

April 7 Lesson 6 (NIV)

## Faith of the Persistent

Devotional Reading: John 4:4–18

Background Scripture: Luke 5:17–26

Luke 5:17–26

<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.”

<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 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.”

### Key Text

*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*

## Examining Our Faith

### Unit II: The Measure of Faith

Lessons 6–9

## Lesson Outline

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- B. Lesson Context
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*A Lesson in Persistence*
  - C. Seeing Their Faith (v. 20a)
- II. Faith That Finds (Luke 5:20b–26)**
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*Part of the Solution or the Problem?*
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  - D. Crowd Is Amazed (v. 26)

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- A. Authentic Friends
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

### How to Say It

Capernaum Kuh-*per-nay-um*.

Galilee Gal-uh-lee.

Messianic Mess-ee-*an-ick*.

Nazareth Naz-uh-reth.

Pharisees Fair-ih-seez.

Synoptic Sih-*nawp-tihk*.

### Introduction

#### A. Imposter Friends

Words and their definitions seem to change all the time. In recent years, discussions on blogs and opinion pieces have focused on defining the word *friend* in the age of social media. Is it possible for a person to have thousands of “friends”? Is it possible to be friends with someone you have never met in person? Many so-called friends on social media are criminals hiding behind fictitious names! They are imposters.

I have found a simple way to identify one's genuine friends: announce that you are moving and see who volunteers to help. My wife and I have moved more than 20 times during our 22 years of marriage. Surprisingly, we have had no more than five people who have helped us pack and load the trucks. By contrast, I have over 300 "friends" on social media. Today's lesson allows us a first-century look at the results of authentic, Christ-honoring friendship.

## B. Lesson Context

The third Gospel and the book of Acts were written by a man named Luke. He was a traveling companion of the apostle Paul and a physician by profession (see Colossians 4:14; 2 Timothy 4:11; Philemon 24). Because Luke was not an eyewitness to the ministry of Jesus, he gathered his information from those who had been so he could write a detailed account (Luke 1:1–4). Most students believe that the Gospel of Mark was written first and, therefore, could have been one of the sources used by Luke. The scene in today's lesson is worded quite similarly to Mark 2:1–12 (but see Luke 5:17, below; compare Matthew 9:1–8).

Today's lesson locates Jesus in Galilee, early in his three-and-a-half-year ministry. His popularity was rising, and he was drawing crowds. The news of Jesus' teaching and miracles was spreading rapidly (Luke 4:37), and attempts to keep things under control in that regard didn't work (5:14–15). As a result, Jesus had to make a conscious effort to carve out some "alone time" for prayer with his heavenly Father (4:42; 5:16).

Luke 5:12 states that the healing miracle just prior to the one in today's text occurred "in one of the towns" of Galilee. Mark 2:1 is more specific in indicating that the events of today's lesson took place in Capernaum. This town, located on the northwestern bank of the Sea of Galilee, became something of a headquarters for Jesus during his tours of Galilee (Matthew 4:13).

## I. Faith That Seeks (Luke 5:17–20a)

### A. Teaching a Gathering (v. 17)

**17a. 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.**

The phrase *one day* indicates that the events that follow probably occur on a day other than a Sabbath. Recognizing that this supposition is an argument from silence, we note that there are no complaints from Jesus' opponents concerning a Sabbath violation, as we see in Luke 6:1–11 and 13:10–16.

This verse includes the first of 26 mentions of Pharisee or *Pharisees* in the Gospel of Luke. Two factors indicate their presence to have been an ominous turn of events. The first is that they were accompanied by *teachers of the law*. This rare designation (a Greek word of 14 letters) is found only here, in Acts 5:34 (applied to the renowned Gamaliel), and in 1 Timothy 1:7 (regarding misguided aspirations). The *NIV* lists other times when "teachers of the law" accompanied Pharisees (example: Luke 5:30), but the English translation obscures the fact that a different Greek word is being translated in both cases.

Pharisees opposed Jesus (examples: Luke 11:53–54; John 11:45–57), with a few exceptions (examples: 3:1; 19:39). On the distinctive beliefs and practices of the Pharisees, see Matthew 23:1–36; Mark 7:3–5; Luke 18:10–12; and Acts 23:8.

The second ominous factor is that these religious leaders are not merely “local yokels” *from every village of Galilee*. Instead, they include individuals from *Judea* and *Jerusalem*. It’s a long walk from Jerusalem and its temple to Capernaum—approximately 80 miles! For these religious leaders to commit to such a trip reveals a determined intent that the person and work of Jesus required a thorough investigation.

### **17b. And the power of the Lord was with Jesus to heal the sick.**

With this phrase, Luke unites this event with Isaiah 61:1–2, which Jesus had read concerning himself when he was in Nazareth a short time before (Luke 4:16–21). The healings, both physical and spiritual, fulfill messianic prophecy.

The reference to healing *the sick* raises a question of antecedent: Who were these people? In any case, the focus is on the source of the power: *the Lord* (compare Micah 3:8; etc.).

## **B. Finding a Way (vv. 18–19)**

### **18. Some men came carrying a paralyzed man on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus.**

The helping action of the friends of *a paralyzed man* is selfless and authentic. In their effort, the friends show what Jesus called the second greatest commandment: love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:39; Mark 12:31). This account does not specify how many men are carrying the bed, but Mark 2:3 does: there are four. This makes sense when we imagine something like a medical stretcher with one person at each corner.

The Greek verb to describe the man’s disease is in the tradition of other ancient medical writers, and Luke’s books feature four of its five occurrences in the New Testament (here and in Luke 5:24; Acts 8:7; 9:33; compare to the fifth occurrence in Hebrews 12:12, there translated “weak”). If spoken in Greek, the word would sound very much like our English word *paralyzed*. The affliction made it impossible for the man to come to Jesus without assistance.

### **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.**

The religious leaders’ determination to investigate Jesus (Luke 5:17a, above) was matched by the determination of four men to have the suffering man healed by Jesus. This verse reads quite similarly to its parallel in Mark 2:4, except for Luke’s phrase *right in front of Jesus*, which Mark did not include.

First-century Palestinian houses typically had flat roofs with exterior steps or a ladder providing access. Roofs were built with beams resting on the outer walls, with smaller posts crossing the beams and covered with thatch and mud. The rooftop was a place for household activities, drying laundry, and getting fresh air. It was also where people sometimes hid, conferred, mourned, and prayed (Joshua 2:6; 1 Samuel 9:25; Isaiah 15:3; Acts 10:9, respectively).

Roofs were also places where bad things could happen (2 Samuel 11:2; 16:22; Deuteronomy 22:8; Jeremiah 19:13).

Even with outside access readily available, for the four men to climb the stairs or ladder while transporting the man was undoubtedly quite difficult—another sign of their faith and commitment. And lowering the man *through the tiles into the middle of the crowd* would probably have required ropes, possibly an indication of advance preparation.

### C. Seeing Their Faith (v. 20a)

#### 20a. When Jesus saw their faith, he said,

The four Gospels mention *faith* a total of 24 times (in Greek), and Luke features 11 of those instances. The verse before us is the first (earliest) of those 11. Faith, being a mental and spiritual state, cannot literally be seen in and of itself by us ordinary humans. That limitation does not apply to the Son of God, however. He knows people's spiritual and mental states (see Luke 5:22, below). But even though we lack the divine ability to see the faith (or lack of faith) in someone's heart, we can certainly see evidence of faith in one's actions or inactions (James 2:17). What the crowd saw in the actions of the men Jesus *saw* in both heart and action.

We must not assume that the phrase *their faith* refers only to the man's friends to the exclusion of the paralyzed man. There is no indication that he opposed others' carrying him to Jesus. It's likely that he was more than willing to seek out Jesus.

## II. Faith That Finds (Luke 5:20b–26)

### A. Man Is Forgiven (v. 20b)

#### 20b. "Friend, your sins are forgiven."

How Jesus addresses the man varies across the accounts of Matthew, Mark, and Luke (the synoptic Gospels). Luke uses the generic Greek word for *friend*, while the other two Gospels use the Greek word that can be translated as "son" (Matthew 9:2; Mark 2:5).

### B. Jesus Is Disparaged (vv. 21–22)

#### 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?"

Not (yet) finding anything in Jesus' teaching to criticize, *the Pharisees and the teachers of the law* focus their attention on his actions and implied identity. They are not correct in an absolute sense when they say that *God alone* can forgive sins—people are encouraged to forgive sins committed against one another (Matthew 6:14; 18:21–22; Luke 11:4; 17:3–4; Colossians 3:12–13). But the teachers of the law and the Pharisees are correct in the sense of a person sinning against God (Exodus 34:6–7; Psalm 103:2–3; Isaiah 43:25; 1 John 1:8–9). According to Jewish writings in the period between the Old and New Testaments, the Jews expected a righteous

Messiah to overthrow foreign invaders. They did not expect a Messiah who would be God-in-the-flesh, able to forgive sins.

This unspoken question of the religious experts goes to the heart of understanding the person and work of Jesus. The experts actually had a good grasp of what was happening: Jesus was speaking and acting in a manner reserved for God. For a mere human to forgive sins committed against God would indeed be blasphemy, which was punishable by death (Leviticus 24:16). Various forms of the word *blasphemy* occur dozens of times in the New Testament. Jesus eventually would be crucified on this very charge (Matthew 26:65–66; Mark 14:64; compare John 5:16–18; 10:31–33). The text establishes this instance as the first organized opposition to Jesus in the Gospel of Luke.

## **22. Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, “Why are you thinking these things in your hearts?”**

Everyone present could see the evidence of the faith of the man and his friends in their actions. Jesus, however, was able to see the doubt and lack of faith in the *hearts* of the religious leaders. The ability to know people’s hearts and innermost thoughts is one of the divine characteristics of Jesus that Luke emphasizes (see Luke 6:8; 9:47; 24:38). With this ability, he was able to respond to their unspoken question with an audible question of his own. Although Jesus knew the thoughts of their hearts, he asked them a question, a method of teaching that he often used (2:49; 6:9, 39, 46; etc.).

### **C. Man Is Healed (vv. 23–25)**

#### **23. “Which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk’?”**

Not waiting for an answer to his question, Jesus immediately poses another one. Some students see this as a “greater to lesser” argument (technically known as *a maiore ad minus*). A simple example of this argument goes like this: “If a glass can hold eight ounces of water, then it can surely hold five ounces of water.”

Other students see it as the opposite—a “lesser to greater” argument (technically known as *a minore ad maius*). A simple example might be: “If it is illegal to shoot fireworks on the Fourth of July (a single day), then it is surely illegal to shoot them off on all other days.”

In either case, Jesus’ question gave the religious leaders something to think about. What was to be not doubted was Jesus’ ability not just to say *get up and walk* but actually to bring that action about, as the next verses demonstrate.

#### **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.”**

This verse—worded almost the same as Matthew 9:6 and Mark 2:10–11—stresses that Jesus healed the paralyzed man as evidence of Jesus’ *authority on earth to forgive sins* (compare John 5:8). In this way, Luke again connects what has happened here to Jesus’ reading of the prophet Isaiah in the synagogue (see notes on Luke 5:17b, above). When John the Baptist wavered in his faith while imprisoned, Jesus confirmed his messiahship by mentioning signs such as this (7:22–23). Faith in Jesus is based on evidence!

This verse is the first of 25 occasions that Luke records Jesus’ using the self-designation *Son of Man*. Overall, this expression occurs across all four Gospels more than 80 times. In almost

every case, it comes from the lips of Jesus and not as a description of Jesus by the Gospel writers. (Luke 24:7 and John 12:34 are the only two exceptions, both quoting Jesus.)

The background of this designation comes from the Old Testament. The book of Ezekiel applies the title to that prophet more than 80 times, but without suggesting that he was divine (examples: Ezekiel 5:1; 6:2; 7:2). The two uses of the designation in the book of Daniel recognize the Son of Man as having divine attributes (Daniel 7:13–14; 8:17).

**25. Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God.**

Earlier, Luke established Jesus' authority and power to heal and drive out demons (Luke 4:33–36). And we remember that *authority* is “the right to do something,” and *power* is “the ability to do something.” Luke is the only writer of the four Gospels to use both words together (examples: 4:36; 9:1; 20:20). Although the text now under consideration does not explicitly use those words, both concepts are present in this verse.

The adverb *immediately* establishes that the healing happened instantly at the mere spoken words of Jesus. This particular adverb is a favorite of Luke's. The Greek word that is being translated occurs most often in the New Testament in the Gospel of Luke (examples: Luke 1:64; 8:44; 13:13; 18:43) and the book of Acts (examples: Acts 12:23; 13:11). The healing did not happen over a length of time. And there is no indication that Jesus' touch was involved, as healing miracles featured in other contexts (compare Mark 8:22–25; John 9:6–7).

The man's sudden ability to walk was (or should have been) evidence that Christ had both authority and power to forgive sins (see Luke 20:2–8). The statement *in front of them* is essential to this proof—everyone present saw the result. In biblical times two or three witnesses were required to prove the veracity of an event (Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15; Matthew 18:16; John 8:13–18; 2 Corinthians 13:1). Thus, Luke confirms that a sufficient number of witnesses were present to verify the miracle.

#### D. Crowd Is Amazed (v. 26)

**26a. Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said,**

This is the only verse in the New Testament where amazement, praising *God*, and *fear* occur together as reactions of a crowd. The parallel verses of Matthew 9:8 and Mark 2:12a, by contrast, record only two of these three reactions each. We presume that the word *everyone* includes the religious leaders who were present. This was their first encounter with Jesus, as recorded in the Gospel of Luke, and it's not unreasonable to conclude that they shared in everyone's reactions. Like everyone else, those leaders needed time to process the evidence for Jesus' deity just seen. Soon enough, however, some people will reach the wrong conclusion (see Luke 11:14–16).

**26b. “We have seen remarkable things today.”**

This is the crowd's fourth reaction, as recorded by Luke. If spoken aloud, the Greek word translated *remarkable things* (which occurs only here in the New Testament) would sound like the English word *paradoxical*. This reaction, unlike that in Luke 4:28–29, is one of confused neutrality. It reaches no conclusion.

### Conclusion

### **A. Authentic Friends**

Social media has changed the world's concept of friendship. Only time will tell whether a new word is needed to distinguish between a virtual social-media friend and an authentic real-life friend. In the meantime, I will continue to post online as we prepare for our next move and patiently wait for my 300 so-called friends to show up.

The friends in today's lesson remind us of the nature of authentic friendship. We are unsure how long they had been carrying their friend around on this bed. We know that when Jesus came into the city, they believed he could help their friend. However, they did not stop at simply believing. They put their faith into action and brought their friend to Jesus, overcoming every obstacle on the way.

It was not an easy task to get their friend onto the roof, tear it apart, and lower him into the room. Undoubtedly, they could have spent their time on other matters that day. How can you dedicate your time and resources to assisting a friend in need?

### **B. Prayer**

Father, we are grateful for the friends who have helped us on our faith journey. We pray that you will help us be the friend who carries the bed of another when needed, regardless of the obstacles in our path. We give you thanks for friends and the strength to be a friend in Jesus' name. Amen.

### **C. Thought to Remember**

God enables us daily to be faithful friends!<sup>1</sup>

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