When You Can't Go Through the Front Door, Go Through the Roof

Mark 2:1-5

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And when he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home.
And many were gathered together, so that there was no more room, not even at the door.
And he was preaching the word to them. And they came, bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men.
And when they could not get near him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him,
and when they had made an opening, they let down the bed on which the paralytic lay.
And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

A man named Christopher was born on September 25, 1952, in New York City. He came from an upper-class family. His paternal grandfather was the CEO of Prudential Financial, and one of his great-grandfathers was an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court.

When Christopher was four years old, his parents divorced. His mom moved him and his brother to New Jersey, where she would remarry. After graduating from high school, Christopher studied at Cornell University. During this time, he would also work as a professional actor. In his final year at Cornell, he was one of two students chosen to study at New York's prestigious Juilliard School. The other student selected, who would become his roommate, was Robin Williams.

Christopher would go on to become an accomplished actor, film director, producer, screenwriter, and author. He starred in several movies, including *Somewhere in Time, Street Smart, Rear Window, and The Great Escape II*. Of all the movies Christopher starred in, the one he is best known for is *Superman*.

Playing the man of steel, he was faster than a speeding bullet, more powerful than a locomotive, and able to leap tall buildings in a single bound. When this movie debuted, Christopher Reeve became famous worldwide.

In 1980, *Superman II* came out. In 1983, *Superman III* was released. In 1987, the last of the four Superman movies Christopher Reeve starred in hit the big screen. The character he played, Clark Kent, found himself living in a world on the brink of nuclear war. As Superman faced his arch-nemesis, Lex Luthor, he overcame various obstacles put in his way and triumphed, destroying all the nuclear weapons.

It was not long after this, on May 27, 1995, that Christopher's life would take a tragic turn.

During an equestrian competition, his horse abruptly stopped and he was thrown off. He fractured his top two cervical vertebrae, which left him paralyzed from the neck down and dependent on a ventilator.

Christopher found himself in a very dark place; so much so that he no longer wanted to live. When he regained consciousness after the surgery to immobilize his neck, he assessed his situation and reached the following conclusion: As one who was now completely paralyzed, he knew he was going to be a huge burden to everyone. He thought he had ruined not only his own life, but everybody else's. He figured this wasn't fair to those in his life. Considering this, he thought the best thing to do would be to slip away. When his wife Dana came into his room, they made eye contact, and he mouthed to her, "Maybe we should let me go."

There were two key people who helped Christopher emerge from his despair. The first was his bride. As she stood by her husband's side, she said, "I want you to know that I'll be with you for the long haul, no matter what. You are still you, and I love you." Knowing he had his wife's support, it gave him hope and the encouragement he needed to face the many hardships before him.

The second person was his old roommate, Robin Williams. Shortly after the accident, Robin came into the hospital wearing blue scrubs, a yellow gown, spoke with a Russian accent, and pretended to be an insane doctor. It was then that Christopher laughed for the first time after the accident, and he knew his life was going to be okay.

Christopher Reeve would go on to live for another 9½ years, until he died on October 10, 2004. The entire time, he was completely dependent upon everyone else. He needed assistance from a machine to breathe, others had to feed him, and he was constantly vulnerable to severe medical complications, including chronic pain, respiratory infections, and dangerous bed sores. The man of steel … suddenly became bound to a wheelchair for the rest of his life.

When we read God's Word, note how the text begins: "When Jesus returned to Capernaum, it was reported that he was at home." Upon hearing this, it meant hope for the man who was paralyzed, for if Jesus had healed others, He could heal him as well.

But there was a problem. Unless others helped him, there was no way the paralytic could get to Jesus. As the man laid on his mat – hearing the report that Jesus was in the area – he knew and accepted that he couldn't get there on his own; he needed help.

All of us, in each and every one of our lives, have struggles we deal with. For the paralytic, he couldn't walk. What is it for us?

Perhaps you have experienced health struggles of your own.

Perhaps there are certain hurts, hang-ups, and habits in your life that you can't break free from.

While there are certain things in life we do well, we're not great at everything. Given this, each of us has certain strengths that others admire … and shortcomings we don't want anyone to know about.

What is it that you need help with? All of us need help with something. What areas in your life are weighing you down? What areas of your life are you falling short? To frame it differently, what is it that God wants you to do – and you yourself want to do – yet despite your best intentions and efforts, regardless of how hard and how often you try, you cannot enact the desired, lasting change?

Maybe you can't stop lying.

You can't stop drinking.

You can't stop overeating.

You can't stop spending money.

You can't stop watching pornography.

You can't stop gossiping.

You can't stop getting angry.

You can't stop trying to fix people.

You can't stop doing drugs.

You can't stop overworking.

You can't stop playing video games.

You can't stop trying to be perfect.

You can't stop judging people.

You can't stop thinking poorly of yourself.

You can't stop worrying.

You can't stop hurting yourself.

You can't stop _____ (fill in the blank).

For the paralytic, he wanted to get to Capernaum. To do this, he first had to accept the help he needed.

If we want to move past our own hurts, hang-ups, and habits, we need to admit and accept that we can't do it on our own; we need the help of God and others.

The eight principles of Celebrate Recovery, which is a Christ-centered recovery program, are based on the beatitudes found in Matthew 5:1-10 in the Bible:

Realize I'm not God and admit that I am powerless to control my tendency to do the wrong thing and that my life is unmanageable.

Earnestly believe that God exists, that I matter to Him, and that He has the power to help me recover.

Consciously choose to commit all my life and will to Christ's care and control.

Openly examine and confess my faults to God, to myself, and to another person I trust.

Voluntarily submit to every change God wants to make in my life and humbly ask Him to remove my character defects.

Evaluate all my relationships, offer forgiveness to those who have hurt me, and make amends for harm I've done to others, except when to do so would harm them or others.

Reserve a daily time with God for prayer, Bible reading, and self-examination in order to know God and His will for my life and to gain the power to follow His will.

Yield myself to God to be used to bring this Good News to others, both by my example and by my words.

When the paralytic arrived in Capernaum, being carried by four others, they encountered an unexpected setback – they couldn't get to Jesus. While Jesus was preaching the Word of God to people, it was so crowded that they couldn't get near Him.

There's an important principle here: The road to recovery is typically not a straight path. It often includes many ups and downs and unexpected twists and turns along the way, and it is not as simple as going from point A to point B.

Consider a person who has struggled with overeating their entire life and decides to embark upon a weight loss journey. The person gets the help and support he or she needs, implements a sound plan for eating and exercise, and then sets out to lose 50 pounds. Generally, the journey does not look like this:

Starting weight: 250 pounds

- WEEK 1: Lose 12 pounds
- WEEK 2: Lose 9 pounds
- WEEK 3: Lose 7 pounds
- WEEK 4: Lose 8 pounds
- WEEK 5: Lose 5 pounds
- WEEK 6: Lose 4 pounds
- WEEK 7: Lose 2 pounds
- WEEK 8: Lose the remaining 3 pounds and reach goal weight of 200 pounds!

For some, this may be the outcome, but for most, it looks more like this:

Starting weight: 250 pounds

- WEEK 1: Lose 8 pounds
- WEEK 2: Lose 4 pounds
- WEEK 3: Gain 5 pounds (it was a hard week at work, so the person eased the stress by eating out a few times and enjoyed some good comfort food in order to feel better)
- WEEK 4: Lose 3 pounds
- WEEK 5: Gain 5 pounds (the holidays included many delicious treats that became too hard to resist)
- WEEK 6: Lose 4 pounds
- WEEK 7: Lose 2 pounds
- WEEK 8: Gain 2 pounds (not sure what happened here; ate well and exercised, but the body gained weight instead of losing it?)
- WEEK 9: Feeling discouraged, but determined to keep going until the weight is lost

This is what recovery (and change in general) often looks like – it is not a straight path from point A to point B.

It's taking a few steps forward and a few steps back. It's making significant strides in the right direction … and falling flat on our face and getting back up again. It's about celebrating victories … and accepting God's grace, forgiveness, and encouragement when we fall short and want to give up. In short, recovery is not a quick fix.

The reason for this is that the road to recovery is not just about the destination; it's about God transforming our hearts and character along the way.

One of the images used at Celebrate Recovery is this: A tree with different branches of issues that are the product of what is at the roots.



Think of it this way. Imagine walking along the street and seeing a house on fire. With the house burning inside and smoke rising, you hear a fire truck approaching. As the firefighters come out, a person runs to them and yells, "Quick, get the hoses and put out the smoke!" Confused by what the person says, one of the firefighters responds, "Why would we do that? We need to focus our attention on the flames. When we put out the fire, it will take care of the smoke."

Do you know why Celebrate Recovery focuses on dealing with a person's hurts, hang-ups, and habits? Because of the connection between certain hurts that lead to hang-ups, which create habits. When we begin to clearly see this – discovering the root issues that show up as emotional triggers, repeated patterns of behavior, and character defects – it leads to amazing transformation, and we grow closer in our relationship with God and others in the process.

The next time you find yourself getting angry, instead of focusing on the smoke of your anger, look at the fire within that produces it.

For some, when they get hurt, they cry.

For others, they get mad.

When a person addresses the root of their anger, the smoke stops rising.

The Bible says that anger can also be the product of selfishness. When we don't get our own way, we can get mad. Even adults throw temper tantrums. When this occurs, address the roots. When selfishness is replaced with love, the smoke of one's anger clears away.

Remember, the road to recovery is often not a straight path. It's a journey of ups and downs and unexpected twists and turns … because discovery is taking place, and it's not just about learning new things that are helpful; it's also about unlearning things that are not good.

When the paralytic heard that Jesus was in Capernaum, he made his way there with the help of others. Upon arriving, he got stuck in his tracks due to the crowd.

He was at a crossroads.

Would he turn around and go home, or would he – along with the other four with him – find another way to get to Jesus?

This is what they decided to do …

When you can't go through the front door, go through the roof!

What an incredible, memorable, marvelous moment in time this must have been!

Capernaum was a small fishing village on the Sea of Galilee. Archaeologists have worked in the area and discovered ruins of dwellings dating back to the first century B.C.

One house in particular had coarse walls with a roof made of earth and straw.

Other houses were plastered over from floor to ceiling.

In the process of doing excavation work, archaeologists have discovered walls bearing inscriptions in Greek, Syriac, or Hebrew that say, “Lord Jesus Christ help thy servant” or “Christ have mercy.”

Let’s look at the text again: “And when he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he {Jesus} was at home. And many were gathered together, so that there was no more room, not even at the door. And he was preaching the word to them. And they came, bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men. And when they could not get near him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him, and when they had made an opening, they let down the bed on which the paralytic lay.”

Can you imagine being inside that house?

First, you would probably hear them going up on the roof. Remember, it’s not just four men climbing onto a roof; it’s four men carrying another human being, lying on a mat (or perhaps rolled up in it), as they ascend the roof of the house.

Did they make it up on the first try?

Did they encounter any problems along the way?

What unusual sounds did the people inside the house hear?

Once they got up on the roof, how big was the opening they made? It had to be big enough to get a human being down. How long did it take to make the opening? A few seconds? A few minutes? Half an hour? Can you imagine being inside the house when, all of a sudden, you feel debris landing on your head?

Was it just particles of debris? Were they small chunks of debris? Was it large pieces of debris?

As more and more people had to look up and see the paralytic being lowered by the four men and placed at the feet of Jesus. When this occurred, with Jesus beholding their faith, He healed the man.

There are two elements to this historical account we are going to focus on. The first is the bold faith these men exercised. When they arrived at the home of Jesus, it was so crowded that they couldn’t get in! Imagine the paralyzed man and the four who brought him looking at each other, trying to answer the question, “What are we going to do now?”

When you can’t go through the front door, go through the roof!

Their strategy worked. Their perseverance paid off. Four of them walked to Jesus that day. Five of them walked home.

I wonder how many other people came to Jesus that day, filled with the same hope that He could heal them as well, but upon seeing the crowd blocking the way to Jesus, they figured there was nothing else they could do and they went home.

What hurts, hang-ups, and habits do you have … that you have yet to experience the healing and freedom that Jesus can bring? What "crowds" are in between you and Jesus?

Exercise bold faith!

Rally people around you who will help you and support you and exercise bold faith themselves!

Even if it requires going up on a roof and ignoring what other people think and say:

- "Hey, you can't go up there!"
- "What do you think you're doing?"
- "Get down from there, right now!"

And once you get on that roof, make an opening big enough to reach Jesus so you can receive the healing and freedom that the Son of God can bring.

The second element of this account to note is that recovery can be messy. The Bible doesn't say how much damage was done or even who had to clean it up. The Bible doesn't say how much money it cost to make the necessary repairs or the inconvenience it caused having a hole in the roof until it was finally fixed. Was it clear sky that day? Did it rain later that night, with puddles of water inside the house, all because a group of guys decided to make an opening in the roof, and everyone else had to deal with the aftermath!

None of this is mentioned, and it's noteworthy. A human being made his way to Jesus that day and not only found physical healing, but forgiveness of sin. This doesn't mean that the ramifications of their actions were unimportant or that when dealing with matters like this it gives people license to be irresponsible when ministry takes place, but what it does emphasize is this: Messes can be cleaned up, buildings can be repaired, and it all fades away when a life is transformed – both now and forevermore – by Jesus.

The joy that must have been experienced when the once paralyzed man returned home. To see the faces of his parents, brothers and sisters, and other family members and friends wiping away their tears in gratitude to God. To hear the sound of rejoicing, as one person after another praised God for His mercy and power.

When a person today finds healing and freedom from the hurts, hang-ups, and habits in their life, it positively impacts everyone around them. The opposite of this is true as well. When a person is still struggling with the hurts, hang-ups, and habits in their life, it negatively impacts everyone around them. Considering this, Edgewood brought back Celebration Place about a year ago to minister to children ages birth through 6th grade. At this point, I am going to invite Kate Otto, our Celebration Place Director, to come on stage and share about this special ministry.

Friday night, we had a special program to give honor, glory, and praise to God for the many lives impacted through the ministry of Celebrate Recovery (also known as CR) at Edgewood. Here are some of the testimonies that were shared:

Before God brought CR into my life, I was a hurting, resentful, anxious, and depressed man…praise Him for three years sober of addiction, and what He's done and yet to do.

It brought me personally to a better relationship with Jesus, family, and my marriage.

He has reconciled me to many loved ones.

God has blessed me with sobriety for over 20 years. Coming to CR was one of the best decisions I ever made after leaving the Rock Island County Jail.

CR has given me the courage to confront my addiction and character defects.

I have been here four times. God's people are kind and friendly enough to make sure we can be here with a ride.

It has been a year since I started coming…I can't fix anyone; God is the only one with the power to change lives, including mine. I am now a part of a bigger family of God.

After coming to find CR through a friend, I have been clean of cocaine addiction for nine months and have found Jesus Christ and God. I have become a believer and have started attending Edgewood.

Instead of turning bitter, I chose to get better. I took accountability, stepped out in faith, and plugged myself into CR and a Step Study. Through that process, God didn't just begin restoring what was broken; He began transforming who I am from the inside out.

God has used CR to heal me from anxiety, depression, self-harm, addiction, and healed me from abortion.

CR has given me a life. I wanted to die and I had a plan. It gave me a reason to live. It improved my self-esteem. I now have a family, where before I was alone. I learned to do things I never thought I would. I did a Step Study, then went on to co-lead a group and become a leader. I now have a life worth living.

It brought me out of denial to admit I had a problem with alcohol. Now I'm working on my anger.

God pursued me when I didn't feel worthy of pursuit…God has been patient with me when I was anything but patient with others…God has loved me when I felt unworthy of his love…God has satisfied me when nothing else could.

These are just a few of the many stories of how God has impacted people's lives through the ministry of Celebrate Recovery. To everyone who has served and sacrificed for this ministry, thank you. May God bless you for all you have done.

For those who want to find healing and freedom from certain hurts, hang-ups, and habits, know that you are welcome to come at any time on a Friday night. Dinner starts at 6:00 p.m., Large Group is from 6:45 - 7:45 p.m., and Open Share Groups are from 8:00 - 9:00 p.m. For those who have children 6th grade and younger, they can also come the entire time. For more information, go to the tables in the lobby, or look for someone wearing a CR t-shirt this weekend and ask them any questions you have.

If you are here today and you are uncertain what would happen to you if you died, make your way through the crowd of people and come to Jesus. The good news is that you don't have to go on the roof and make an opening to come to Jesus. You can come to Jesus just as you are, right where you, and He will bring healing and forgiveness of your sins.

The Bible says that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

God's Word also says that the wages of our sin (what we deserve) is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

For God so loved the world, that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him will not perish, but have everlasting life.

If we confess with our mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in our heart that God raised Him from the dead, we will be saved.

God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

God loves you very much and wants to be with you forever. Receive His love today … and start the journey of loving God and others from this day forward.