

## ***Pick Up Your Mat and Walk – Dan Hitz***

*Learning to Walk Out of Intensive Care and Into Our Rightful Place in the Body of Christ*

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***“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?” “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.” Then Jesus said to him, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” John 5: 6-8 NIV***

It’s surprising that Scripture doesn’t record Peter barging into this conversation and saying something like, “Lord, that’s the stupidest question I’ve ever heard! Of course this man wants to get well!” In reality, Jesus’ question to this man is very profound. It asks far more than the six words in the sentence.



When Christ poses that question to us, our first reaction is usually a resounding, “Yes!” Later, as the costs of being made whole start to become apparent, we’re not always so quick to respond. No more begging. No more lying on our mats and having others tend to our needs. No more blaming all of our problems on our disabilities. Now we must accept the responsibilities of our daily lives. Walking isn’t as easy as it seemed. There are hurdles to jump,

detours along the way, unmarked paths to figure out. We discover deeper areas of pain that still need to be made well. We begin to learn more about what it means to pick up our mat and walk.

When we were rolling up our mat, we began to have hopes and dreams of doing big things for God. We may have looked around at others who seemed to be thriving in those same callings and wondered how they managed to walk so freely in all that God has for them. We begin to burn with a passion to follow Him and run the race that He calls us to run. The desire to do His will – to embrace His gifts and callings – consumes us. Everything within us wants to run towards our Father as He says “come, follow me,” so we get up and run. Sometimes we trip. And then we remember our mat. We remember what put us there. We become overwhelmed at the challenges ahead, stop walking, unroll our mat, and lie back down.

When God calls us into something, He always calls us into something much bigger than ourselves, and far beyond our ability to comprehend. Outwardly the mat seems easier, but inwardly we know it’s death. We may even cry out to God and beg Him to take our calling away, because it seems impossible that we could ever fulfill it. Yet, Romans 11:29 tells us that “God’s gifts and his call are irrevocable”. Our loving Father comes once again and asks us to pick up our mat and walk. This time we better understand what He is asking. We better understand the challenges that lie ahead, and weigh the blessings with the costs.

Years ago, I was very discouraged in the ministry. What I thought God was building – answers to the God given desires in my heart – came crashing down. God had spoken to my heart and told me certain things that were going to happen, but it became apparent they weren’t going to happen my way. God could have fulfilled my perception of His word so easily, but He had better in mind. In my frustration I returned to my mat. I begged God to take the calling away – at the same time, I was afraid that He would.

I just wanted God to put me on the shelf. In the middle of this season, I visited the church of a pastor friend. I'm a visual person so sometimes the Lord speaks to me in word pictures and even though I didn't want to hear it, the Holy Spirit began to speak. I "heard" a siren and "saw" pictures of people lying wounded by the enemy in places that should have been safe. The Lord seemed to be saying to me, "The enemy has sneaked in where he should not be. I want you to minister to the people whose hearts have stopped beating for Me." I

saw a close up of a defibrillator on someone's chest and the medics shocking the person to get the heart beating again. I was so heart broken myself that I couldn't fathom having the strength to answer His call. After the worship service, my friend introduced his guest speaker. It was another pastor who had also been wounded and discouraged in the ministry, and whose family paid a dear price to walk with God. His message spoke so loudly to me that it cut through the resistance and the pain. All I remember from his sermon is that the "gifts and callings of God are without repentance."



I knew that I needed to get back off my mat. I also knew that I needed a season of spiritual intensive care. The Lord put me in a wonderful body of believers with many others who also needed spiritual healing. In time, many of us needed to leave the ICU and go into regular spiritual care. Eventually many of us transitioned into spiritual rehab, and then back into everyday life. With each transition, decisions had to be made. Would we stay in the ICU, or would we accept our room in the normal care unit. This meant less attention to our brokenness and less dependence on the doctors and nurses. Spiritual rehab meant that the Lord would teach us to walk again and place more responsibility on us. As with any rehabilitation, the therapists often ask the patients to do things that hurt – things they don't think they can do. As the muscles get exercised and the requests increase under the watchful eye of the caregiver, we become stronger and more able to do things we never thought possible. Taking our place back in the mainstream of life brings with it new challenges and vulnerabilities. It is now our responsibility to get our prescriptions filled – our responsibility to hear from God and walk out His instructions in our lives.



The Lord is always with us and He has placed us within the beautiful Body of Christ. Walking into spiritual wholeness means that we leave our mats behind and move from our identification with what put us there, into an identification of who we are in Christ. We learn to submit ourselves to the work of the Holy Spirit and walk with our brothers and sisters into the challenges that the Lord equips us to fulfill. Spiritual wholeness moves beyond identification with what has been crucified with Christ and into identification with what has been resurrected with Him. Our strength will always come from Jesus Christ risen and alive in us.

We are all in different places on our journey into spiritual wholeness. The important thing is that we listen to God and allow Him to make us well – even when it means walking through the discomfort of the healing process. It is time to get up, take up your mat, and walk!

***"Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." Philippians 1:6 NIV***