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By GERALD A. KLINGBEIL

Crooked Wood— Upright Posture

*What does it take
to walk tall?*

Eighteen years is a long time. Eighteen marks full responsibility before the law in many countries. Eighteen-year-olds can drive cars, vote in general elections, or consent that their bodies be used in medical research.

Eighteen years is a *long* time. That's how long the woman had to wait to experience the miracle of healing. But let's not get ahead of ourselves. We should start at the beginning.

Sabbath in the Synagogue

It's another Sabbath in Judea. Like most God-fearing Jews, we find Jesus in the synagogue, teaching (Luke 13:10). In fact, the only earlier mention of Jesus teaching in a synagogue on the Sabbath in the Gospel of Luke can be found in Luke 4:31-37 and describes another Sabbath healing. Clue one: *Pay attention to the day—it's Sabbath.*

Luke's description of the condition of the unnamed woman is ambiguous. She was "bent over" and "had a spirit of infirmity"—she "could in no way raise herself up" (Luke 13:11). While Jesus' healing miracle is not an exorcism, Dr. Luke establishes a clear link between disease and the destructive work of demonic forces.

As Jesus scans His audience, His



eyes fall on the woman—bent over by years of pain, without any hope on the horizon. He calls her forward. Then He speaks—words that must have shaken the very foundation of the woman's world. Clue two: *Jesus sees what we need—always and anywhere—and acts on it.*

The Miracle

Jesus' recognition of the woman must have caused some murmurings in the audience. A man publicly addressing a woman not related to him was something out of the extraordinary—a fact that also was not lost on the Samaritan woman in John 9:9.¹ "Woman, you are loosed from your infirmity," says Jesus, or, as the New International Version trans-

lates: "Woman, you are set free from your infirmity" (Luke 13:12). Then Jesus commits the next cultural no-no. He "laid His hands on her" (verse 13).

"Immediately," Luke tells us, "she was made straight." *Immediately*—that's Luke's way of painting for us the picture of an omnipotent Creator-God whose power clearly surpassed Dr. Luke's more limited skills.² Similar to the life-giving words uttered by the One who spoke heaven and earth into existence (Gen. 1-2), Jesus' words have an immediate creative effect. Bone structures change, muscles flex, tendons stretch—and suddenly the impossible becomes a reality: the woman stands upright and praises God. Clue three: *Jesus calls us to stand tall and straight.*

“How can we, fragile human beings surrounded by an ever-increasing **crescendo** of injustice, destruction, distraction, and futility, ever hope to walk upright and with purpose?”

The Aftermath

The synagogue ruler's reaction to this incredible miracle is not a surprise—at least not to Luke's readers. The Gospel contains four Sabbath healings (4:31-41; 6:6-11; 14:1-6; and the present story in 13:10-17) and every miracle is accompanied by criticism and increasing tension between Jesus and the Jewish leadership. The synagogue leader's rebuke, while directed to the people, is really an affront to Jesus. In his mind, healing equals work; thus, considering the fourth commandment, healings should only occur during the week (13:14).

Luke's record of Jesus' reply is important. Before our very eyes we see the change from “Jesus” to “the Lord.” The tone is sharp (“Hypocrite!” [verse 15]); the reasoning is sound. The woman is described as a “daughter of Abraham” (verse 16)—a phrase that appears only this once in Scripture. Jews loved to point out their connection to Abraham (John 8:33, 39, 53), the “father of faith.” Jesus underlines the importance of the woman when He describes her as a “daughter of Abraham.” Clue four: *Our worth before God is not based on gender or race—God's grace levels the differences separating us.*

The Sabbath

Jesus' statement in Luke 13:16 highlights a key truth about the Sabbath. The day, separated by God at Creation, is really a day of liberation and re-creation (Ex. 20:8-11; Deut. 5:12-15). As evidenced by Jesus' miracles in the Gospels, God purposefully steps every Sabbath into this world and demonstrates His grace that is sufficient for us. In this way the Sabbath

healings of Jesus represent deliberate acts engaging His audience to think more biblically (and less traditionally) about the Sabbath. Furthermore, as was the case with the woman who had waited for 18 years to experience liberation, every Sabbath we are called to remember our own past bondage and crookedness and celebrate Jesus' victory on our behalf.³ Clue five: *God's Sabbath is our refuge.*

Crooked Wood

Helmut Gollwitzer (1908-1993) taught systematic theology in Germany for decades following his return from a Russian prisoner-of-war camp and a brief stint as the pastor of the Lutheran church of Berlin-Dahlem. A member of the Confessing Church during the Nazi-regime in Germany and opposed to Hitler's evil dreams of world dominion, he became an important voice in postwar German society.

In 1970 Gollwitzer published the volume *Krummes Holz—Aufrechter Gang* (“Crooked Wood—Upright Posture”). In it he considered one of the most existential of human questions about the meaning of life. His title was a silent nod to ideas expressed earlier by two German philosophers, Immanuel Kant and Ernst Bloch. Kant's “crooked wood” pointed to the senselessness and humility of human existence—nobody can make something straight out of crooked wood. “Upright posture” encapsulated Bloch's idea of human aspiration and dignity, based on ideology that hopes for a human utopia—even though it recognizes human limitations.

Gollwitzer's paradoxical title still challenges our hearts and our minds. How can we, fragile human beings,

surrounded by an ever-increasing crescendo of injustice, destruction, distraction, disease, and futility, ever hope to walk upright and with purpose? We can't—we are always and forever crooked wood, doubled over, hopeless, and unable to straighten up. Unless—*unless*—we allow the Master to touch our bent-over frame and speak us into life.

Which areas of your life are crooked and bent out of shape? Jesus' engagement with the synagogue leader in Luke 13:10-17 tells us that there is a worse crookedness than the physical pain experienced by the nameless woman immortalized in Dr. Luke's description of Jesus' Sabbath miracle. Crooked hearts and minds, bent attitudes—they all require Jesus' touch and His word of life. The good news of Luke 13:10-17 is that Jesus is ready to change crooked hearts, minds, and bodies into something straight and upright and beautiful. Final clue: *Allow the Master to help you walk and talk and dream upright.* ■

¹ Additionally, the woman at the well recognized the strangeness of a Jewish man talking to a Samaritan woman.

² Luke describes other miracles using the same Greek term: 1:64; 4:39; 5:25; 8:44, 47, 55; 18:43; 19:11; 22:60.

³ See the helpful chapter “The Sabbath and the Healing Ministry of Jesus” in Sigve K. Tonstad, *The Lost Meaning of the Seventh Day* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 2009), pp. 181-203.



Gerald A. Klingbeil is an associate editor of *Adventist World* and anxiously anticipates the glorious moment of the Master's return when all crooked and bent-out-of-shape hearts and minds will be made straight forever.