

## What are Real Friends For? — Getting to the Heart of Community

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### Story of my life...

Somehow in my life, I decided that I need to be the most spiritual, the most put together, the most Jesus-loving. I think part of this came from my pastor-kid upbringing, where I internalized the idea that if I look bad my parents look bad, and if they look bad God looks back, so my messing up was not an option and sinning was even less of a possibility. Throughout the course of my life I wanted to keep things perfect so I wouldn't make others look bad, so I wouldn't disappoint God, and so my life would look the way Jesus wanted it to.

But I was leaving something out. I was doing everything backwards, I wanted to pull myself together so I could finally fit into church and have Christian community, where in truth I needed friends and leaders to bring me back to the feet of Jesus. Finding Jesus is hardly ever a solitary journey, to truly know him and experience his power sometimes we have to let ourselves be carried.

### The story of the paralyzed man...

There is a story in the Gospel of Mark about a man who needed all kinds of help to get into the presence of Jesus:

*When Jesus returned to Capernaum several days later, the news spread quickly that he was back home. 2 Soon the house where he was staying was so packed with visitors that there was no more room, even outside the door. While he was preaching God's word to them, 3 four men arrived carrying a paralyzed man on a mat. 4 They couldn't bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, so they dug a hole through the roof above his head. Then they lowered the man on his mat, right down in front of Jesus. 5 Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralyzed man, "My child, your sins are forgiven." 6 But some of the teachers of religious law who were sitting there thought to themselves, 7 "What is he saying? This is blasphemy! Only God can forgive sins!" 8 Jesus knew immediately what they were thinking, so he asked them, "Why do you question this in your hearts? 9 Is it easier to say to the paralyzed man 'Your sins are forgiven,' or 'Stand up, pick up your mat, and walk'? 10 So I will prove to you that the Son of Man has the authority on earth to forgive sins." Then Jesus turned to the paralyzed man and said, 11 "Stand up, pick up your mat, and go home!" 12 And the man jumped up, grabbed his mat, and walked out through the stunned onlookers. They were all amazed and praised God, exclaiming, "We've never seen anything like this before!" **Mark 2:1-12***

What kind of friends are these that pick up their paralyzed friend, destroy property, disrupt a gathering, and put their friend right in Jesus' face so he could receive his healing?

I know a lot of people focus on Jesus in this passage and talk about this power to forgive sins and bring physical healing, and maybe we'll get to that here, but what strikes me the most about this story today is the radical friendship necessary for some of us to receive the healing and forgiveness Jesus longs to bestow upon our lives.

Let's look at the obstacles this man had to face:

1. He was paralyzed — he was unable to move into Jesus' presence on his own.
2. The crowd had beat him to Jesus — there was no space for him in the room even if he somehow find a way to drag himself to the meeting.
3. He was a social outcast — he would never be the guest of honor in any room but was used to being overlooked and pitted everyday of his life — if anyone had the right to feel unworthy it was him.

It is likely that this man spent his life in a bed, useless to his family and purposeless to himself, and yet in the midst of his hard circumstances he found friends — or friends found him. I think a lot of us can relate to this man, perhaps not in his physical condition but we too feel like him:

1. Paralyzed — we feel that can't move into Jesus' presence — something happened, we did something, or we've been living outside of it for so long that we don't even know how to get there, how to receive healing.
2. The crowd got there first — we feel that God has been good to everyone except for us; like everyone else got there before us and there won't be enough blessing, provision, and healing for us by the time we get there.
3. Social Outcasts — we feel like there is a dark cloud over us, like there is something uniquely wrong with me that will keep me from being welcome into the community (sometimes it sounds like "If they only knew who I really was...")

### **We really want to fix it on our own...**

We really believe that somehow we have to make it to Jesus on our own. It's like if the paralyzed man said to himself, "I can only receive healing from Jesus if I can walk up to him on my own. I can only approach him if I can pick myself off my mat and walk over to him and politely ask him to heal me." — That doesn't make any sense. And yet, we do that. We want to find ways to clean ourselves up before we come and ask Jesus for his help, or we want to figure things out on our own before we even let friends sit with us in the pain. It's like we are only willing to tell our stories if we know the ending, if we know how the problem gets solved. We get used to not inviting people to see us when we are still on our mat, or building relationships when we are still paralyzed, but what if the only way to get to Jesus is to let someone else carry us there? What if the only way to receive healing is to show up with all of our mess: our sin, our disease, our issues — all at the same time, surrounded by people who see it, know it, and are not ashamed to call us "friend" in the midst of it.

### **What would happen if we allowed ourselves to be carried?**

What would happen if we realized that finding true healing had nothing to do with getting there on our own? Our journeys are not any less valid because we needed others to get us to the finish line, if anything the win is that much sweeter because we had someone cheering us on.

Thank God for friends who aren't afraid to come to us, even when we don't know how to get up and look for them. May love them, cherish them, and be them if they are nowhere to be found. May we not be afraid to ask for help; would we be strong enough to be weak.

### **An invitation for today:**

Be honest about where you really are. Chances are, you don't have all the answers and you feel like you need help. This is the place to ask for help. This is the place to be honest. This is the place to be needy. What if you take the next 30 seconds and be completely honest with the Lord? Ask Him your questions, share your heart with Him and let Him meet you where you are! And know this: following Jesus is not something you have to do on your own: can you think of anyone in your life you can go to to ask for help? A friend, a friendship group leader, a parent, or maybe a pastor?

I challenge you to let at least one of these people into your process and let them take you to Jesus. You don't always have to get there on your own.

### **Where to start?**

1. **Introduce yourself to someone today.**
2. **Don't leave early, lean into the space we've set aside to connect today, you may be surprised by what happens!**

### **Announcements:**

1. **You are cordially invited to the Young Adult Set (Y.A.S.) every Wednesday at 8:00 pm**
2. **Join our Ushers and Parking team! Talk to any of your team members if you're interested!**
3. **Bilingual Thanksgiving service on Thanksgiving Day at 11 AM! Bring the whole family!**

party time: first person to get a bingo wins a prize!

Find someone who...				
<p>Played in the band</p> 	<p>Who is a teenager</p> <p><b>13-19</b></p>	<p>Is Left handed</p>	<p>Was born the same year as you</p>	<p>Has <b>3</b> siblings</p>
<p>Has been married at least <b>20</b> years</p>	<p>Has a gym membership</p> 	<p>Had a baby this year</p> 	<p>Born in the <b>80's</b></p>	<p>Likes to sing</p> 
<p>Prefers Coke over Pepsi</p> 	<p>Knows a foreign language</p>	<p>Has a Facebook account</p> 	<p>Served or is serving in the military</p>	<p>Drives a minivan</p> 
<p>Owens a dog</p> 	<p>Has a birthday in</p> 	<p>Is younger than <b>10</b></p>	<p>Has run a marathon</p> 	<p>Doesn't have a smart phone</p> 
<p>Has been on a cruise</p> 	<p>Is over <b>6</b> ft tall</p>	<p>Is the baby in their family</p> 	<p>Owens a white car</p> 	<p>Shares a name with an ancestor</p>