

STEP 1 – STRETCH OUT YOUR HAND

MATTHEW 12:9-14¹ NIV

Going on from that place, he went into their synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Looking for a reason to bring charges against Jesus, they asked him, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?” He said to them, “If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a person than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.”

Then he said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” So he stretched it out and it was completely restored, just as sound as the other. But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus.

We don't know the man's name or why he has a withered or shriveled hand. The man was disabled. It was a stigma in the first century. Some considered disability a curse or a sign of some kind of sin. See John 9.

This man with a withered hand no doubt encountered hardship because of it. He probably couldn't work. Disabled people were often excluded, marginalized, and pushed aside. It was a stigma. He was one of “those people.” It was something, I think, he tried to hide. I imagine he was ashamed of it.

One day, he came to worship and pray with his hand carefully hidden in his flowing robe. I think he was trying to hide his hand. To his absolute horror, the Pharisees point to him, making him a test case for Jesus.

Jesus, angry, calls the man to the front. Can you imagine his embarrassment? Jesus then asks the man to do the unthinkable in front of everyone. “Stretch out your hand.”

Show us your shame

And as that man with the withered hand obeys the words of Jesus, he is healed. His shame is gone. His disgrace is turned into a sign of God's grace, His love, acceptance, and healing.

John Ortberg, in the wonderful book *Steps—A Guide to Transforming Your Life When Willpower Is Not Enough*, talks a lot about the FELLOWSHIP OF THE WITHERED HAND. It's based on our story today and is often associated with Alcoholics Anonymous. It's used to describe a community of people whose pain, brokenness, and shame are no longer hidden. These things have been stretched out to Jesus. Disgrace exchanged for God's grace.

What if Jesus is saying to us, “Stretch out your hand,” not as a way of shaming but as a way of healing? He already knows. He wants to turn our disgrace into signs of His grace.

Step 1 of RE:GENERATION and all recovery programs is admitting—admitting we have withered hands, and that we cannot fix them.

WE ADMIT WE ARE POWERLESS OVER OUR ADDICTIONS, BROKENNESS
AND SINFUL PATTERNS—THAT IN OUR OWN POWER OUR LIVES
ARE UNMANAGEABLE.

We stretch out our hand to Jesus and say, “I can't do this. I can't fix this. Help me. Heal me.”

ENTERING THE STORY

Take a moment to imagine the scene. What stands out to you about the man with the withered hand? What do you imagine he felt when Jesus called him forward? Why do you think Jesus chose to heal him publicly rather than privately?

¹See also Mark 3:1-6, and Luke 6:6-11.

STIGMA AND HIDING

In the first century, disability was often seen as a stigma, sometimes even a sign of sin. See John 9. Today, stigmas still exist, though it wears different disguises. What kinds of struggles do people tend to hide in church? What “robes” do people use to cover brokenness? (busyness, success, humor, spirituality, control, competence) When have you felt like one of “those people”?

Complete this sentence honestly: If people really knew this about me, they might _____.

IDENTIFYING YOUR WITHERED HAND

Most of us have something we’d rather keep hidden—something that feels weak, broken, or unfixable. What feels “withered” in your life right now? What patterns, habits, or coping mechanisms have you tried to manage on your own? Where has self-reliance stopped working?

Write one sentence: My withered hand might look like _____.

ADMITTING POWERLESSNESS (STEP 1)

Step 1 is not about shame; it’s about truth. We admit we are powerless over our addictions, brokenness, and sinful patterns and that in our own power, our lives are unmanageable. What makes admitting powerlessness difficult for you? Where have you said, “I can handle this,” even when you couldn’t? In what ways has this area of your life become unmanageable—emotionally, spiritually, or relationally?

HEARING JESUS’ INVITATION

Jesus already knows what we hide. His invitation is not condemnation; it’s healing. How do you hear Jesus’ words, “Stretch out your hand”—as risky, kind, hopeful, or frightening? What do you believe Jesus already knows about your struggle? What do you think Jesus wants for you, not just from you?

STRETCHING IT OUT

Healing begins with honesty. What would it look like to stop hiding? Who might God use to walk with you in this journey? What small step of courage is God inviting you to take next?

Pray: Jesus, here is the hand I’ve been hiding: _____. I can’t heal it. I need You.

CLOSING REFLECTION

Disgrace becomes grace when it is stretched out to Jesus. What are you are willing to offer Him today?

RE:GENERATION

Re:generation focuses on heart transformation, seeking to remove the idols of our hearts that keep us from a deep, intimate relationship with God. It takes the spiritual wisdom embedded in the Twelve Steps and roots it unapologetically in the Gospel—in Scripture, repentance, grace, and the transforming work of Jesus. We plan to launch Re:generation at Sherwood Oaks Bloomington this fall, with an informational meeting this summer.

Re:generation General Information:

<https://www.regenerationrecovery.org/>

Find your struggles (a survey)

<https://www.regenerationrecovery.org/struggle-finder>

12 Steps with Key Concepts:

<https://www.watermarkresources.com/ministries/regen/12steps>