

Breaking Down Systems

- Bouncing off of what my father has been preaching for the past month, I wanna talk about breaking down systems.
- **John 5 introduces us to a man who had been disabled for thirty-eight years. He was not only living with a physical condition; he was living within an environment that had shaped how he understood himself, his future, and the possibility of healing.**
- Especially cultural systems. The cultural river we are swimming in is constantly telling us that there is a right and wrong way to do things.
 - The cultural river we are swimming in now that is America tells us that when you are sick, you see a medical professional. The cultural river we are swimming in tells us to instead of picking up a bow and arrow, to go to the grocery store when you are hungry.
- I want to address some of the cultural systems that we find ourselves in that can be in the way of the future God has for us.

The Healing at the Pool

5 Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals. 2 Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda[a] and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. 3 Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. [4] [b] 5 One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. 6 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 get well?”

7 “Sir,” the invalid replied, “I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.”

8 Then Jesus said to him, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” 9 At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.

The day on which this took place was a Sabbath, 10 and so the Jewish leaders said to the man who had been healed, “It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat.”

11 But he replied, “The man who made me well said to me, ‘Pick up your mat and walk.’ ”

12 So they asked him, “Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?”

13 The man who was healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there.

14 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.” 15 The man went away and told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who had made him well.

- What systems do we see observed in this passage? The Sabbath?
- A lot of systems are in place to protect us. The Sabbath is a God-made system, but a lot of systems are also imposed by the culture we exist in.
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JMj1ggINLe4&t=8s>
- I want to hone in on 3 specific systems that we observe this man living in at the pool
- A system of competition
- A system that produces powerlessness
- A religious system more committed to rules than restoration

1. Competition

- The culture of the pool has become one of competition. Everyone who is living at this pool is set on the idea that they need to be first to the stirred water. **Whether or not the pool actually healed anyone, the man clearly believes he is trapped in a competitive system. Everybody around him needs something, but each person’s chance at healing seems to come at someone else’s expense.**
- Competition in college, LinkedIn culture, my own experience with pressures to perform.
- But Jesus.

2. Powerlessness

- Directly or indirectly, I think a lot of systems breed feelings of powerlessness. The man was here for almost 40 years. At what point in being in a place for that long do you begin to expect to live there until you die?
- Sir,” the invalid replied, “I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.”
- His response to Jesus’ question shows how his brain is working. He sees his answer as being the first to the center of the pool, but in the end, all it took was simply an act of faith for him to be healed.
- Most of us haven’t been sitting at the edge of a pool for nearly 40 years waiting to get healed, but many of us like this man live in systems that try to keep us feeling powerless.
- Financial systems can keep us feeling powerless, relationships with other people, finding work, etc.
 - Going back to my last example. While I was in the process of looking for work, before committing to Cru, it was definitely one of the most powerless “feeling” seasons of my life. But with the continued call to ministry I found myself having to make the same decisions of taking that step of faith or not.

- We can't ignore the culture we are living in. It's part of our culture to need a job, but we don't want our cultural perceptions to get in the way of how God is trying to move.
 - **Jesus enters broken systems and reveals that they are not sovereign. He sees the people they overlook, challenges the beliefs they create, and calls his followers to participate in restoration when he commands us to turn away from sin.**
3. A religious system that is more committed to rules than restoration
- The Sabbath was given as a gift of rest and freedom. But their interpretation had become a system that prioritized control over compassion. Instead of asking, "Who healed you?" they initially ask, in effect, "Who told you that you could break our rule?"
 - **This is one of the clearest ways Jesus breaks systems in the passage. He heals on the Sabbath, challenging a religious framework that had lost sight of God's heart.**
 - Jewish rejection of Jesus continuously is one of the greatest tragedies we see throughout the gospels, but it's not dissimilar to the same type of religious treatment we see in Christian nationalism.
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gTCTBIXSsLg> (optional video of Stephen confronting Sanhedrin)
 - We see a lot of organized Christianity that looks like this today. When churches lose sight of the heart of God and focus on the little things, when Christians are condemning people for the little things.
 - There's a lot to unpack in this chapter about Jesus' interaction with the Pharisees and his declaration of authority, but this week I really wanted to hone in on the circumstances we see this man living in. Most systems we can't up and walk away from. Barriers are real and injustice may be real, but Jesus does not allow the system he is living in to end his story. Instead he speaks freedom into his life, he tells him that His grace is sufficient.

Life Groups

- Questions
 - Reread John 5 1-15. What cultural system do we live in that needs to be addressed?
 - What cultural perceptions can get in the way of how God wants to move in our life?
 - How do we help others to see systems they live in?