

*Where we start . . .*

Do you know “Murphy’s Law”? What is it? Do you think it has any validity? Why or why not?

Do you know any of the “corollaries” to this basic Law?

*What we read . . .*

When reading familiar passages we have to be careful that we don’t too readily assume we know what the passage is about. Although Mark does tell us the basics of what Jesus did, if we aren’t careful readers we might miss *why* he tells us. With that in mind, read Mark 2:1-11.

Try to picture the scene. Who is there? How many? What is happening? What would it be like to have been in that moment?

What do the four friends do? Think about what had to happen for them to carry out their task.

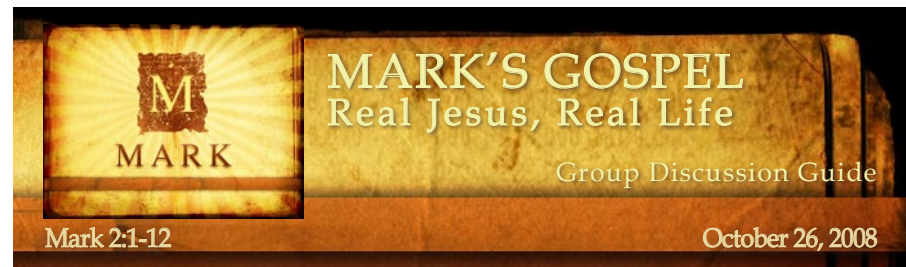
What must the experience have been like for the paralytic?

If you had been the guy on the stretcher, what would you have been thinking when Jesus spoke His first words to you (2:5)?

Although most “study Bibles” have a heading for this section that reads something like “Jesus heals a paralytic,” that seems a shallow summary of this snapshot. So, write a different heading.

*Why this matters . . .*

We often come to Jesus with a “presenting problem;” we know what the problem is (or so we *think*) and know what Jesus should do. How is that approach to Jesus broadened by the account of His care for the paralyzed man?



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*Diving in . . .*

Jesus is amazing; we've noted that repeatedly. He teaches and heals and ministers in astounding ways. And as He does such things, people are drawn to Him. And that is right and good; He is ushering in the kingdom and it has impact on those around Him. But, as we will see as we open to Mark 2, what gets presented as the "basic problem" may be only part of what Jesus intends to address. He cares for people *wholly*, and He will do what must be done to address all that needs attention in our lives.

*Discussing . . .*

Sometimes our Bible study can be just a bit too somber. Not that Bible reading and discussion should be trifled with, but some of the scenes and some of the accounts (if read honestly!) could even set us laughing with delight at the startling and unexpected turn of events. So, begin your time talking about "Murphy's Law" ("If anything can go wrong, it will.") Why is this helpful? Because getting that "law" (and any corollaries your group can recall or come up with) will be helpful in understanding how truly startling the "devotional time" was that Jesus had with the crowd as described in Mark 2:1-12. (By the way, some of those corollaries are: "Whenever you set out to do something, something else must be done first;" "Things get worse under pressure;" and "Just when you think things can't get worse, they will!" And, remember, take all of these with a grain of salt and a sense of humor well in place.)

As you turn your attention to the passage, after reading it through try to have the group really explore and explain what the scene must have been like. Drawing on what the text tells us, you might make observations about:

How crowded the place was; a small home (not anything like ours!) packed to the doors.

How the masses of people so overflowed the house that something like a human barrier kept people far away from Jesus.

How most homes in that day had an exterior staircase that led to a flat portion of the roof, and that became important to the four friends.

Mark's language is very picturesque; he literally says that the men "unroofed the roof" and dug a hole! This would have to be the case as the roof would have typically been made of wood and clay (thus, the digging) covered by thatch of some kind (thus the need to first "unroof" a spot).

And don't forget to think through what it was like *in the house* as the roof was "opened" and a body was let down! All the while Jesus was trying to teach!

We know from what Mark has already told us about Jesus, that He has been active in healing people. So, the idea that these four friends bring their paralyzed

friend is not entirely surprising. However, what they do has to startle and amaze us! And what it must have been like inside . . . well, it is almost too unexpected to explain!

There the crowd sits, attentive to every word Jesus says; after all, no one ever taught like He taught (Mark 1: 22). People are packed to the door and beyond; even a number of the religious leaders are there. And then you hear the noise. Banging, scraping, pounding. And the roof begins to give way, debris falling into the small room where the crowd is gathered. And the hole in the roof gets larger. (What are you thinking if you are sitting there?) And then a bed is lowered; right in front of Jesus. And Jesus speaks to the man, pronouncing his sins forgiven. And, for awhile, nothing else happens! There must have been at least a few moments as the scribes began to turn their thoughts over in their hearts before Jesus spoke. And only then does Jesus address what appears to be the reason the friends brought the paralytic. The man is healed and leaves. And everyone (including, apparently, the scribes themselves) are amazed.

So what is this account really all about? Is it simply a story to affirm that Jesus can heal paralyzed people? Is it more about the "activity of faith" made evident in the actions of the friends? Both of those ideas are clearly part of the story. But what about what Jesus says? How does that shape our thinking about what is really going on here?

The Bible doesn't teach that all illness or affliction is rooted in sin; some may be, but it is not always the case. So even hearing Jesus' offer of forgiveness doesn't automatically mean that the man's affliction is the result of sin. But it is highly unlikely that the friends brought their paralyzed acquaintance to Jesus for forgiveness of sins; there's been no real mention of that idea up to this point in Mark. They came for healing. And got so much more.

What does Jesus ultimately do? A couple of things are worth noting. First, he ministers to the whole man. That is, He doesn't only heal the man physically but He addresses other needs the man has as well — needs that his friends may not even have been aware of. And Jesus takes the opportunity to use the ministry to this paralyzed man for the benefit of others as well. It isn't that He *used the man*, as if the paralyzed man and his friends were merely tools to be used. But Jesus is making the most of the situation by reaching into the hearts of others while He ministers to the needs of the paralytic. In healing and forgiving the paralytic, Jesus clarifies more about Himself and addresses concerns that are beginning to arise in the hearts of some of the religious leaders. The way Jesus makes the most of this situation should inform our understanding of how Jesus just might minister to us.

What does this mean for us? A few thoughts might help you guide your group's discussion. First, when we come to Jesus (because we are amazed by what He does and we are coming to trust Him with our needs), He just might address other things in our lives beyond what we come seeking to get Him to do. He can and does minister to us as whole persons, seeing beyond our "presenting problem." Also, in caring for us and meeting our needs, He might actually be putting Himself on display for the benefit and instruction of others as well. As we think about Jesus' ministry in these broader terms, it could radically impact the way we pray, the way we think about what is happening in our lives, and the expectations we have for what might happen when we trust Him with our deepest needs.