

Faith of Four Friends

Jazmin's heart lifted when she read the text on her phone from her friend Lela. It was Psalm 34:17-19: "The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles. The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. The righteous person may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all." The Scripture was accompanied with several brightly colored heart emojis.

Jazmin was dealing with circumstances that found her fighting discouragement. Not overwhelmingly so, but enough that had driven her to special prayer and devotion time. She had shared her struggle with close friends.

Her ringing phone interrupted her thoughts. "Hey girl!" came the friendly voice of her friend Shantice. "I have Renatta on the other end."

"Hello, Jazmin," said Renatta.

"What are you two doing?" asked Jazmin.

"What do you think about going to a prayer breakfast at my church the end of this month?" asked Shantice.

"Sure," said Jazmin, "I don't have anything planned. Thanks for thinking of me, guys."

"We love you, sister," said Renatta. "We're in this together."

"How have you been feeling, Sis?" asked Shantice.

"Better and better," said Renatta, "especially with such good sisters in the faith as you walking with me. Better and better!"

1. *What does friendship mean to you?*

2. *Do you prefer to have a few friends or a lot of friends? Explain your answer.*

3. *Why is forgiveness an important element in every friendship?*

Jesus Forgives a Paralyzed Man

Luke 5:17-20, KJV

17 And it came to pass on a certain day, as he was teaching, that there were Pharisees and doctors of the law sitting by, which were come out of every town of Galilee, and Judaea, and Jerusalem: and the power of the Lord was present to heal them.

18 And, behold, men brought in a bed a man which was taken with a palsy: and they sought means to bring him in, and to lay him before him.

19 And when they could not find by what way they might bring him in because of the multitude, they went upon the housetop, and let him down through the tiling with his couch into the midst before Jesus.

20 And when he saw their faith, he said unto him, Man, thy sins are forgiven thee.

Luke 5:17-20, NIV

¹⁷One day Jesus was teaching, and Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there. They had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was with Jesus to heal the sick. ¹⁸Some men came carrying a paralyzed man on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus. ¹⁹When they could not find a way to do this because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus.

²⁰When Jesus saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven."

Jesus was staying in Capernaum, and the house quickly overflowed with people. Jesus took advantage of the occasion to proclaim the Word, namely, the message about the coming divine kingdom (Luke 4:43).

As Jesus taught, some religious leaders sat listening to the Savior. By this time in His earthly ministry, the news about Jesus had spread around the country. The religious leaders had every right to investigate Jesus and the claims about Him. One of their jobs was to prevent false prophets from leading the people astray (Deut. 13; 18:15–22).

The stories of God's healing "power" (Luke 5:18) caused

some men to carry a disabled friend to the house with the faith that Jesus would heal him. Even the large crowd did not stop the disabled man's friends; their faith in Jesus' ability to heal prompted them to devise another way.

Most Jews in Jesus' day lived in simple, one-room homes made of stone or brick. Outside, a narrow stairway led to the roof, which was made of branches and dried clay laid over wooden beams. The roof was frequently used for working or sleeping. The paralytic's friends carried him up to the roof and lowered him down through a hole to right in front of Jesus. Impressed by the "faith" (vs. 20) of the friends, Jesus then responded to it, though not (at first) as the men might have expected.

Jesus recognized that the greatest problem faced by the disabled man on the stretcher was not physical immobility, but spiritual paralysis. So, instead of immediately healing the man, Jesus forgave the man's "sins" (vs. 20). From this we see that the paralyzed man also had faith.

4. *What indication is there that the religious leaders were interested in Jesus?*

5. *What did a group of concerned men do for their disabled friend?*

6. *How did Jesus respond to the efforts made by the disabled man's friends?*

Jesus Heals a Paralyzed Man

Luke 5:21-26, KJV

21 And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, Who is this which speaketh blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone?

22 But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, he answering said unto them, What reason

Luke 5:21-26, NIV

²¹The Pharisees and the teachers of the law began thinking to themselves, "Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

²²Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked,

ye in your hearts?

23 Whether is easier, to say,
Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to
say, Rise up and walk?

24 But that ye may know that
the Son of man hath power
upon earth to forgive sins, (he
said unto the sick of the palsy,)
I say unto thee, Arise, and take
up thy couch, and go into thine
house.

25 And immediately he rose
up before them, and took
up that whereon he lay, and
departed to his own house, glo-
rifying God.

26 And they were all amazed,
and they glorified God, and
were filled with fear, saying,
We have seen strange things to
day.

“Why are you thinking
these things in your hearts?”

²³Which is easier: to say,
‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or
to say, ‘Get up and walk’?

²⁴But I want you to know that
the Son of Man has author-
ity on earth to forgive sins.”
So he said to the paralyzed
man, “I tell you, get up, take
your mat and go home.”

²⁵Immediately he stood up
in front of them, took what
he had been lying on and
went home praising God.

²⁶Everyone was amazed and
gave praise to God. They
were filled with awe and
said, “We have seen remark-
able things today.”

Jesus’ pronouncement of forgiveness angered the religious leaders, for they understood that anyone who claimed to pardon sinners was also claiming to be divine. With respect to Jesus, the legal experts refused to accept that He is God.

Whereas Jesus addressed the paralytic as “friend” (vs. 20), the religious leaders rudely referred to Jesus as “this fellow” (vs. 21). As they did so, they charged Him with “blasphemy,” since only God can forgive sins. This was a very serious charge that could result in stoning (Lev. 24:16).

The legal experts knew that God had the authority to forgive sins and the power to pardon and redeem people. Because they believed Jesus was a mere human being, they assumed He was illegitimately claiming divine authority for Himself.

Jesus could sense what the leaders were “thinking” (Luke 5:22) and discussing among themselves. Which was easier, He asked, to tell the paralyzed man he was pardoned or to enable him to stand up and walk away with his mat? Clearly, the first option was easier, for it could not be verified by any conventional means. Additionally, miraculous healing and the forgiveness of sins both required divine “authority” (vs. 24). One reason Jesus first healed the disabled man was to lend credibility to His declaration of forgiveness. Another reason was to prove that He truly is the “Son of Man.”

Confirmation came when the paralytic, at Jesus’ command, was able to stand up in the presence of the onlookers, pick up his stretcher, and begin walking “home” (vs. 25). There was no hesitancy, either, as he did so. Instead, he responded at once. He also “gave praise to God” for the miracle he experienced that day.

Only a few moments earlier, the religious leaders had planted the seeds of doubt among those who were present in the house. Now, verse 26 states that everyone present was “amazed” at what they saw. They, in turn, praised God for the miracle they witnessed Jesus perform, exclaiming that they had “seen remarkable things” that day. Though the crowd, after watching Jesus heal the paralyzed man, responded enthusiastically to His display of power, they did not yet realize He had not come to only be a miracle worker. The miracles He performed confirmed His claim to be the Messiah and His legitimate authority to forgive and save people.

7. *How did the religious leaders respond to Jesus’ statement?*

8. *What did Jesus declare for Himself?*

9. *How did the paralytic respond to Jesus’ command?*

10. *How did the onlookers respond to the healing episode?*

Friends Forever

What is astonishing about the friends of the paralyzed man is not so much their effort in getting their friend to the Lord but their faith that this teacher could miraculously heal him. Moreover, this man believed as well, and such a faith even moved Jesus to the point that He Himself called the paralyzed man His “friend”!

To be a friend of Jesus is a marvelous blessing! He blesses families and communities centered on Him, and within those relationships He forms intimate friendships, where trust and the sharing of burdens help us thrive as His children.

Helen Keller once said, “Walking with a friend in the dark is better than walking alone in the light.” Keller, who was blind and deaf from the age of 19 months until her death at the age of 87, certainly could appreciate the contrast between light and darkness but even more having close friends to guide and inspire her. Her life is a lesson on triumphing over seemingly insurmountable disabilities with the aid of special friends, such as Anne Sullivan, her teacher and companion.

Of course, no one is without faults. That’s why when a friend still loves us despite our faults, we know we have a true friend who will demonstrate his or her love for us with encouragement, loyalty, and empathy, all the same qualities we should show in return. A good friendship takes a tremendous amount of effort as well as the ability to forgive and receive forgiveness to make it work. In other words, to have a good friendship, we must be willing to give of ourselves to that other person.

11. *Why is encouragement crucial in a good friendship?*

12. *How do your friends encourage you? How do you encourage your friends?*

13. *In what ways does Jesus show you what it means to be a good friend?*

Encouragement Works Both Ways

When the friends of the paralyzed man lowered him to Jesus, they did so because of their love for their friend. Such love should be reflected in our love for our friends, and hopefully such love should be reflected in their love for us. Such friendships are the kind that Jesus wants for us.

► *How can you encourage a friend this week? Write some ideas here and then follow through on them as the Holy Spirit leads you.*

KEY VERSES

And, behold, men brought in a bed a man which was taken with a palsy: and they sought means to bring him in, and to lay him before him. And when they could not find by what way they might bring him in because of the multitude, they went upon the housetop, and let him down through the tiling with his couch into the midst before Jesus. —Luke 5:18-19, KJV

Some men came carrying a paralyzed man on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus. When they could not find a way to do this because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus. —Luke 5:18-19, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of April 8 through April 14

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Acts 10:1-15—Accept What God Has Made Clean.
- Tues.** Isaiah 42:1-12—God's Servant Enlightens the Nations.
- Wed.** Malachi 1:10-14—God Is Praised among the Nations.
- Thurs.** Colossians 3:1-11—Christ Is All and in All.
- Fri.** Zechariah 8:18-23—Nations Shall Entreat God's Favor.
- Sat.** Luke 3:1-14—All Flesh Shall See God's Salvation.
- Sun.** Luke 7:1-10—Jesus Helps a Righteous Gentile.