

SESSION 2

THE GREATEST NEED

Leader pages on pp. 106-109

THE POINT:
ONLY JESUS CAN TAKE
CARE OF OUR NEED FOR
FORGIVENESS.

LUKE 5:17-26

¹⁷ On one of those days while he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea, and also from Jerusalem. And the Lord's power to heal was in him.

¹⁸ Just then some men came, carrying on a stretcher a man who was paralyzed. They tried to bring him in and set him down before him.

¹⁹ Since they could not find a way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on the stretcher through the roof tiles into the middle of the crowd before Jesus.

MEMORY VERSE

.....
²⁰ **Seeing their faith he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven."**

²¹ Then the scribes and the Pharisees began to think to themselves, "Who is this man who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

.....
²² But perceiving their thoughts, Jesus replied to them, "Why are you thinking this in your hearts?"

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

²⁴ But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he told the paralyzed man, "I tell you: Get up, take your stretcher, and go home."

²⁵ Immediately he got up before them, picked up what he had been lying on, and went home glorifying God.

²⁶ Then everyone was astounded, and they were giving glory to God. And they were filled with awe and said, "We have seen incredible things today."

KEYWORDS

Pharisees (v. 17)—Meaning "separated one." They separated themselves to the study of the law. They viewed obedience to the law as the way to God.

Your sins are forgiven (v. 20)—The form of the Greek verb rendered stresses the continuing and enduring state of this forgiveness.

Blasphemies (v. 21)—This term transliterates a Greek word meaning "to speak harm."

Son of Man (v. 24)—This verse records the first appearance of this title for Jesus in the Gospel of Luke. It occurs in connection with His authority to pronounce forgiveness.

HOW DOES JESUS MEET OUR GREATEST NEED?

Do-it-yourself, DIY. It saves you money, gives you a sense of pride and accomplishment, and is also a great learning opportunity. Sometimes it's a great idea and the best way to accomplish a task or complete a project. There are other times when DIY just won't work. Certain jobs need a specific professional, and DIY won't cut it.

In the passage we will be studying, there are some friends who had an issue that was not a DIY project. They wanted healing for a paralyzed friend. As much as they helped him, carried him, and maybe even tried to coach him to walk, it wasn't happening. In fact, what ailed their friend was greater than what they could see. Their friend needed a special one-of-a-kind professional. His name was Jesus. Only Jesus had the cure to what ailed their friend, but seeing Jesus wouldn't be as easy as they thought.

He Allowed Us To Come To Him // Luke 5:17-19

Jesus had gone viral; His reputation was growing. After returning from His wilderness temptation, even before selecting all His disciples, Jesus started teaching and healing around Galilee. This mini-tour attracted crowds. The religious elite, sick,

and social outcasts were all among the crowds that gathered to hear and witness Jesus's supernatural power and ability.

Luke opened his historical account with: "On one of those days" (v. 17). He chose those words to highlight that it was just an ordinary day, not the Sabbath, with special rules and regulations that must be kept.

Religious celebrities were in the house. Luke noted the Pharisees and teachers of the law were present. His choice of words are interesting. The celebrities were there not to learn from Jesus nor were they sick. They were just sitting there. The journey from Jerusalem was approximately 121 miles, which was at least a three-day trip. So, who were they and why were they sitting there? The religious leaders were:

- Experts in knowledge and details of Jewish legal tradition.
- Lay people, not priests.
- Promoters of a strict adherence to Mosaic law.
- Architects of tradition and practices for how the law should be applied for each generation.



THE POINT: ONLY JESUS CAN TAKE CARE OF OUR NEED FOR FORGIVENESS.

Why were these religious experts present? Experts in Mosaic law should know how important it is for someone to come to God. They should have been ushering people into His presence, but instead they were just sitting there taking spaces from people who desperately wanted to hear Jesus speak.

"Just then some men came" (v. 18). They weren't men of position, power, or even name. But they had a friend they desperately wanted to bring to Jesus.

Notice the contrast between the two groups of men. The religious leaders just sat there. The other men brought a friend in need to Jesus. The religious leaders invested or sacrificed nothing. The other men invested personal time and energy for someone else. When they encountered obstacles, they didn't give up. Unable to get their friend in front of Jesus because of the crowd, they took him to the roof and lowered him down right in front of Jesus.

The men dug through the plaster, mud, straw, and even wood beams to create an opening in which they could lower their friend to Jesus.

Consider the risk versus reward. These men took great risk in getting their friend before Jesus. They risked their:

- **Reputation.** What would people say or think? What if Jesus wouldn't heal their friend?
- **Finances.** Who would pay for the damage done to the home to get their friend to Jesus?
- **Freedom.** What if the homeowner decided to press charges for the damage done to his home?

Why did they do it? Possibly from what they had seen and heard in Jesus's Galilean tour, they genuinely believed Jesus could heal their friend. If they could just get him before Jesus, Jesus could cure him. While the Pharisees and teachers of the law sat by, not even offering their seat for those more in need, the men overcame every obstacle and got their friend to Jesus. It is so much easier to sit and watch, than to go and bring, isn't it?

C. H. Spurgeon wrote this about the men: "They need be strong, for the burden is heavy; they need be resolute, for the work will try their faith; they need be prayerful, for otherwise they labor in vain; they must be believing, or they will be utterly useless."⁴ May we be such friends ourselves.

**WHEN HAVE YOU SEEN SOMEONE'S LIFE CHANGED
THROUGH THE FAITHFULNESS OF OTHERS?**



DIGGING DEEPER DISABILITY AND DISEASE

The miracle of having our sins forgiven is the greatest miracle that God has ever done. Sometimes we might think that watching someone be healed is the best way for God to display His glory. We will then downplay the power of someone accepting Jesus as their Lord and Savior. When Jesus announced that the paralyzed man's sins were forgiven (5:20) before telling him to get up and walk (5:24), Jesus was teaching that spiritual wellness is more important than physical wellness. This does not mean God does not care about the physical. One day every Christian will have a body that will be healthy and eternal (1 Cor. 15:42–58). Until then, there will always be some mystery related to why God allows us to have certain diseases or disabilities, but we can trust that God has allowed these issues to exist for the purpose of leading us to redemption.

Can you think of a redemptive purpose for someone living with a disability or illness?

He Encourages Us To Trust Him // Luke 5:20-21

As noted earlier, the men could not cure their friend, only carry him. Only Jesus could cure what ailed him. They broke through the roof and lowered him before Jesus. Mission accomplished; their helpless friend lay there, right before Jesus. What would happen now?

The mention of Jesus “seeing their faith” (v. 20) causes us to reflect on how determined the friends were to overcome obstacles and take personal risks. Their actions demonstrated their belief that Jesus could surely cure what ailed their friend. Yet, we can’t overlook the faith of the paralyzed man. He displayed faith that the stories about Jesus were true. He displayed tremendous faith in allowing his friends to do all they could to get him before Jesus. He had enough faith in their ability [or willingness] to walk him to the roof and lower him down through the hole at the risk of being dropped. It was a cornucopia of faith that Jesus saw.

We often hear the challenge to be like these friends. Very few times have we been encouraged to identify with the paralyzed man. Should we and could we identify with him in this account? The paralyzed man recognized his need for Jesus. He was surrounded with a group of friends who cared. He wasn’t too proud to accept the help of others and trusted Jesus to heal him. Before we can display the faith of the friends, we must come



to realize that we are, or were at one time, the paralyzed man in deep need of Jesus’s touch.

What Jesus said after calling the paralyzed man a friend pushed the Pharisees over the edge and probably confused the friends peering down from the roof: “Your sins are forgiven” (v. 20). I’m sure that everyone in the place couldn’t believe what they heard. Of course, God alone can forgive sin. The religious leaders realized Jesus was making an identity statement. Since all sin is committed against God (Ps. 51:4), and since only God can forgive sin (Isa. 43:25), Jesus identified Himself as divine.

WHAT ARE SOME MISCONCEPTIONS OUR CULTURE HAS ABOUT FORGIVENESS?

He Forgives Us As We Obey Him // Luke 5:22-26

Jesus could certainly read a room. The question we often ask is: While He was on earth, did Jesus keep His omniscience? In other words, could Jesus know what others were thinking? The Bible teaches that Jesus emptied Himself when He stepped out of heaven (Phil. 2:7), but to what degree? From a human standpoint, Jesus was very intelligent, perceptive, and able to read body language and facial expressions at the very least. From the visual cues given by the religious leaders in the room, He was no doubt able to perceive they weren’t happy. His words to the paralytic man brought out their wrath and ire. Jesus most certainly knew exactly what He said would set them off. The dreaded and beautiful words: “Your sins are forgiven” (v. 23). In their eyes, this was blasphemy—claiming to do what only God could do.

Instead of just bluntly setting the record straight as to His identity, Jesus, as He often did, posed a thought-provoking question: “Which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk?’” (v. 23). The question created a conundrum for everyone in the room.

From the vantage point of visual confirmation, it was much easier for Jesus to say, “Your sins are forgiven” (Luke 5:23). One couldn’t visually confirm that the paralytic man’s sins were forgiven. So, in that sense alone it was easier. For Jesus to say,

THE POINT: ONLY JESUS CAN TAKE CARE OF OUR NEED FOR FORGIVENESS.

"Get up and walk" (v. 23) carried the risk of the paralytic man not getting up and walking away. That would have brought accusations and ridicule from all the people gathered at the home.

As always, Jesus was the smartest person in the room and light years ahead of everyone else. He wanted to send the message of who He is, and what He had the authority to do. Knowing the Pharisees' correct belief that only God could forgive sin, Jesus chose to announce His true identity through His proclamation: "The Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" (v. 24). Jesus went third person on the group by calling Himself the Son of Man, and therefore on the same plane as God.

Jesus made His point. Luke wrote: "Everyone was astounded, and they were giving glory to God" (v. 26). As the people departed, the conversation revolved around the incredible things they had seen that day. Everyone agreed that what they witnessed was remarkable, and there's no telling how many lives would be changed as a result.

HOW MIGHT YOU ENCOURAGE A FELLOW BELIEVER WHO IS DOUBTING THAT JESUS IS THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN MEET OUR NEEDS?

DID YOU KNOW?

The transitional experiences of the Pharisees in this passage can help us learn to be patient with unbelievers that we encounter in our local environments. The Pharisees begin by just sitting there and observing (5:17). As mentioned in this study, they are simply taking up space that could be used by those who already understand who Jesus is and what he is trying to accomplish. By the conclusion of this story, the Pharisees witnessed and were also amazed (5:26). However, this does not last long. Soon they are grumbling because of Jesus's choice of disciples (5:30) and then questioning his application of the Sabbath law (6:2). Some of the Pharisees do not appear to join the faith until much later, and even then, this fact is mentioned as an aside (Acts 15:5). This should encourage us to be patient as we seek to join in the mission of God.

Biblical Truth: Jesus is the only One who can forgive us of our sin.

Are there some unbelievers in your life who might require you to be a patient witness for them to see the hope of the Gospel?

LIVE IT

How well can you empathize with people in various walks of life for the sake of sharing Christ?

In this passage, Jesus encountered three different groups of people. While they each had different reasons to want to see Jesus, they all had the same need. None of them were able to provide themselves or anyone else with the forgiveness of sins. Only Jesus can take care of our need for forgiveness. Spend some time this week reflecting on how each of these groups might have missed out on being forgiven has they allowed their own issues to distract them from Jesus.

+ + +

- **Identify with the paralytic man.** How do you identify with the paralytic man? What fears or sins paralyze you? Ask God to reveal these things and turn them over to Him and walk forward in faith.
- **Identify with the religious leaders.** In what ways are you like the religious leaders? Are there certain religious traditions that might distract you from experiencing what God is doing? Ask God to reveal these things and turn them over to Him and walk forward in faith.
- **Identify with the friends.** In what ways are you like the friends? Identify someone in your community who needs help with a physical need. Seek to identify a way that you or your church might provide for them.

DAILY READINGS

1. FORGIVEN TO FORGIVE // EPHESIANS 4:32

Forgiveness, for many, can be a very complex topic. Offense and rage can keep us from forgiving others. Coupled with bitterness and pride, unforgiveness also keeps us from looking inward. How often do we ask ourselves what can we be forgiven for? We all fall short of God's glory (Rom. 3:23). This means that as often as we are put in positions where we must forgive others, Christ is also forgiving our shortcomings. Luke 6:36 states, "Be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful." When we fall short, it is our responsibility to ask for forgiveness, and in return, being forgiven by Christ, we must forgive others. Showing the same grace God showed us.

Remembering that we are forgiven helps us forgive others.

2. GUIDING THE WAY // LUKE 5:19

Seeing someone you care about in need is difficult for many people. Compassion drives us to the desire to help in whatever way possible. In this passage of Scripture, a group of men carry their paralyzed friend to Jesus. They had so much determination that they took out part of the roof so that their friend might be healed. These men not only wanted to see their friend healed but also showed their faith in what Jesus could do. Whether by praying, having a conversation, or living righteously, guiding the ones you love to Christ exemplifies your love for them and Him. What are some ways you can guide someone close to you to Christ?

Lord, help me to show love today by guiding someone I love to You.

3. MIRACLE OF FORGIVENESS // LUKE 15:8-10

In this parable, Jesus teaches of a woman who searched for a lost coin and, when it was found, celebrated with her friends and neighbors. Jesus then elaborates, saying that even the angels

rejoice when a sinner repents (v. 10). We praise God when someone gives their life to Christ because we recognize that salvation is awesome, freeing, and precious. Salvation exemplifies the love of God through His forgiveness and the gift of eternal life. Simply put, it's a miracle! Only an all-powerful God can do what no one else can do. God empowers us to praise Him as we recognize His holiness and His love for us.

Praise God for the miracle of forgiveness!

4. RECONCILIATION DRIVES TRUST // 2 JOHN 1:6

Being reconciled with God produces gratefulness and endears us to Him. Christ's unconditional love helps us to see who we truly are—His! Knowing we are His beloved children draws us into a closer relationship with God. It drives us to trust God even deeper, realizing He has been every bit of nurturing, compassionate, and patient toward us. Our desire then shifts from proving ourselves worthy of forgiveness to submission to a most trustworthy God.

Reconciliation with God embeds our love for Him and drives us to trust him!

5. A FIXED FIGHT // PSALM 20:6-9

"Tell me, who can stand before us when we call on that great name? Jesus, Jesus, precious Jesus, we have the victory."⁵ This hymn acclaims God's inability to fail. As His children, we have access to the victory God possesses. Psalm 20:6 reads, "Now I know that the LORD gives victory to His anointed . . ." God gives us victory over death through Jesus.. His love reinforces our faith in Him and gives us the confidence to trust in our unbeatable God. Furthermore, it gives us faith to depend on Him as we recognize His divinity and our mortality. Fighting in our own strength can exhaust our hearts, minds, and bodies. But we don't have to fight alone, we can rely on Christ to fix our fight.

We can trust in God for victory through Christ over anything that we face!