



World Day of Prayer Bible Study
Prepared by the WDP Committee of Zimbabwe
“Rise! Take Your Mat and Walk”
John 5:2-9a

Introduction

The story from the Gospel of John is the main Bible text for the WDP Zimbabwe programme. This Bible Study suggests some steps to deepen our understanding of the story and to discern God’s word for today.

First step: Reading the Bible story

Reading the text more than once and in different ways may enrich the group conversation. The facilitator may suggest the group first read over the text in silence. Then, hear it read aloud a few times, with participants reading from different versions of the Bible, for example the Good News, New Revised Standard Version and the Message.

Laying Bibles aside, encourage the group to retell the story in their own words. Perhaps try dramatising it! The following ‘4Ws & 1H’ could be used to help the retelling. Allow participants to add any details they felt have been left out or to ask questions to seek clarity on details. Encourage people to say what questions they have about the story. Take note and advise that the group will come back to exploring the questions later.

Second step: Understanding the story

Invite the group to use the ‘4Ws & 1H’ as pointers to understanding the Bible story, and use their responses to re-tell the story. You may complement their responses with the information in the summary.

1. When did the story happen?
2. Where did it happen?
3. Who was involved in the story?
4. What happened?
5. How did it happen?

Summary:

This is a story of a miracle. To learn the full story, it is necessary to read at least up to verse 18. Then the chapter continues with Jesus' teaching. The full chapter sets the miracle on the Sabbath (Saturday) and the conflict it caused between Jesus and the Jewish authorities. However, for the WDP 2020 programme, we will focus the study on the interaction between Jesus and the man who had been ill for 38 years.

Jesus had gone to Jerusalem during the festival of the Jews. The setting of the story is well described in John 5. There was a pool by the Sheep Gate where people with different illnesses went for healing. In some Bible versions, there is an explanation about the healing happening to the ones who first entered the pool after the water had been stirred up by an angel.

The people by the pool believed that the power of healing was in the stirred up water; hence the man in the story would expect his healing from the water. As he was unable to get into the stirred water by himself, he could not see how he would be healed. So, he waited on his mat for the next opportunity. What does this encounter say about the man? The man of the story seemed a lone person; he had nobody to help him get healed. He sounded stagnant and powerless. Maybe, that was what led Jesus to ask him a life-changing question: "Do you want to get well?"

What does this encounter say about Jesus? Jesus acted with compassion, love, understanding and caring. Jesus in his humanity could identify himself with human suffering. Jesus in his humility could listen to the man without judging his excuses. Jesus gave the man a chance.

What does this encounter tell us about God? Jesus' response challenges the man, who had been sick for 38 years, to do three things: get up, pick up his mat, and walk. The dialogue of Jesus with that man takes us beyond the physical healing. The active verbs suggest that we should not be afraid to act on the word of God. God is offering the steps for personal and social transformation.

Third step: Listening to God's word today

The word of God comes alive today in our own context. The facilitator should move the conversation along to what the story may mean in the group's context today especially in terms of the WDP 2020 programme's

focus on peace and reconciliation. If there were previous questions about the story, introduce them to the conversation now.

“Zimbabwe experienced political violence for many years. And the traumas and tensions are still alive in communities. In the process of bringing reconciliation, it is said that we must forgive, but just saying it does not make it happen. We need to be able to accept that we have been hurt, and go through the process of healing. Others need to acknowledge that they have caused hurt, and show they are sorry. We need to listen to each other. Peace begins with me and with you. The ingredient of peace is love, and where there is reconciliation, peace comes.” (WDP Zimbabwe member, 2017 Preparatory Workshop)

In the historical context of Zimbabwe, peace and reconciliation may refer to overcoming the traumas of armed conflicts by a peace building process. When violence erupted in 2008 around the national elections, women were targeted and subjected to abuse. Truth, justice, forgiveness, repentance and even reparations are steps usually taken by truth and reconciliation commissions. A national political reconciliation may bring peace and security to communities. At the same time, churches or community organisations may also develop their own peace building process enabling victims to overcome traumas, raising public awareness to prevent violence or promoting training for sustainable community development.

How do we view the story through Jesus’ eyes? The miracle and transformation in the Bible story are symbolised by the mat. The mat was the place the man laid down with his excuses, even though he was searching for healing. After the encounter with Jesus, the mat became a reminder of this healing.

Jesus empowers us to be made well by doing something for the transformation that God is offering – to rise and take up our mat, whatever that may be for us, and walk. Jesus empowers us to choose to be healed, to be made whole, perhaps physically, mentally, spiritually, and socially. When we are made whole, we are reconciled to God, to ourselves, to our community. When we are reconciled, we can truly love, and when we truly love, we are able to walk toward peace. So, “Rise! Take your mat and walk.”

Form small groups to reflect on the following questions:

1. What is the context that you or your community live in that needs to hear Jesus' life-changing question – “Do you want to be made well?” For example, in the context of violence, the question can be re-worded as “Do you want to live in peace?”
2. What are the obstacles or excuses given, that are not allowing for transformation? For example, in the context of violence what are the excuses for not building peace and reconciliation?
3. Encourage your group to identify what Jesus' words would mean in your context – “Rise! Take your mat and walk.” Then, share some of the steps that you or your community may take in response to these words. To continue the example, what are the steps to love, to reconciliation and to living in peace in the family, workplace, church, community or nation?

If possible, give the group time to report the answers as a skit based on Jesus's words: “Do you want to be made well?” and “Rise! Take your mat and walk.” At this moment in the conversation, the skit should not be the repetition of the Bible story, but showing how the two phrases can be applied to your own context towards love, peace and reconciliation – be it in the family, workplace, church, community or nation.

Concluding Prayer

God of Peace, we pray for everyone, across political, religious and social differences, to love one another, to be reconciled to each other and to have peace. We pray for broken homes to be reconciled, for women to live in security, and for communities to be open to peace building. In the name of the Prince of Peace – Jesus. Amen.

Continue to Pray for

- Churches and ecumenical organisations who are actively promoting peace education and civic awareness.
- The improvement of social services and more opportunities for training, education and sustainable economic development.
- The women of Zimbabwe, following their courageous and hardworking pioneers of World Day of Prayer Zimbabwe, who taught their communities to pray, love and forgive.