



Looking Inwards (15 mins) *Caring For Each Other*

*Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an **opportunity to share**, not something you have to do, however, 'it's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:*

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins) *Concern For Others*

*Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours; or church, which you would like to share (please be careful not to pass on anything that is **confidential** or which you think the person/people concerned would not wish to be shared) for:*

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



HG36: The Miracles of Jesus (1/6) *The Faith of the Four Friends*

Mark 2:1-11

Home Group Study Notes

12th September 2010 - Revd Paul A. Carr



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION
BEFORE THE MEETING!

*Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group
with you, along with any previous notes and
other resources that might be helpful.*



Welcome/Ice Breaker (10 mins)

Share one experience/event (whether on holiday; at home; or in a newspaper, magazine or on TV) which has had an impact on your Christian life since your Home Group last met.



Looking Upwards (10 mins) *Worship*

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise, or listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers; etc.





Looking Upwards (40 mins) *Bible Study*

Read through the text for this study, Mark 2:1-11, and any references given below, alongside those in the sermon notes, then answer the following questions - you may find it helpful to read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss your answers with your Home Group.

1: The four friends were willing to break with convention (and tradition?) to see their friend healed. In what ways might we be 'held back' both as individuals and as a church family, in enabling healing (body; soul and spirit) to take place in the lives of ourselves and others?

2: Reflecting on the action of the four friends, Paul asked the question: "Is this faith or sheer desperation?" Discuss whether there is a difference and how this might affect the outworking of your faith on a daily basis. Share an experience when you have greatly appreciated the support and friendship of your Christian friends.

3: Paul suggested that the four friends showed 'persistence, determination and perseverance' in enabling their friend to get closer to Jesus. What could you put into action in your own life to enable those who are 'not yet Christian's' to find Jesus' healing touch on their lives?

For some of us, that desire for a spectacular healing can be a weakness too and, whilst there is no doubt that those of who were present on Pentecost Sunday witnessed a miracle, Yancey is asking whether we are as interested in the state of our spiritual health as we are with our physical health, e.g. would we be as prepared to go forward for prayer for healing for, say, issues of pride; hypocrisy; envy; and so on?

There's no doubt that many were 'shocked' into praying on Pentecost Sunday, but should we do more? Should we have more healing services midweek or ? Is praying for healing something that we are reactive about rather than proactive? There's no doubt, whatever our answer may be to these questions, that each of us are called, and commissioned, to take our place in bringing healing to others through our prayers, through our love, through our compassion but perhaps, most of all, through our actions. As we begin this series into the healing ministry of Jesus, I wonder: will your perceptions will change; will you see an increase in your faith; will you take risks in your prayers; will you be more practical in looking for miracles to happen?

We should always remember that the truly great miracle of the Gospel is an invisible one, that through the forgiveness of sins, we make our peace with the living God; we are restored: body soul and spirit; we become his children; his sons and daughters and inherit the promises of God for this life and for eternity.

Conclusion: A good friend is hard to find. How many of you found Jesus through a friend? This story paints a wonderful picture of the faith; determination and perseverance of four friends to enable their friend to meet Jesus. We see that Jesus recognised their faith and responded in the way they knew He would. What kind of friend are you to those around you? Are you as interested in their spiritual wellbeing as you should be? What would it take for you to bring a friend to Jesus? I pray that you will have the vision to see beyond the improbable, a faith to make a start, and the courage to go through the roof in order to allow Jesus to touch the life of a friend.

You can bring a friend to Jesus: It's easy to underestimate how much of an important role you have to play in others coming to faith in Jesus. There's no doubt that each one of you have a: friend; family member; husband; wife; child; you would like to bring to Jesus.

You can bring a friend to Jesus: But not without perseverance. It may take years and numerous attempts but perseverance produces a harvest, scripture promises that. Psalm 126:5-6: *Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy. He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him.*

You can bring a friend to Jesus: But you might need to be willing to break with convention, and become unorthodox, even extreme, in your faith - just like those four friends.

You can bring a friend to Jesus: By doing something immediately. By this I mean that the four friends were willing to do what they did quickly because they never knew if they would get a second chance. Jesus wants you to do whatever it takes to reach others for him because He is the only one who can bring that inner peace and purpose to their lives. The Bible tells us that *Today is the day of Salvation*. No matter what problems people have, no matter how they may be struggling with life; they all need to know Jesus and experience the power of His healing, forgiveness and cleansing.

You can bring a friend to Jesus: By praying for them regularly and seeking opportunities to share your faith with them. You can encourage them to attend, with you, the Alpha Course at Billericay Baptist Church, or invite them to 'Back to Church Sunday' (invitations are available in church!)? ... whatever you do, expect the Lord to honour your work.

Faith, according to Hebrews 11:1 is: ... *being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see*. Faith doesn't have any special words or actions or particular ways of doing things. Jesus, himself, healed in many different ways – word, act – we'll look at some of these in this series.

Coming to Jesus with Determination: Have you ever felt, as soon as you walk into a service, that something significant is going to happen? There are times in our life when we know that our heavenly Father is going to answer the deepest prayer of our heart. In those situations, we seem to live and breathe under an open heaven; when anything is possible and faith knows no bounds.

There are plenty of other times, as we all know so well, when we seem to get no reply and wonder where the face of God can be over shadowed. Sometimes, there are obstacles in the way: the odd roof or two, perhaps? I believe that God wants us to show how much we want something to happen before He responds - as the four friends showed their determination in getting their sick friend to Jesus.

A good friend is hard to find. When they couldn't get through the crowd they didn't stop and say: *Well, I guess we just can't get in we'd better go home*, or *I guess we'll just have to try some other time*, or *maybe we can come back tomorrow*. They showed persistence, determination and perseverance. They weren't prepared to quit until they got to Jesus. That's what God wants to see from us as well; He wants to see our faith in action.

Jesus recognised the faith of the friends but what about the man? He had to show his own faith by his willingness to get up. Sometimes, healing takes an action on the recipients behalf, rather than taking it lying down - literally. When we come before the Lord with this kind of faith, His word has the power to change our lives. Some people have a lot of faith but little determination and perseverance. As soon as faith becomes difficult and challenging, they quit. If that had been the attitude of those four friends then I know one man who would not have been healed! *When the going gets tough ...*

Healing or Forgiveness? Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, wherever Jesus went about doing good, critics were never far behind. In this case, it was the Teachers of the Law. It was their responsibility to investigate 'religious happenings' since the religious life of the nation was under their supervision. They'd heard Jesus was guilty of blasphemy and they wanted to find out for themselves. It's amazing, isn't it, how they had such good ringside seats when those who were desperate to get near to Jesus had to crash through the roof?

These Teachers of the Law could have come to Jesus with open minds and open hearts seeking truth instead of coming with a critical and negative attitude. The crucial point of the confrontation between Jesus and the teachers of the law comes in vs9: *Which is easier; to say to the paralytic 'Your sins are forgiven' or to say 'Get up, take your mat and walk.'* Jesus' challenge to the Teachers of the Law was for them to recognise that his power to heal was evidence that he was God in the flesh.

To heal someone was an immediate test of Jesus' claim to be the Son of God - and his authority to forgive sins. Jesus knew they would be more impressed by seeing a man healed rather than him being forgiven, because the 'tangible' evidence would be before their eyes.

Philip Yancey, in his book: 'The Jesus I never knew,' writes that Jesus' first concern was to forgive the man's sins, suggesting that He had different priorities than we do and that physical healing was secondary to spiritual healing.

4: In James 2:14-17 we are challenged about striking a balance between a faith that saves us and a faith we express in the way we live (our works, deeds or actions). Discuss what God might be saying to you through these verses and how this could affect your future Christian living.

5: Philip Yancey suggested that Jesus' first concern was to forgive the man's sins, suggesting that physical healing was secondary to spiritual healing. Are we as interested in the state of our spiritual health as we are with our physical health? e.g. would we be as prepared to go forward for prayer for healing for, say, issues of pride; hypocrisy; envy; and so on? Does unrepented sin affect our capacity to receive healing?

6: Read the section at the end of the sermon notes entitled: 'You can bring a friend to Jesus' and share with your Home Group the name of a friend whom you would like to come to know Jesus (If you are able, copy this link <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lfy7t611bew> and listen to the song 'Two Hand's' by Love Song). Pray for each other's friends and ways in which you could help draw them closer to Jesus.



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



HG36: The Miracles of Jesus (1/6) *The Faith of the Four Friends*

Mark 2:1-11

Home Group Sermon Notes

12th September 2010 - Revd Paul A. Carr

Introduction: If we are not feeling too good we have a tendency to withdraw into our own little world where we want to be alone. Conversation becomes laborious and the company of others is exhausting. We're tired and just can't be bothered to go to work; socialise; too tired to do anything at all - even church. Is this true, or is it me? An ex-missionary, at the church where I served my curacy, who was suffering from ME, once said to me: *I'm sick and tired of being sick and tired.* Have you ever felt like that? I'm sure the paralysed man in our story felt that way too.

A Good Friend is Hard to Find: Bryn Haworth sings: *A good friend is hard to find* and that's so true, isn't it? As we begin our series into the healing miracles of Jesus, I want to focus on the part those four men played in their friend being healed. I'm doing this because we tend to forget how often healing, in the Gospels, comes, not always as the result of the prayer of a sick person, but by the actions of a relative or friend (Deaf and Dumb man Mark 7) and it's worth recognising the important part we can play in assisting and interceding on behalf of others.

The paralysed man's four friends heard that Jesus was back in town (Jesus was returning to Capernaum. In Mark 1:29-34 we read that Jesus had healed many on an earlier visit, before moving on to some nearby villages). And so they'd heard something of Jesus' reputation as a healer and were desperate for their sick friend to be healed. We read that the house where Jesus was speaking was full to capacity. There was a large crowd outside - no doubt passing on down the line what Jesus was saying (a version of Chinese whispers, perhaps?). If only those four men could get their friend near to Jesus he would be healed. However, because it was so congested and because of the sheer volume of people there was no way they were going to get their friend anywhere near Jesus.

What could they do? What would you do? Would you even think about embarking on their course of action? Would you consider going through the roof? The writer John Ortberg wrote a book entitled: *If you want to walk on water, you've got to get out of the boat.* What about this one: *"If you want your friend to be healed, you've got to go through the roof!"*

What these four friends did was to break with convention (and tradition?). They weren't prepared to waste time by hanging around and so they took it upon themselves to do something about it. You could say that these four friends did what they did out of desperation - such was their desire for their friend to be healed - but what better friends could you ask for? What they did was unorthodox. Unconventional. They exercised their faith in an extreme way! However, it was a faith which had an effect on all of those around, vs12 the crowd remarked: *We have never seen anything like this.* The result of the faith of these four men gave the paralysed man new life - both physically and spiritually. Yes it came about because of Jesus' healing touch, but it was also the result of their faith and actions.

Steve Hill, who was the evangelist at Brownsville, Pensacola, used to say that when Jesus is in the house strange things start to happen. When the Holy Spirit comes upon ordinary people they begin to do strange, extraordinary things - some would say weird or crazy things (we see this so often in the Bible). How would you categorise those four friends? Did they have an extreme faith? Was it complete trust in Jesus? Had they gone off the wall - or off the roof? However we might label them, they had a faith that allowed, and provided, an opportunity for Jesus to work a miracle.

A good friend is hard to find. But these four men really put themselves out to take their friend to Jesus, didn't they? And they ask us some hard questions; it seems to me, about how willing we are to change our schedule and realign our priorities, in order to introduce our friends to Jesus. We hear the excuses: *I have friends staying with me over the weekend so I won't be in church. I had a late night on Saturday and couldn't get up on Sunday! I don't enjoy special services such as 'Back to Church Sunday' so I won't be inviting anyone to come with me as I won't be going myself!* But a living faith, such as these men had, should have such an impact on our life that we'd be willing to rearrange our diary, our life in order to introduce a someone to Jesus.

Nothing thrills me more in my ministry than to see people finding Jesus for themselves (whether through Alpha or responding to an invitation or through an awakening of faith in their pilgrimage of faith or ?). I have to be honest and say that if I never saw people coming to faith in Jesus, or being renewed in their faith: I wouldn't want to be in this job - I tell you, it's true! As a minister, it's one of the most satisfying things in the world. But I hope that's true for each of you, too.

If you want your friend to be healed, you've got to go through the roof! Just picture the scene in your mind's eye if you can. Houses in Jesus' time had flat roofs - they are still built like this in much of the Middle East today. These houses have a staircase on the outside for easy access to the roof. These four men had to fight their way through the crowd just to get to the stairs to climb up to the roof - that must have taken some doing - and remember, their friend is in a stretcher. The roof was made up of wooden beams, that would have been covered with tiles that had been set on a bed of mortar or mud. They were often used as a place of storage, a place to keep animals (they were often grassed) and, I guess, a place to sunbathe.

And so, having gone this far, set about making a hole big enough to get their friend through, using whatever tools were available and, no doubt, demolishing the majority of the roof in the process. Once they'd broken through, they would see the astonished faces of the people below - imagine what the owner must have been thinking? I wonder whether the cost of repairing that roof an issue that concerned them. Even if it did, it wasn't going to stop them. Eventually the hole was big enough to lower their friend through to where Jesus was. I wonder if going through the roof was a spontaneous or planned decision? I wonder if one started and the others began to follow? I wonder if they went with a plan to do what they did? Whatever happened, they gave of themselves and shared their different talents, outlook, abilities, experiences and used them for a purpose that saw a dramatic result. *Someone had a vision to see beyond the improbable, someone had the faith to make a start, and someone had the courage to go through the roof ...* to get to Jesus.

Is this faith? But is this faith? Or was it sheer desperation? Is there a difference? Faith is the powerful understanding that human solutions alone will not alter any situation in which we find ourselves. Remember that a miracle is something that cannot happen by natural means and faith is an unshakeable trust and belief in God's ability to do the impossible - because he's God!

Martin Luther: *Faith is trust in what we cannot see. And so, if we are to have room for faith, the things in which we put our trust must be unseen. Indeed, they cannot be more hidden than when they appear to be the opposite things, the opposite feelings and the opposite experiences.*