

NO STRINGS



There's an assumption held by most people in our culture that it is possible to have a middle-of-the-road relationship with God, where you're not flat out atheist, nor are you one of those gung-ho fanatic type Christians.

You're an associate member of the kingdom.

You want to stay on the right side of the Almighty so he can never have an excuse to throw the book at you, but beyond that, you're going to live your life the way you jolly well want to.

- On the one hand, I don't want to get on the wrong side of God.
- On the other hand, I sure don't want God to come along and mess up *my* plans.

In the back of our minds is the idea that God's program is pretty dull. If I went along with his program, what kind of life would I have?

So, we go on our own way - do our own thing and God doesn't interfere. He'll never violate our will.

We can do what we want to.

And even when we do some pretty dumb things, his love for us is still there.

Then one day, we reach an impasse. Life isn't as much fun as we thought it would be.

In fact it's a mess....

- we're miserable
- heart broken
- walking on the edge of despair.

Now, wouldn't it be wonderful if I could touch the hem of his garment?

Wouldn't it be great if the Lord would come along and get me out of this mess?

“Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. Here a great number of disabled people used to lie - the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. 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, he asked him, “Do you want to be well?”

John 5:2-6



Notice that Jesus ties no strings to his offer.

He doesn't say;

“I'll heal you if you agree to straighten out your life.”,

“I'll heal you if you promise to be my disciple.”,

Just;

“Do you want to be healed?”

“Do you want to be out of the mess you're in?”

Of course;

if you're healed, your whole program will change.

You won't be able to use your sickness as an excuse.

You'll have to get up and make your way in the world.

Do you want this? “Do you want to be well?”

“Sir,” the invalid replied, “I have no one to help me to the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.” Then Jesus said to him, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.

John 5:7-9



Everybody seems to be so afraid of God's program.

So, what is God's program?

- to make people whole,
- to set them free,
- to do for us what he did for the woman who touched the hem of his garment,
- to do for us what he did for this man.

Did it disrupt this man's life?

You bet it did!

For 38 years he was an invalid. He had to be carried. He couldn't work. Others had to provide for him. He had become accustomed to it - it was his way of life. Now he's going to have to get up and make his way in the world for the *first time in 38 years*.

In the episode that follows it becomes clear this man was not overly grateful for what Jesus did.

"Hey, you. It's the Sabbath! It's not lawful for you to be carrying your mat on the Sabbath!" "Why the man who healed me told me, "Take up your mat and walk!" "Who told you to take your mat and walk?"

The man didn't know. Jesus had melted into the crowd. Now suddenly Jesus reappears and says to the man,

"Now you are well; so stop sinning, or something even worse may happen to you."

John 5:14

i.e. "Start changing your attitude."

And what does the man do? Does he say, "Thank you! Thank you!" No. He runs right to the authorities and puts the finger on Jesus, because he knows this will save *his* skin and keep those big shots off *his* back.

Then the man went and told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who had healed him.

John 5:15



This man was playing the middle-of-the-road as best he could.

Glad to have his healing. But he wasn't about to make any commitment or take any risks for this Jesus.

"Yes, I'm healed, but does this mean I owe something to this guy? I think I'll just keep my options open."

Jesus doesn't bug the man, doesn't send him a bill.

Jesus told the man all he needed to know....

.... and now he's free to do as he chooses.

That's how it works for us.

I was at the end of my rope.

I didn't know which way to turn.

I cried out to God - touched the hem of his garment and help came, healing, life.

For a brief time - while I was going through the crisis;

I saw an open door leading to a world of light,

I heard a voice inviting me to enter.

But when I thought of all the things I'd have to leave behind to walk through that door, I got scared. I think I'm better off out here where I can live my life the way I want to...

....So, I'll be an associate Christian.

A few chapters later in the book of John, we read of Jesus healing a man born blind.



Again there are no strings tied to the healing.

The man is free to do whatever he wants with it.

And again the authorities are having fits.

"Are you the man they say was born blind?" "Yes." "How come you can now see?"

"The man they call Jesus made clay, anointed my eyes and said, 'Go wash in the pool of Siloam'. So I went and washed and received my sight."

"What do you say about this man since he opened your eyes?" "I say he's a prophet." "What do you mean a prophet! He broke the Sabbath by healing you. The man's a sinner!" "Well... he opened my eyes. If this man were not of God, he could do nothing."



“What? You were born in sin and you would teach us? From now on you stay out of the temple and you stay out of the synagogue. As far as we’re concerned, you’re a Gentile dog.”



When Jesus heard what had happened, he found the man and asked, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” The man answered, “Who is he, sir? I want to believe in him.” “You have seen him,” Jesus said, “and he is speaking to you!” “Yes, Lord, I believe!” the man said. And he worshiped Jesus.

John 9:35-38



The man saw the open door, heard the invitation, and entered.

Blind all his life, he could now see that whatever he would have to leave behind in order to enter that door was worth nothing compared to the life waiting for him in there. And in he goes - into the kingdom. In the process he gets kicked out of the synagogue. That’s okay. A lot of people have been kicked out of churches after they got serious with God! Martin Luther for one.

The truth is, there is no such thing as an associate relationship with God.

You’re either inside that door or you’re not.

You’re either committed or you’re not.

The fact that you were healed, that your prayer was answered, that you were set free of your demons, does *not* put you inside that door.

That blessing was simply a sign that the door is now open.

You are invited, but it’s up to you to decide what to do.

The man healed at the pool of Bethesda chose to stay outside.

The blind man healed at the pool of Siloam chose to enter.

Actually, that is one of the few *real* choices we have in this life.

You didn't choose your parents, or your time of birth, or the color of your eyes.

From your earliest years, you have had less control than you think over who you are and what you are.

But once that door opens...

Once the Living Word breaks into your life and calls you by name, You Are Free!

You can choose to enter or to stay outside.



And once you enter, every day brings new choices, new freedom, as you move deeper and deeper into the heart of God's world.

Of course, there has to be a point where we begin...

There has to be a moment when we say,

“Here I am, Lord. I’m inside the door. I’m at your service.”

Is it hard to take that step? Jesus says it's easy. It's only hard when you're trying to go your way *and* his way at the same time.

To answer Christ's call and come to him...

Just the way you are with all your hang-ups, problems, sins, and fears --- is easy.

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

Matthew 11:28-30



“I’m not going to give you a hard time. I’m going to help you. What I’m calling you to is a lot easier than those burdens you’ve been carrying all these years!”

Of course, once you answer that call, the illusion that you can be an associate member of the kingdom is gone.

You now know there is no such thing as an associate member.

You're a disciple.

You're committed.

You're under the yoke with Christ.

A new life has begun. A life that gets better all the time.

You could say that anyone who has had an encounter with Christ through a healing, an answer to prayer - a deliverance of some kind - is standing by one of two pools

- the pool of Bethesda

- the pool of Siloam

At the pool of Bethesda, you take your healing and go your own way - like the sick man who picked up his mat and walked away...

At the pool of Siloam, you open your eyes and follow Jesus through a door into God's world. Like the blind man who received his sight, committed himself and paid the price for it, you become a servant of God and the people to whom he sends you.

That healing,

That answered prayer,

That deliverance,

... which you can have today, is a sign pointing to an open door.

But only *you* can decide whether you're going to go in.



Prayer: Lord, how good you are that you attach no strings for healing us, for blessing us, for rescuing us again and again. Help us not just be satisfied with you hearing our prayers and rescuing us... and then going our own ways. But help us to open our eyes like the blind man in gratefulness and awe, and open our hearts to you, and hear you calling our names to come to you. Help us to let go of our fears about what we will lose. Help us to take the freedom you offer and to use it to come inside, and say, "here I am." Help us to stop hanging on the fringes... but choose to be attached to you, yoked to you; Choosing to be committed disciples....serving you, loving you, and starting new lives in you....and finding rest and joy under your easy, wonderful, life-giving yoke. Amen.

Message: Richard E. Bieber 2001

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