would be waiting for an angel to stir up the waters. Then, somehow, he would inch himself over to the pool and slip into it for supernatural healing.

He was waiting for an angel . . . but I was waiting for Jesus.

I knew that the Son of God Himself would be coming, stepping out of the bright morning light, slipping under the shade of the colonnades and standing for a moment, looking out at the desperate, nearly hopeless little band of disabled men and women waiting at the water's edge.

In my fantasies, I would see Him pausing by the pool, His disciples puzzled by the delay and eager to keep moving toward the temple. And I would cry out to Him, not wanting Him to leave, not wanting Him to miss me, lying on that pavement in the shade of a pillar.

“Jesus! Oh, Jesus! Don't pass me by. Here I am! Heal me! Help me! Don't leave me here like this!”

And the truth was, though I couldn't see it at the time,

He had seen me all along. He had known me. He was aware of my fear, my sorrow, my despair, my longings, and my crushing need. He would not—did not—pass me by. He never has passed me by. And He never will, not in all eternity.

Jesus' ceaseless watch-care and compassion for us is no fantasy. In Psalm 77, the psalmist reflected on the Lord's presence during some of the darkest, most turbulent moments of his nation's history. "Your path led through the sea," he recalled, "your way through the mighty waters, though your footprints were not seen" (verse 19). In other words, "We couldn't see You or feel You in those heartbreaking, terrifying moments, but looking back, it's very clear that You led us and protected us every step of the way."



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GOING DEEPER . . .

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*Jerusalem says, "The LORD has deserted us;  
the LORD has forgotten us."*

*"Never! Can a mother forget her nursing child?  
Can she feel no love for the child she has borne?*

*But even if that were possible,*

*I would not forget you!*

*See, I have written your name on  
the palms of my hands."*

ISAIAH 49:14-16, NLT





Have you ever jotted down a phone number on your own hand because you were in a pinch, needed to remember it, and couldn't find a scrap of paper? Our God has no such memory problems, but to help you understand His constant attention and love, He tells you that He has written your name on the palm of His hand. Carry that mental picture with you into your day . . . and your night.





— DAY 2 —  
*A Long Time*

“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 . . .” (John 5:5-6).

A few months from now, I will mark an anniversary that is at once a heartbreaking story of loss and an incomparable testimony of God’s faithfulness. As of July this year, I will have been in a wheelchair for forty-seven years.

Forty-seven years, when compared to the Roman

lighthouse at Dover Castle or the pyramids, isn't much time at all. It's barely a heartbeat in history, and as nothing compared with eternity. But for a flesh-and-blood, earth-dwelling human being, forty-seven years in a wheelchair is a long time. Trust me on this: 17,155 days of quadriplegia are a great plenty.

Even Jesus thinks so. When He saw the paralyzed man lying on his mat at the pool of Bethesda, and learned that he had been in that condition thirty-eight years, He understood it to be “a long time.”

You have no idea how much I value that phrase in Scripture. “A long time.” The Lord of all, the One who existed eternally before time, who created time but lives outside of it, whose name is Ancient of Days and Everlasting God, *that* Jesus feels that living without the use of your legs for thirty-eight years—or forty-seven years—is a long time.

When the Savior's eyes rested on the paralyzed man lying on his worn, weathered straw mat, His heart went out to him. He saw more than a disabled man waiting through the years for healing, without any real hope. He

took time to learn that poor soul's story. We can imagine Him whispering the words to Himself, "Thirty-eight years," and feeling the weight of those years in Himself.

In our Lord's humanity, thirty-eight years was more than His whole earthly life span. He understands time not only as something He created but also in an experiential, human way as well. As the book of Hebrews reminds us, "We don't have a priest who is out of touch with our reality" (Hebrews 4:15, MSG).

The God who is above time, beyond time, and outside of time chose to enter time, proving that He fully understands our experience of it. He knows how it feels to us when prayers seem to go unanswered . . . when pain or illness lingers . . . when days pass with no word from a loved one . . . when the pregnancy test keeps coming up negative . . . when we're stuck in a dreary, going-nowhere place in life. If it feels like "a long time" to us, we can count on it feeling that way to Him, too. It may be difficult for us to wait, but He waits with us, offering His own presence and companionship to see us through.



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GOING DEEPER . . .

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*Now that we know what we have—Jesus, this great High Priest with ready access to God—let’s not let it slip through our fingers. We don’t have a priest who is out of touch with our reality. He’s been through weakness and testing, experienced it all—all but the sin. So let’s walk right up to him and get what he is so ready to give. Take the mercy, accept the help.*

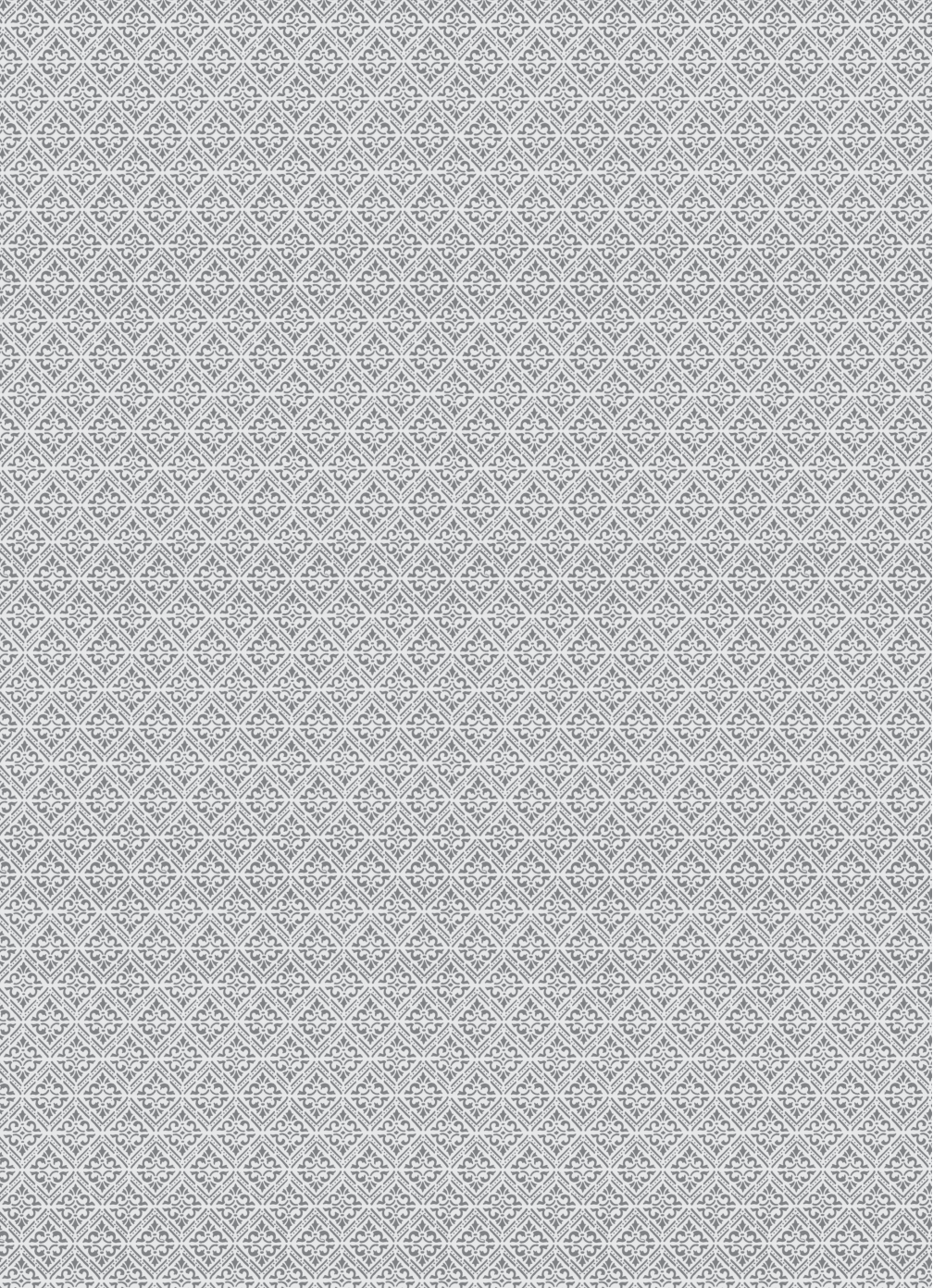
HEBREWS 4:14-16, MSG



From where you sit today, what things in your life seem to be taking “a long time”? Ask the Lord to kneel with you as He knelt with the man at the pool of Bethesda, to feel your frustration and fading hope, and to sustain you with His perspective, gift you with His incomparable peace, and empower you with His patience, so much richer and deeper than your own.







— DAY 3 —

*Certainty at the Center*

I CAN'T BEGIN to describe the feeling that swept over me shortly after my diving accident, when I realized I was a quadriplegic—that my paralysis was total and complete. Devastation? Depression? Denial? None of those terms even come close. The permanence of my condition was too much reality to bear.

It didn't help that my friends were going off to college, getting jobs, and going on dates while I was stuck in a hospital bed. My future? In a wheelchair? I couldn't



bear to contemplate it. I cried out to God. I wanted reassurance that my world wasn't ripping apart at the seams. I longed for someone to promise that everything would be okay.

This is the heartfelt plea of anyone who suffers. We want assurance that somehow, someday, things will work out in the end, though we can't imagine how. We want to know that our world is orderly and stable, not spinning off into nightmarish chaos. We want to know that God is at the center of our suffering, not only holding our lives together but also holding us.

In Romans 8 we have the massive promise of that assurance: "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose" (verse 28, ESV). In other words, the Lord is so supremely in charge of the world that everything touching our lives as Christians is ordered in such a way that it serves our good. This is true whether we face cancer, broken relationships, job loss, bankruptcy . . . or even a broken neck at age seventeen. The strong hope of the believer is not that we will escape "bad things" in

the course of our lives, but that God will transform every one of our hardships into an instrument of His mercy to do us good.

That assurance goes way beyond the promise that “everything will be okay.” Romans 8:29 reveals a far more stunning, mind-boggling purpose than that: Through our sufferings, we are being shaped into the very image of God’s Son, Jesus Christ.

You need not panic or be swept away over your problems and setbacks. Paul said your sufferings are small and short when compared with the weight of glory they are accruing for you in heaven. So bear with heartbreak and hardship a bit longer. These things are expanding your soul’s capacity for joy, worship, and service in heaven more than you can begin to imagine. “We must wait patiently and confidently” (Romans 8:25, NLT). Wait and trust in the Lord. Your present hope and expectation will not disappoint you.



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GOING DEEPER . . .

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*In face of all this, what is there left to say? If God is for us, who can be against us? He that did not hesitate to spare his own Son but gave him up for us all—can we not trust such a God to give us, with him, everything else that we can need? . . . I have become absolutely convinced that neither death nor life, neither messenger of Heaven nor monarch of earth, neither what happens today nor what may happen tomorrow, neither a power from on high nor a power from below, nor anything else in God's whole world has any power to separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord!*

ROMANS 8:31-32, 38-39, PH



Stop and consider how God has transformed your hardships into instruments of needed change in your life. Don't allow today's trials and worries, large and intimidating as they might appear to be now, to overwhelm the reality of God's care, His ability to transform your situation, and His unshakable plan for good in your life.

