Four Friends January 29, 2023

**Bible Verses:** Luke 5:17-26

**Spark Story Bible:** pages 348 to 353

**--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------**

Overall Lesson Takeaways

* **The importance of helping those in need around us.**

Although there are plenty of other theological details to dive into, we shouldn't lose sight of the fact that the entire healing and Jesus' discussion with the Pharisees and scribes was predicated by a small group's act of kindness to someone in need. For children – particularly younger children – this is the logical entry point into this passage. We aren't given enough detail in this passage, but given other passages like Acts 3, it's safe to assume that this paralyzed man faced significant challenges every day – and we know that there are many people today who find themselves in similar circumstances, whether because of physical challenges, mental health struggles, on-going poverty, or more. We believe our Christian imperative is to be of help, so when these helpers bring the man to Jesus and he "sees their faith" (Luke 5:20) we are reminded that we too are asked to put our faith into action!

* **Helping sometimes means being creative and persistent!**

Although it would be great for helping people to always come easily and naturally, sometimes it asks us to go above and beyond what we might normally do. In this passage, we see the man’s friends be creative (go through the roof!) and be persistent (crowds wouldn’t stop them from reaching Jesus!) – and those are two things that should apply to the way we give and advocate for others. Sometimes doing something nice for someone can require creativity, especially if they are politely refusing help in the first place – and sometimes it means that we need to keep at it, especially if we are helping and advocating for someone our society may not think about much.

* **Jesus is continued to show that he is “God With Us”.**

Although the first several chapters of Luke's Gospel make it clear that Jesus is God's son, this passage (and others around it) has Jesus doing something that would have been understood as God’s domain alone: forgiving someone’s sins. Coupled with Jesus’ ability to heal, his declaration that he is the “Son of Man” (a title stemming from Daniel 7:13 that implied God bringing about a new age), and his occasional subverting of the Law, Jesus’ ministry was continually showing that God was doing a new thing in the midst of the people. Knowing that Jesus was both showing and telling us how God wants us to live is a really helpful way to approach our Bible stories – we know that there are always things that we can learn and apply to our lives!

Checking In

**Before the reading:**

* **Check in with the kids – welcoming any newcomers warmly.**
  + Younger kids: What did you really enjoy this weekend?
  + Older kids: Highs and Lows from the past week
* **Who are some of your best friends? What makes them such good friends?**

Bible Lesson / Discussion

**Reading the Bible:**

* Today, we are reading about four friends who helped a man be healed by Jesus… even though they had a hard time getting to Jesus at first!
* **Read the text together, either in the Bible, or the Spark Story Bible.**
  + Feel free to stop and ask questions during the reading, if helpful.
  + Afterwards, take time to explore what that passage might mean, and know there's no one *correct* way to read these passages!

**Questions About the Passage** (see next page for PreK/K questions)

* The passage says that Jesus saw the faith of the man and his friends – how were they showing their faith?
* Why might the Pharisees have been upset? What would you have said to the Pharisees if you were Jesus?

**Connections to Our Lives**

* When was the last time you needed someone else’s help? How does it feel to be helped by someone? How does it feel to help someone else?
* The man’s friends needed to be creative to get him to Jesus – what are some creative ways that we can help others? Think about something kind that you can do for: a friend, a family member, someone you don’t know!

**Biblical/Church Connections**

* The season of Epiphany is all about learning who Jesus is and what his teachings mean for our lives. What do we learn about who Jesus is in this passage?

**Alternate Preschool and K/1st Questions**

Younger ages, particularly those in our preschool class, may have a hard time discussing the biblical text for very long (if at all). My hope is that these questions (and especially the activity) can help with engagement!

**Opening Questions / Activity**

* **Take some time to welcome / get to know the kids!**
  + Who are some of your best friends? What makes them your friend?
  + When is the last time that someone did something nice for you? How did it make you feel?

**Warm Up Game – Maze + Spot the Difference**

* In our passage today, four people helped their friend get to Jesus to help him be healed – and I was hoping I could get your help with a few things!
* First, the friends needed to find a way to Jesus – so I was hoping you could help me with this maze to help the friends get there:
  + Play the Maze game (ask kids to help at each turn!)
* Next, the friends helped to lower their friend down to Jesus – but these pictures aren’t quite the same! Can you help me by spotting 5 changes?
  + Play the Spot the Difference game (5 total)
* Play as long as kids are having fun, then transition to the Bible questions.

**Bible Discussion/Questions**

* Our Bible story today is about four people who decided to help their friend go see Jesus – hoping that Jesus could heal him!
* **Read the text together, either in the Bible, or the Spark Story Bible.**
  + Feel free to stop and ask questions during the reading, if helpful.
  + Afterwards, take time to explore what that passage might mean, and know there's no one *correct* way to read these passages!
* Both the man’s friends and Jesus really helped him out – who are people that you can count on helping you when you really need it?
* Jesus helped everyone understand that he was God’s son by healing the man and forgiving him. If Jesus were standing here with us, what would you ask him about? (After kids share, you can say a prayer together to close, using some of what kids have said as a guide).

People of Faith

In addition to reading our weekly Bible story, I'd love for our older grade school students to learn more about people whose lives were changed by their faith in Jesus. We'll lift up a new person each Sunday, trying to connect their story to our Bible passage as much as possible!

**Glennon Doyle**

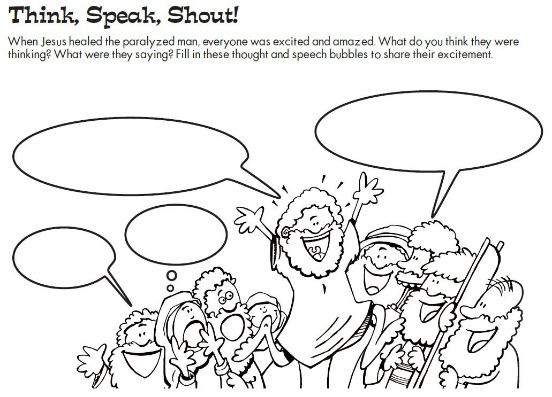
While we often lift up people in this series who seem like they’ve never done a bad thing in their lives, Glennon Doyle would be the first person to tell you that that’s not true for her. In fact, she sees being honest about our struggles, flaws, and hurts as one of the most important things that we can do for each other.

Doyle grew up going to church and was part of a loving family, but deep down she felt like she had to pretend to be perfect everywhere she was: home, school, and especially church. Her struggles to be perfect eventually led her to harm herself through bulimia and then later through alcohol abuse in her teenage years. She struggled with these things for years and years before her sister helped take her to her first Alcoholics Anonymous meeting – and gradually Doyle began to realize the power of sharing how broken she felt and the desire to try to help anyone trying to pretend things were perfect in their lives.

In 2009, she created a blog called Momastery in which she shared all of this and more – and she soon found that there were thousands who were struggling in the same way that she was. Her blog posts on a variety of difficult and personal topics ended up getting her recognized by a variety of outlets – but more important they’ve helped people get through some difficult periods in their lives.

Doyle has continued to write on the blog, as well as now being the author of three books, but in 2012 she also decided to start a non-profit called Together Rising. This non-profit allows thousands of people to donate directly to families in need – and they cap individual donations at $25 to ensure that a big community of people rally around anyone needing help. To date, they have raised over 25 million dollars to help pay from everything from breast cancer treatments to keeping the heat on for families who can’t pay their bills. In reflecting on her work, Doyle once said: “I believe that God is in each person, each child. You are good. God is in you and in every person that you meet”.

Crafts / Activities

**Four Friends Crowd Reactions**

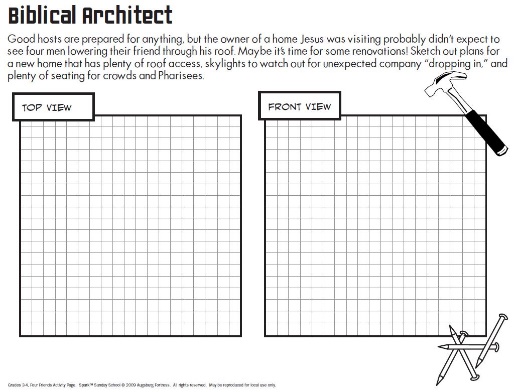
**(Ages 5+, 5 mins)**

Supplies Needed:

* Printed Handout
* Markers/Crayons

Instructions:

* This craft is mostly coloring, but encourage students to fill in the word bubbles with things that the crowd might have been thinking or saying!

**Four Friends House Design**

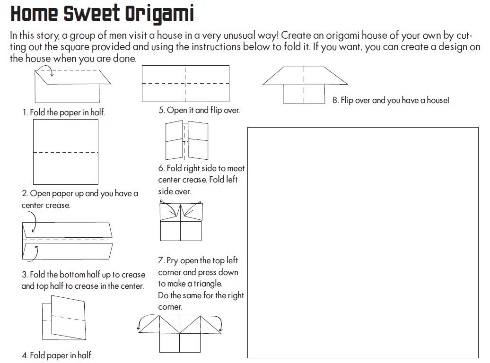
**(Ages 5+, 5-10 mins)**

Supplies Needed:

* Printed Handout
* Pen/Pencil/Crayons

Instructions:

* This craft asks kids to imagine designing their own house where someone could get lowered in from the roof. Encourage creative designs!

**Four Friends Origami House**

**(Ages 7+, 5-10 mins)**

Supplies Needed:

* Printed Handout
* Scissors

Instructions:

* This craft will require some careful folding and instruction following, but older kids may enjoy creating an origami house using this handout.

Biblical Background – Four Friends[[1]](#footnote-1)

While the themes of friendship, healing, and Jesus’ compassion come through very clearly in this passage, your class may find it helpful to have background info on a few of the less clear portions of this passage:

**What would the paralyzed man’s life have been like?**

Although it’s hard to say, in general life would have been extremely difficult for anyone with physical ailments. There were not laws/protections in place for those who had injuries or disabilities, and things like wheelchairs were largely not in existence. Instead, those who were unable to walk would have been dependent on friends to assist them.

**Why were the Scribes and Pharisees so upset?**

Given that Jesus is doing a kind thing for this man, it seems quite bizarre that the Scribes and Pharisees get bent out of shape. The root issue, though, is made somewhat clearer in Luke – Jesus’ offer of forgiveness seems to be usurping a role that was widely seen as God’s domain alone. This will be a repeated issue throughout the Gospels, as Jesus’ healings, teachings, and occasional disobedience of the Law are often met with strong pushback from the religious authorities on the grounds that he is overstepping his bounds. Jesus, however, makes clear in this passage that God has indeed given him this authority by claiming the title of “Son of Man” – a messianic title that would have marked Jesus as a figure who will usher in a new age.

**Why is Jesus talking about forgiveness in the first place?**

Although this clearly does not hold up today, it was a fairly common view within the 1st century that someone’s physical and/or mental ailments were a punishment from God (or the gods) for something that that person (or their family) had done. In light of that, this man’s paralysis likely would have been understood by those in the crowd as a result of his sins, which Jesus seems to acknowledge in verse 24 when he invites the man to stand and walk after receiving forgiveness. However, Jesus himself seemingly does not share this view; offering forgiveness is rhetorically given as the “easier” option in verse 23, with the healing acknowledged as the work of God through Jesus.

1. Your ability to share this info with kids will vary depending on their age – this section is mainly written for teachers and parents to learn a bit more about the background to each week's passage! [↑](#footnote-ref-1)