

# L E S S O N 6

For April 7 • Page 40

## Faith of Four Friends

A few days before the annual air show in Houston, the residents can always expect an interesting array of aircraft in the skies. One Thursday afternoon during rush hour, as Debra Lee Thomas stopped for a red light at a crowded intersection, three Hueys came thundering overhead. The driver next to her, a businessman in a well-tailored suit, got out of his BMW to get a better look. Seconds later he was joined by a pony-tailed, tattooed biker in a leather vest who had parked his Harley on the shoulder. The two men stood in the intersection, their hands raised in silent salute, as the helicopters made their way across their air space.

When the traffic light changed, no one moved. But as the Hueys disappeared, the two men turned to face each other and shook hands without uttering a word. The businessman got back into his BMW, and the biker climbed on his Harley. Sure, they looked different; yes, they were from opposite spheres of life. But for that moment, they were on the same team.

The paralyzed man of this Bible story was helpless—at least in a way. Yet in another way he had something far more important than a set of good, stout legs. He had faithful friends. Don't we all need friends like that? Friends who will encourage our faith when ours is waning? Friends who will invigorate our hope when we're feeling down-and-out? Friends who won't give up on us because of obstacles and hindrances in their way? Friends who will carry us to Jesus?

**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?*

**LESSON FOCUS:** Do you have friends that encourage your faith?

## 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*

<sup>17</sup>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 Judea and Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was with Jesus to heal the sick. <sup>18</sup>Some men came carrying a paralyzed man on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus. <sup>19</sup>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.

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

Jesus was staying in Capernaum (possibly in Peter's house), 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 (Mark 2:2).

As Jesus taught, some religious leaders from "Galilee" (Luke 5:17), along with "Judea and Jerusalem," 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). They had interrogated John the Baptist (John 1:19–34), and now they would examine Jesus of Nazareth.

The stories of God's healing "power" (vs. 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 cause the disabled man's friends to give up. Indeed, 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. Inside were plain furnishings and utensils. Often the family shared the home with their animals. 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, rather, 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

*Luke 5:21-26, NIV*

<sup>21</sup>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?"

<sup>22</sup>Jesus knew what they were

their thoughts, he answering said unto them, What reason 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, glorifying God.

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

thinking and asked, "Why are you thinking these things in your hearts? <sup>23</sup>Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'?"

<sup>24</sup>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." <sup>25</sup>Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God.

<sup>26</sup>Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, "We have seen remarkable 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 serious charge. In Leviticus 24:16, the law said that "anyone who blasphemes the name of the LORD is to be put to death. The entire assembly must stone them. Whether foreigner or native-born, when they blaspheme the Name they are to be put to death."

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" (vs. 22)

and discussing among themselves. He responded by asking whether it was easier 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. After all, forgiveness took place invisibly, whereas a false claim of miraculous healing could be disproved based on the lack of visible evidence.

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 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 only He had not come to 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 in this week's Scripture is not so much their effort in getting their disabled 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. Jesus was so right when He said, "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15:13).

**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

While the friends of the paralyzed man lowered him before 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 of friendships 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

Week of April 8 through April 14

(See *The Quiet Hour* for 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.