

Helping Others Follow Jesus
By Senior Pastor Tom Harrison

February 5, 2017

Helping Others Follow Jesus In February, we share our hearts for people. To help others follow Jesus, we must be followers ourselves = personal discipleship. A vital part of our personal discipleship must always lead to inviting others to join us in pursuing Christ.

Mark 2:1-12

*A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. ² So many gathered that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. ³ **Some men came, bringing to him a paralytic, carried by 4 of them.** ⁴ Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus and, after digging through it, lowered the mat the paralyzed man was lying on. ⁵ **When Jesus saw their faith**, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." ⁶ Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, ⁷ "Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" ⁸ Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, "Why are you thinking these things?" ⁹ Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk?' ¹⁰ But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" He said to the paralytic, ¹¹ "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." ¹² He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"*

This is a great Gospel story. A **MAN** who was hopeless + helpless. He was **PARALYZED** in an age with little medical technology or care, no social security and no future. I'd guess he was a beggar. It's challenging now – but we have incredible technology (i.e. Stephen Hawkins). Back then, this was a totally “crippling” affliction. That Jesus was teaching new things and performing miracles, too, reverberated in Capernaum: the blind were seeing, the deaf were hearing, lepers were being cleansed – maybe, just maybe, the lame could walk, too. But none of that mattered to this man because it was impossible for him to get there on his own. Though he didn't have use of his legs, he did have one resource. He had some friends. We don't know exactly WHO they were (Family? Friends? Neighbors?) but they were good **HELPERS**. The “4 Guys and a Mat” wanted their

friend to walk. They didn't have the power to help him walk but maybe Jesus could heal him if they could make the connection. They had faith. It doesn't say that the man had faith, but that his helpers had faith. In Mark's gospel, faith always is linked with some sort of action. They had a major obstacle: there was a huge **CROWD** present. They couldn't get the guy to Jesus. Their faith was **PERSISTENT**. They didn't allow the difficult circumstances to stop them. A typical house at that time would've had a roof holding beams about 2-3 feet apart with branches on top, followed by earth. Grass grew on top of the roof in the summer. There was often an outside stairwell leading to the roof. They probably carried him up the stairwell, dug a hole in the ceiling, got a rope and the 4 let him through on the mat. It was dramatic. They cared so much for their friend that they wanted to help him meet Jesus. Imagine their perspective: The 4 guys laying on their stomachs peeking through the hole in the roof, waiting anxiously to see what would happen.

Can you imagine what **JESUS** saw? Looking **UP** at the friends - He had to have smiled because of their faith and their action." When He looked up, He saw the men on the roof with their sick friend. He saw **their faith**. We admire several characteristics of these men, qualities that ought to mark us as "**fishers of men**." They worked together and dared to do something different, and Jesus rewarded their efforts. When Jesus looked **DOWN**, He saw the **PARALYTIC** lying on his mat. While this man needed physical healing, he had an even greater need: **FORGIVENESS**. He needed to be spiritually whole. Jesus addressed his primary need first. Jesus told him that his sins were forgiven even though the text never shows the man even asking for it. But Jesus pronounced it. He looked **WITHIN** the man's heart and spoke to his **GREATEST** need first – **FORGIVENESS**. This seems a bit odd at first. If you went to the doctor because of a health issue, you'd be surprised if the doctor said: "Your sins are forgiven." That would be a curveball. Not all sickness is caused by sin (see John 9:1-3), but evidently there was something spiritual going on in this man's life. Jesus will heal his body, but even more importantly, He speaks healing into the man's soul. Forgiveness is the greatest miracle that Jesus ever performs. It meets the greatest need; it costs the greatest price; and it brings the greatest blessing and the most lasting results.

Then Jesus looked **AROUND** and saw the **CRITICS** who had come to spy on Him. These teachers of the law had every right to investigate a new teacher's ministry, since the religious life of the nation was under their supervision. They were to keep the people of God from error. But in their zeal, they missed the point. They had critical spirits. They weren't seeking truth. Ceremonial hand washing, keeping Sabbath, making sure the bad people are locked out (Samaritans, lepers, women,

tax collectors, etc) were more important than people. They tried to keep people from Jesus. This was the beginning of the official opposition that ultimately led to our Jesus' arrest and death. They had front row seats and witnessed this miracle – yet still didn't believe. Jesus looked **WITHIN** and saw their critical spirits and knew that they were accusing Him of blasphemy. After all, only God can forgive sins; and Jesus had just told the paralytic that his sins were forgiven. Jesus was claiming to be God!

The story concludes when Jesus says not only is his sin forgiven but he can get up, take up his mat and go home. The guy jumped to his feet. The guys on the roof are still peering down. Can you imagine their elation? Can't you see them breaking into laughter as their friend jumped to his feet! They scamper off the roof, and rejoin their friend and dance with him in the street. Then telling and retelling the story of meeting Jesus, for the rest of their days.

This should be a picture of the church: faith-filled people doing what it takes to draw near to the Savior, risking together, struggling together, overcoming obstacles together, succeeding together and celebrating *together*. God knew what He was doing when He invented the church. Together we have a farther reach and greater influence. Together we have greater resources- more ideas, strength, encouragement and courage!

Why are we here? Why does the church exist? It's easy to get off track in this regard. I have a role in preserving the church – making sure we pay our bills and take care of our building. We want to make this a good place for people to come. But WHY? Why are we doing all this? I guarantee you I didn't go into the ministry so I could keep an institution alive. I'm not here to build up a denomination or even a local church. Jesus spoke into this in the previous chapter when he called some of his disciples: "Follow me – and I will make you fishers of men." He said something similar in the previous chapter (Mt. 28): "Go into all the world and make disciples." I'm here for this primary reason: I want to **Help Others Follow Jesus**. Why? Why would we want to help others follow Jesus? Because we believe **He is God**; He isn't just another teacher. He has authority to forgive our sins and the power to make us whole. *He is worth following*. Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one else is. Nothing else can give us this. Not only does Jesus forgive us of our sin, but He gives us eternal life. And He gives us a reason to live here. The church isn't a self-help group. It's not: "God helps those who help themselves." We're all for improvement, growth and improvement – but we've got a fundamental problem – we ALL need to be forgiven. The church can pronounce the words of forgiveness to others. Communion speaks to our greatest

need: **“In the Name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven! Glory to God!”** Being a sinner is a prerequisite for being a follower of Jesus.

Someone helped us! **Help, verb:** make it easier for (someone) to do something by offering one's services or resources. There are friends here who help others follow Jesus because they've been helped themselves.

Just as the friends used a mat and some ropes to let their friend down to meet Jesus, there are all kinds of ways we find mats and ropes around here. It's why we participate in Prayer, have Bible Studies, Children's + Student Ministry, Hospitality, Music & Local & Foreign Missions. People volunteer with their time and serve in all kinds of ways. This explains “Learn 2/Serve 2” and “Adult Discipleship Communities. It explains “Day of Service” and “If Gathering” and SBM. People volunteer with their time and serve in all kinds of ways. There are plenty of places where this sense of forgiveness is offered in the life of our church, but there's a special place where it happens every Monday night – **“Celebrate Recovery.”** It happens every Monday night with a 6:00 dinner, followed by a 7:00 worship service + small groups following. It's for people with “hurts, habits and hang-ups.” But CR is not about a program or an event – it's all about following Jesus.

A young man from Boston, **Edward Kimball**, taught Sunday School at his church because he wanted to impact young boys and men. He often visited them during the week to get to know them better. There was one young man who was in the class but was very troubled. He was 17. He was poorly educated and had a problem with his temper. Edward went to visit him at the shoe store where the teenager worked. Kimball tried to convince the young man to give his life to Christ, but was convinced he'd botched the job. But the conversation was transforming – and the young man committed his life to Jesus Christ. His name was **Dwight L. Moody**. He became one of the most effective evangelists of the 19th century, preaching to an estimated 100 million people. He led a man named **F.B. Meyer** to Christ who also became a minister. Meyer led **J.W. Chapman** to Christ, too, who started an outreach ministry to professional baseball players which is how one of those players, **Billy Sunday**, became a follower of Jesus. He started holding his own evangelistic rally's. He became one of the greatest preachers of the early 1900's and he led a man to Christ named **Mordecai Ham** in Charlotte, NC. Ham started preaching revivals and at one of those meetings in Charlotte, NC. In 1934, a gangly High School student came forward to give his life to Christ. That teenager was **Billy Graham**. At a Billy Graham evangelistic meeting in OKC in 1956 **Bill Mason**, our Pastor Emeritus, gave his life to Christ. Had that not happened – none of us would be in this room today.

You don't have to be a pastor or evangelist to follow Jesus or to help others follow Jesus. These 4 friends weren't named. Some of us may feel a little like the physically paralyzed man – with all kinds of needs and issues. Some may be physical, but often it's the emotional/spiritual which are most pressing. Some of us though know the great joy of being helpers who will struggle up on a roof, dig through it to bring another to the source of healing? The gospel = one beggar telling another beggar where to find some bread. Indeed, Jesus is the Bread of Life.

You don't have to be a pastor/evangelist to FOLLOW JESUS or to HOFJ. Some may feel a little like the **PHYSICALLY PARALYZED man** – hopeless w all kinds of needs + issues. Some may be physical, but often it's the emotional & spiritual which are most pressing. Some of us may be **SPIRITUALLY PARALYZED** like tchrs of law denying their spiritual needs. You can be forgiven, have Eternal life & find meaning in this life. We want to follow Jesus ourselves and we want to help others follow Him, too. Some of us though know the great joy of being helpers who will struggle up on a roof, dig through it to bring another to the source of healing? The gospel = one beggar telling another beggar where to find some bread. Indeed, Jesus is the Bread of Life.