

Video #1 Transcript

Hi, I'm Cheri Gregory and I am recovering self-improvement junkie. I used to own almost all the books on the self-help aisle of Barnes & Noble, and I would go back regularly to see if new titles had been released. I used to love watching talk shows where they would bring on an expert to solve somebody's problem, and my challenge to myself was to try to come up with the right solution before the expert did - and whenever that happened, I was so proud of myself. I used to love going to workshops and seminars, always looking for the one that was finally gonna make the big change in my life, and oh my goodness, the number of programs I have started, whether it was an eating plan or an exercise regimen and always "This is the one that is gonna make the big difference."

Well, after years and years and then decades of that I started to really wonder - "Is change even a possibility?" Like, can my story change or am I just gonna be living the same old story year in and year out? Maybe you wondered the same thing.

The story that we're gonna look at together in scripture today is about a woman who may have been asking very similar questions when she was on her way to a very special encounter with Christ. Now, there are three Gospels that actually tell this story, each in their own way. For the sake of time I'm gonna share Matthew 9:18 through 26. It's the shortest one. but you can also find it - and I'll also be referring to Mark 5:22 through 43 and Luke 8:41 through 56.

"While He (Jesus) was saying this, a ruler came and knelt before him and said 'My daughter has died. But come put your hands on her and she will live. Jesus got up and went with him and so did his disciples. Just then a woman who had been subject to bleeding for 12 years came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak. She said to herself 'If I only touch his cloak I will be healed.' Jesus turned and saw her. 'Take heart, daughter,' He said, 'Your faith has healed you.' And the woman was healed from that moment. When Jesus entered the ruler's house and saw the flute players of the noisy crowd, He said 'Go away. The girl is not dead but asleep.' But they all laughed at Him. After the crowd had been put outside, He went in and took the girl by the hand and she got up. News of this spread through all that region."

Now this story brings up two especially vivid memories from my childhood, and there's just this huge contrast between them.

The first memory, the positive memory, involves my father. Every night as he was putting me to bed and giving me a goodnight hug and kiss he would say the same thing. He would say "I'm so glad you chose me to be your daddy." And even when I was really really little, I knew that this was absurd. And I'd be like "Daddy, I had nothing to do with it!" So I would protest, but it made me feel wonderful. Every time he said it I knew without a shadow of a doubt that I was his adored little daughter.

Now the other memory, the negative, a contrasting memory, is my Aunt Lucy - who was actually my dad's aunt I believe - and oh my goodness, this woman could complain like nobody's business. She would come to dinner and give what we called an organ recital. She would just go through every part of her body telling me - telling us how badly it hurt, and all the surgeries, and oh my goodness. And always her phrase was "You have no idea how much I suffer." And I remember thinking to myself "I think I have a pretty good idea because you've just shared it all with us." But for the sake of my adoring daddy, I kept my mouth shut and sat through her pity parties, even through the entertainment was particularly terrible.

Now in the story we're looking at today, we have a very similar contrast. An adored little daughter and a suffering old woman. And the story starts with a powerful man who is literally brought to his knees in anguish over his adored little daughter. Mark tells us that Jairus pleads earnestly with Jesus. He says "please" and he calls her "my little daughter."

Now Luke tells us that she's actually 12 years old, which is an age by which most girls are not being considered little, but Jairus doesn't care about that. In his heart she is still his adored little daughter. And Luke adds that she's his only daughter. And Jairus is bold. He comes to Jesus and says "This is what I want." He tells Him exactly what he needs. He says "Come put your hands on her. She will be healed and live." And then Jesus responds, gives a sense of hope in the story. All three gospels tell us that He drops everything to go with Jairus, and with so many people in the crowd that they're actually crushing Jesus, they've got to be spreading the news.

So I want you to just imagine the crowd, the ripples through the crowd. "Guess what, guess what, guess what." "Jesus is coming. Jesus is coming to heal Jairus' daughter." "To heal, to heal, to heal." So I want you to just imagine this sense of excitement and anticipation that is spreading through the crowd like electricity.

And then - there's an interruption. An entirely new character shows up with an entirely new storyline and there's a huge contrast between them. The woman who shows up is defined, in fact she is *named* by her suffering. All three gospel writers refer to her as a woman who has been subject to bleeding.

Not a one of them gives her an actual name, and she's introduced to us without an advocate, unlike the little girl, she has nobody to fall at Jesus' feet and earnestly plead for her. It appears that there is no one who considers her their adored daughter. All she has is herself. She has a broken and bleeding body and a broken and bleeding heart. She has 12 years of false hopes and letdowns from the doctors under whose care she has suffered. She spent all that she has and yet instead of getting better, she's gotten worse. So I just want you to imagine this suffering old woman as she kind of sneaks up behind Jesus. She doesn't go face to face, because that's way too much risk.

There's a couple things that she's afraid of risking. The first is the risk of discovery.

We know that culturally she shouldn't be there at all because of the bleeding. She's unclean. But even beyond that, 12 years of suffering is a long time. Maybe she had friends and family who could support her to begin with, but after so many years, I wonder if she was somewhat like my Aunt Lucy, where everybody was like "Oh no, here she is again."

And then the risk of disappointment. And I can't help but wonder if this was even worse than the risk of discovery. Will Jesus turn out to be one more false hope, will He be just one more letdown? And so she's thinking to herself "If I only- If I just-" She's very much unlike Jairus, who boldly tells Jesus what he wants. She just creeps up from behind with such minimal expectations. She plans a quick touch-and-go, a kind of quick contact but not connection with Jesus.

I feel like I know this woman. I know what it's like to be defined, to be named by my suffering. My Aunt Lucy is not the only woman in my family who can give an organ recital. Here's the short version of mine: When I was in eighth grade, I was dumped by my boyfriend. And he dumped me for my best girlfriend, and I decided to stay friends with her. And so we spent hours where she would come ask me for advice on how to be a good girlfriend to him. And I know as an adult this sounds silly, but at that time that really was a form of suffering.

Or this one over here, it says "eating disorder". Through my teen years I had an eating disorder and I was finally - at age 17, I was hospitalized in a psychiatric unit in the eating disorder ward. And yes, there was the suffering of what I was doing to my body, but worse than that was the suffering of the guilt and shame I felt over what I was doing to myself and what I was costing my family.

And then somewhere on here it says "sister of an alcoholic and drug addict." And that one involves silent suffering, because for a long time I was the only one who knew. I was the keeper of the family secret.

And then I became a teacher because I wanted to help kids, and all over this robe are names of parents and students and school board members who made sure I knew what a dismal failure I was. I wanted to share the love of God with young minds, and instead I suffered, and that suffering turned into cynicism.

And we can't leave out the broken vertebrae and the herniated disc above and below, and I found out the hard way that Vicodin is habit-forming. I know the suffering brought on by chronic pain and the suffering of withdrawal from prescription pain medication addiction.

And that's just for starters. So yeah, I feel like I know this woman. I have a pretty good idea of what it's like to be named by my suffering and I know what it's like to approach Jesus from behind rather than feeling like I can go face-to-face. I understand minimal expectations. "If I only- if I just-" I know how much safer it feels, "If I could just go for a quick touch-and-go rather than an actual connection..."

because that's too much of a risk. There's the risk of discovery. My failures will be seen. And the risk of disappointment. What if I reach out and it turns out He's not actually there?

I'm guessing each one of us in our own way understand this woman. I'm sure you know what it's like to be defined, to be named by some form of suffering. Maybe it's physical or relational, emotional, mental, spiritual. We all understand suffering, and we know what it's like to approach Jesus from the back rather than to risk face-to-face, to fear discovery, to fear disappointment, to settle for a quick touch-and-go but not to go for that full connection.

So as we continue unpacking this story, here's what I want to look at. I want to look at how Jesus responds to someone like me. Like you. Who is defined, who is named, by her suffering. And someone who feels like they can't risk facing Him and decides to settle instead for a touch-and-go.

But - hang on a second. This isn't even the story we started out with. If we listen to the crowd, they're still saying "Guess what? Guess what? Jesus is coming. Jesus is coming. Jesus is coming to heal Jairus' daughter. To heal, to heal, to heal." Jairus' little daughter is the main story here, right? And the suffering old woman is an interruption, right?

And here's what I love so much about this story and what I love about Jesus. You see, He doesn't act at all like He's been interrupted. He doesn't seem to realize that healing the adoring little daughter is more important than stopping for the suffering old woman. According to Mark, Jesus keeps looking at her. Matthew says he turns and sees her. And Luke expresses her experience. It says "Seeing she could not go unnoticed" - whew, that was one of her big fears, she has been discovered.

Remember her plan was touch-and-go, and so now that she's touched and she's been noticed, you know, her heart is racing and she's got the urge to go go go, to just run, but she doesn't. Instead, she comes forward. Mark says she comes forward "trembling with fear," and I can't help but wonder: Does she expect to be disappointed? Maybe she recognizes that she has interrupted the main story that's going on there. Maybe she thinks to herself "Jesus isn't here for me."

But with His next words - oh, how this story changes. You see, Jesus looks at this woman, whose entire identity for the last 12 years has been defined by her suffering, He looks at her as if she is the only one there in that moment and He calls her daughter. *Daughter.*

Matthew tells us that the woman is healed from that moment, and Mark adds that she is freed from her suffering. So she's no longer the suffering old woman. Jesus changes her entire identity with one word, because He calls her by His name for her: Daughter.

Jesus makes it crystal clear that she is the reason He's come. She is the daughter He's come to heal. His message to her is "I'm so glad you chose me." By changing her name, Jesus changes the story from a story of contrasts - the adored little daughter, the suffering old woman - to a story of similarity. Of mirrored images. An adored daughter in need of healing and an adored daughter in need of healing.

So when Jesus gets to Jairus' home and revives his daughter, it's almost like he's doing an instant replay to make sure that we get the parallel. It may look like a different miracle, but that's because we see a contrast between the adored little daughter and the suffering old woman. But to Jesus there's no difference. Earlier, He raised His daughter, and now at Jairus', home He raises his daughter. Luke says that what he says is "My child, get up."

Jesus does the exact same thing both times. He calls her by her true name, and that's how her story changes.

Now I love stories with happy endings, but I always get a twinge of envy when I finish a book and I think "Well, their story changed. Why can't my life be a little bit more like a book with a happy ending?" And what this scriptural story shows us is that it can happen to us. Our stories *can* change.

But how? How does my story change? Jesus demonstrates this so clearly that when my name changes, my story changes. Well, that sounds simple enough. I'm sure there's some room on here somewhere. Jesus wants to give me an additional identity. I can grab a sharpie and start writing it. Yeah, you're probably shaking your head already. We both know that's not going to work. Tacking on a new identity over all of this isn't what Christ wants to do.

What Christ wants to do is give me a new identity that replaces all of this. Which means I have to give this up. Which from your perspective may sound really easy - but oh my goodness, it fits. I'm comfortable with it. This is my history. This is the story I know.

Now I want to pause real fast here and be really clear: I'm not talking about giving up healthy pain, normal grief, or the loss process. What I'm talking about here is stale, old suffering. I'm talking about old pain that keeps trying to die, but I put it on artificial life support by continuing to give my organ recital. And I'm not here to try to tell you when you've crossed the line from healthy pain to stale old suffering. I have a hard enough time as it is figuring out the difference for myself.

But I can tell you this from experience: in order to receive Christ's new identity for me, my true identity, I have to give this up. I have to give up my stale old suffering, and it's hard. I've been rehearsing some of these stories for decades. For most of them I could tell you the date, the time, the location. I know these stories to perfection. The problem is that when I'm rehearsing these suffering stories, I tell myself that I'm venting, that I'm just letting it all out, but in actuality I am

reinforcing my identity as a suffering old woman. And much like my Aunt Lucy, I'm making sure that others suffer right along with me.

Giving this up, it's called *surrender*. And the dictionary defines surrender as "to give back what was never originally mine to have in the first place."

You see, each one of us understands suffering. Each one of us has tried in our own ways, like the suffering old woman in today's scripture story, we have tried our own version of many doctors, many solutions that have failed us. Each one of us fears discovery. Each one of us fears disappointment.

The only one who can change our story of suffering - the only one who can rewrite our stories is Jesus. And when we give up our suffering identities to Christ, we give up the names that we've given ourselves, and we give up naming ourselves because that's never even been our job in the first place.

So we surrender suffering girl, suffering woman.

We surrender perfectionist, people pleaser, worrier, overachiever, procrastinator, failure.

And we receive *adored daughter*.

And when your name changes, your story changes. And then with that new name comes a message from Christ: I'm so glad that you chose Me.