

LESSON TWO

FAITH AT WORK

When [Jesus] saw their faith, He said to him, "Man, your sins are forgiven you."

LUKE 5:20 NKJV

REFLECTION

Faith may be a spiritual concept, but it has practical characteristics that make it an essential component of life. Much of our daily routines are based on what we cannot prove. For instance, we rarely examine a chair before we sit in it . . . or have a car checked out by a mechanic each time we want to drive. We accept many things by faith. But life has a way of testing our faith, particularly when it comes to our relationship with God. Think of a time when you have seen faith at work. What were the results of that faith?

SITUATION

As the crowds grew during the early days of Jesus' ministry, they quickly divided into two camps: the spectators and the participants. On one occasion, Jesus is teaching in a house filled with people clamoring for his attention. Among them are those trying to figure out his plan. Does he fit the "acceptable" categories, or is he a maverick who will soon be forgotten? They are watching his every move and sifting every word. Then the ceiling begins to cave in.

OBSERVATION

Read Luke 5:17–26 from the New International Version or the New King James Version.

NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION

¹⁷ One day Jesus was teaching, and Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there. They had come from every village of Galilee and from Ju-

dea and Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was with Jesus to heal the sick. ¹⁸ Some men came carrying a paralyzed man on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus. ¹⁹ 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.

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

²¹ The 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?"

²² Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, "Why are you thinking these things in your hearts? ²³ Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'?" ²⁴ But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." So he said to the paralyzed man, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." ²⁵ Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God. ²⁶ Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, "We have seen remarkable things today."

NEW KING JAMES VERSION

¹⁷ Now it happened on a certain day, as He was teaching, that there were Pharisees and teachers of the law sitting by, who had come out of every town of Galilee, Judea, and Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was present to heal them. ¹⁸ Then behold, men brought on a bed a man who was paralyzed, whom they sought to bring in and lay before Him. ¹⁹ And when they could not find how they might bring him in, because of the crowd, they went up on the housetop and let him down with his bed through the tiling into the midst before Jesus.

²⁰ When He saw their faith, He said to him, "Man, your sins are forgiven you."

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

²² But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, He answered and said to them, “Why are you reasoning in your hearts? ²³ Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Rise up and walk’? ²⁴ But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins”—He said to the man who was paralyzed, “I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.”

²⁵ Immediately he rose up before them, took up what he had been lying on, and departed to his own house, glorifying God. ²⁶ And they were all amazed, and they glorified God and were filled with fear, saying, “We have seen strange things today!”

EXPLORATION

1. As this scene opens, who are present among the crowd? Why do you think they had traveled there from faraway places to see Jesus?

2. A group of men in the crowd that day had decided to bring their paralyzed friend to Jesus. What do you think they hoped Jesus would do for him?

3. What risks and obstacles did the men face because of the crowd around Christ?

4. What were the pros and cons of their plan to let their friend down through the roof?

5. What did these men’s actions—and the fact they would go to any length to get their friend to Jesus—reveal about their perception of Christ?

6. Why was Jesus’ first response to forgive rather than to heal?

INSPIRATION

Let’s talk for a minute about lovebursts. . . . Spontaneous affection. Tender moments of radiant love. Ignited devotion. Explosions of tenderness. . . .

They remind you about what matters. A telegram delivered to the back door of the familiar, telling you to treasure the treasure you’ve got while you’ve got it. A whisper from an angel, or someone who sounds like one, reminding you that what you have is greater than what you want and that what is urgent is not always what matters.

Those are lovebursts. You have them. I have them. And this may surprise you: Jesus had them . . . lots of them. One of them happened when Jesus met an invalid. The man couldn’t walk. He couldn’t stand. His limbs were bent and his body twisted. . . .

[The man’s] friends want him to heal their friend. But Jesus won’t settle for a simple healing of the body—he wants to heal the soul. He

leapfrogs the physical and deals with the spiritual. To heal the body is temporal; to heal the soul is eternal.

The request of the friends is valid—but timid. The expectations of the crowd are high—but not high enough. They expect Jesus to say, “I heal you.” Instead he says, “I forgive you.”

They expect him to treat the body, for that is what they see.

He chooses to treat not only the body, but also the spiritual, for that is what he sees.

They want Jesus to give the man a new body so he can walk. Jesus gives grace so the man can live.

Remarkable. Sometimes God is so touched by what he sees that he gives us what we need and not simply that for which we ask.

It’s a good thing. For who would have ever thought to ask God for what he gives? Which of us would have dared to say: “God, would you please hang yourself on a tool of torture as a substitution for every mistake I have ever committed?” And then have the audacity to add: “And after you forgive me, could you prepare me a place in your house to live forever?”

And if that wasn’t enough: “And would you please live within me and protect me and guide me and bless me with more than I could ever deserve?”

Honestly, would we have the chutzpah to ask for that? No, we, like the friends, would have only asked for the small stuff.

We would ask for little things like a long life and a healthy body and a good job. Grand requests from our perspective, but from God’s it’s like taking the moped when he offers the limo. (From *He Still Moves Stones* by Max Lucado.)

REACTION

7. In what way did the four friends’ faith in Jesus affect the life of the paralyzed man?

8. In what ways does your faith affect others around you?

9. What are some ways that you can show your faith in Jesus Christ?

10. What risks or obstacles have you faced in living out your beliefs?

11. How have those difficulties stretched and strengthened your faith?

12. In what ways have you seen God bless people who trust him?

LIFE LESSONS

This episode in Jesus’ life offers us two challenging examples as we seek to live as disciples of Jesus. We can identify with the paralyzed man, and we can identify with his friends. Each role requires a certain kind of faith. The paralyzed man trusted both his friends and Jesus. We don’t know if he asked them for help or if he just went along with their plan, but feeling himself lowered through the roof must have been a moment of testing.

The friends had to escalate their faith to meet the obstacles they encountered, and their persistence was rewarded. We can experience the same kinds of rewards for exercising our faith in God throughout life. The paralyzed man was not only healed but also forgiven. This reminds us that no matter how bold our faith, God's capacity to go beyond what we could ask or imagine will not be exceeded.

DEVOTION

Father, when all the doors are closed, give us the courage to persevere. When no solutions are in sight, help us to find new ways to break through the barriers that separate us from you. May we persistently seek your face and daily demonstrate our faith in you.

JOURNALING

What bold step of faith are you willing to take this week to be closer to God?

FOR FURTHER READING

To complete the book of Luke during this twelve-part study, read Luke 4:1–5:39. For more Bible passages on faith, read Romans 4:16–25; 1 Corinthians 16:13; 2 Corinthians 5:7; Galatians 2:16; Philippians 3:8–9; 1 Timothy 6:11–12; Hebrews 11:1–2; James 2:14–26.