



July

Terminal to Triumphant

BY ELIZABETH HODGES

— Matthew 9:20-22; Mark 5:24-34; Luke 8:43-48 NKJV —

Cancer. That dreaded diagnosis when placed in the same sentence with someone you love. I remember when my brother, Paul Creech, called to tell me of his diagnosis—esophageal cancer. Paul was pastoring the White Oak Free Will Baptist Church in Macon, Georgia, during his diagnosis, treatments, and surgery. His positive attitude blessed and inspired our family and the many others who followed his writings. He often remarked that it was not a little ‘c’ but a capital ‘C’—not cancer but Christ. We all rejoiced with him when he went into remission. Eighteen months later, the dreaded disease returned, and at 48, God chose to heal Paul by taking him to glory.

Would that have been my choice? No. Many times I even asked the Lord why Paul instead of me. His children were young, and mine were adults. Rhoda, Paul’s wife, needed his help to raise their four precious children. God’s plan was different, and we have witnessed His undergirding strength in Rhoda as she walked this path God chose for her and the children. Has my *why* been answered? No, but God does not owe me an explanation. When some people are healed on earth, and others are not, He simply asks me to trust Him.

Three women with diseases were healed during Jesus’ earthly ministry. The woman with an issue of blood and the woman with a fever are both found in all three synoptic gospels. The crooked woman is found only in Mark.

The Woman With the Issue of Blood

Mark 5:1-20

In Mark 5:1-20, Jesus' sinless humanity was challenged by the demons, and He demonstrated His Lordship over the spirit world in this passage. Following this event, Jesus displayed His authority over disease and death (Mark 5:21-43). Jesus was teaching in the synagogue when Jairus, the synagogue leader, approached him. "My little daughter lies at the point of death. Come and lay Your hands on her, that she may be healed, and she will live" (Mark 5:23). Can you hear the desperate plea of this father's heart?

Immediately, Jesus and His disciples followed Jairus to his home, as did a throng of other people. In this crowd was one of our sisters. Mark introduces her, "A certain woman [who] had a flow of blood for twelve years, and had suffered many things from many physicians" (Mark 5:25-26). She was terminal.

According to Leviticus 15:19-27, women were unclean during menstruation. Whoever touched her during this time was unclean until the evening. Worse yet, if a woman experienced bleeding other than her normal cycle, she was considered unclean until the bleeding stopped.

Do you know what this meant? This dear lady was not allowed in the Temple section reserved for women. She was excluded from participating in the life and worship of the community. While unclean, entering the temple could result in a penalty ranging from 40 lashes to death by stoning. Doubtless, she thought twice before entering!

If she asked permission to talk to Jesus, she would be denied. She hesitated to approach Him in public due to the restrictions of the Law, so she hid amid the crowd. Did she think she could cower in the masses, quickly touch His garment, experience His healing, then slip away? Would such a plan work? Because she was unclean, would her plan be considered an assault? As an unclean person, she fully understood it was her responsibility not to contaminate others. Was it worth risking rejection or possibly worse? Yes!

She had to get to Jesus!

Scripture is silent on the source of this woman's livelihood. One commentator mentioned an inheritance, or perhaps she was divorced, and the dowry returned to her. We do read she was sick, weary, and broke. "She had spent all that she had and was no better, but rather grew worse" (Mark 5:26).

Luke gave the doctor's perspective when he wrote that she "spent all her livelihood on physicians and could not be healed by any" (Luke 8:43). Can you imagine the pain and compassion in his heart as he wrote those words?

"When she heard about Jesus, she came behind Him in the crowd and touched His garment. For she said, 'If only I may touch His clothes, I shall be made well'" (Mark 5:27-28). Had she heard of another person healed in the same way? Wasn't she fearful of exposing her embarrassing condition amid such a crowd? Why did she reach out? She believed if she could touch the hem of Jesus' robe, even just a tassel, she would be healed. A simple touch, and maybe, just maybe, no one would notice her as she quickly escaped.

Mark uses the word *immediately* twice in verses 29-30. "Immediately, the fountain of her blood was dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed and Jesus immediately [knew]." Jesus and the woman knew simultaneously what had happened. The woman had turned to leave. But Jesus stopped midstride and asked, "Who touched Me?" (Luke 8:45).

Luke then detailed the interaction between Jesus and Peter. Peter said, "Master, the multitudes throng and press you, and You say, 'Who touched Me?'" Jesus looked at all the people crowded around Him. "Somebody touched Me, for I perceived the power going out from Me" (Luke 8:46). (This is the only time in recorded Scripture that He identified a touch of faith and mentioned it to His disciples.)

Having been discovered, this woman knew she could not allow His question to go unanswered. Full of joy,

“Faith itself does not heal; rather, it is the proper object of that faith, Jesus, who heals.” (Nelson NKJV Study Bible)

yet trembling with fear, she stepped forward, falling at Jesus’ feet in worship, and “she declared unto him before all the people for what cause she had touched him” (Luke 8:47). She spilled her story for all to hear.

In my mind’s eye, I see a crowded street with this large mass of people slowly backing away from her as they listen. If she had ‘touched’ them, they knew they were unclean until evening. Can you hear the agony in her voice as she confesses to Jesus that she spent all she had to no avail? For 12 long years, she was ostracized and rejected. Hear her pleading words, “I had to try one last thing, and I touched the hem of Your garment.” At this point, I picture her raising her head and saying triumphantly, “When I touched your garment, my bleeding stopped. You healed me! Thank you so much. Glory to God.”

Jesus did not condemn her but rather commended her. He intimately drew her to Himself. “Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be healed of your affliction” (Mark 5:34).

This is the only time Jesus addressed someone as *daughter*. How reassuring for this trembling woman. For all the crowd to hear, He confirmed that her faith made the difference because she rightfully placed her faith in Him. The crowd needed to understand that His clothing was not magical. The tassels on the hem of his outer cloak only served as a reminder of God’s commandments and promises. The power of God healed this lady.

“Go in peace” was the usual Hebrew blessing at dismissal. Jesus reassures her that the cure is permanent when He says, “be healed of your affliction” (Mark 5:34). Everyone heard Jesus’ blessing, assuring her

that her healing was complete! What triumphant words for this woman who had suffered for many, long years!

This is one of those times I wish the biblical writers gave us a few more details. Wonder how the people reacted the first time she entered the Temple for worship? Did they accept her back into their daily lives? Did she receive long-awaited hugs? Or did some still view her as ‘unclean’?

Peter’s Mother-in-Law

Matthew 8:14-15; Mark 1:30-31; Luke 4:38-39

According to Dr. Luke, the Apostle Peter’s mother-in-law was “sick with a high fever,” probably the kind that made her sick enough to stay in bed. Doubtless, she was an older, more mature woman and well-loved by her son-in-law. After teaching in the synagogue and casting a demon out of an attendee, Jesus came to Peter’s house with Andrew, James, and John. Maybe it was early afternoon when fevers typically rose, and the family anxiously tended to her. After Jesus heard about this sick lady, “He took her by the hand and lifted her up, and immediately the fever left her” (Mark 1:31). All three gospel writers record her interesting response to her healing: “she served them.” Can you imagine her gratitude? She owed her health and life to Jesus, and she chose to express her thankfulness through service to Him.

The Crooked Woman

Luke 13:11-13

Luke also writes of another woman who suffered from a health issue for many years. “Behold, there was a woman who had a spirit of infirmity eighteen

years, and was bent over and could in no way raise herself up” (Luke 13:11). While teaching in the synagogue on the Sabbath, Jesus notices this unnamed lady. He calls her over to Him and lays His hands on her, “and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God” (Luke 13:13).

This action did not sit well with the ruler of the synagogue, and he reprimanded Jesus for healing on the Sabbath. Jesus reminded this man that even he would unfasten his donkey to give him a drink of water. Shouldn’t this woman be freed from her bond? “When He said these things, all His adversaries were put to shame; and all the multitude rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by Him” (Luke 13:17).

Imagine entering the synagogue as you had for 18 years; all bent over—a terminal condition. Imagine leaving the synagogue triumphantly walking upright after experiencing Jesus’ healing touch.

After being blessed by Jesus’ powerful touch, each of our friends responded uniquely. The woman with the issue of blood boldly shared her testimony before the crowd of many witnesses. Peter’s mother-in-law arose and served. The crippled woman’s healing initiated a praise session. Each lady’s journey began as terminal and ended triumphantly. With Jesus in our lives, your

story and mine can end the same way.

Jesus saw the neediness in these three women. To some people, their health issues were not considered as important as the death of a child or the casting out of a demon, but Jesus demonstrated otherwise and immediately stopped what He was doing to heal them. He cared about them individually, just as He cares about you and me. Your concerns might not be health related. Maybe you are facing financial complications, a problematic relationship, family problems, the constant pull of the world, ongoing discontentment with your life, etc. No matter our dilemma, Jesus cares about you and me unconditionally, just as He did these unnamed women in Scripture.

Whose life will be changed because you are courageous enough to share all that God has done for you? Are the people around you observing God at work in your life? Are you serving where He has placed you? Who is being challenged to walk more closely with the Lord because you, like my brother Paul, choose to focus on ‘C’ not ‘c’?

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THOUGHT QUESTIONS

1. Who are the ‘untouchables’ in your world? Who is desperately reaching out for help? How can you respond with Christlikeness?
2. What glorious things has God done for you? Have you told others of His goodness to you? Have you shared about His power in your life?
3. Maybe you are like the woman with the issue of blood—treated by physicians but not cured. Do you accept that healing comes in this life or in the next, whichever is God’s perfect plan for you? Though you might have chosen differently, can you rejoice in God’s plan for you?
4. How can we walk alongside those who are struggling? Will you be like Job’s friends when they sat in silence? Or when they tried to figure things out? Can we accept that God does not owe us definitive answers in this life?