



Four Friends' Faith

Goal: To be a caring and faithful friend.

RECOGNIZING GOD'S GRACE . . .

. . . In Mark 2:1–12

The Gospel of Mark moves very quickly. By the second chapter, Jesus has been baptized, been tempted in the wilderness, called disciples, taught in the synagogue, cast out demons, healed people, and prayed in a quiet place, all the while proclaiming the good news of God's love. The news about him spread. Eventually he returned to his home in Capernaum and his house was flooded with people seeking to hear him and be healed by him.

Four friends had such faith in what they heard about Jesus that they moved mountains—or in this case, dug through a mud roof—to bring their friend to him. Jesus, being Jesus, had to have taken one look at these four and the young man on the mat and had compassion. He could have done several things that would have been legally acceptable by religious law of the time per the legal experts and scholars crowded into that room to hear and see just what Jesus was up to. He could have taken the man's hand and raised him or fashioned a cast out of the mud and debris from the ceiling. But Jesus wanted to make it clear what was going on, so he used the words "your sins are forgiven." He was right; he could have just said, "Stand, take up your mat, and walk," but that wouldn't have drawn the line so clearly to show that he could forgive sins "so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" (v. 10).

What did the scribes and Pharisees accuse Jesus of at his trial three years later? Blasphemy, or claiming to be God. Jesus knew what he was doing when he looked upon those four faithful faces. He was confirming their faith.

. . . In Your Children's Experiences

Healing stories in the Bible are tricky for children (and adults) to understand. On one hand, they may see Jesus as a miracle worker and take it at face value. On the other hand, they may think about healing needs today and wonder why people don't just "take up their mats and walk" if they, or their loved ones, have faith like the four friends. It is a mystery, and answers are not so easy. The faith of the four friends brought them to Jesus, and they witnessed a miracle. Perhaps our faith brings us to Jesus, and we, too, might witness miracles in our midst.

. . . In Your Relationships with the Children

You may encounter questions, or have some yourself, about healing. Children may wonder if they have enough faith for a loved one or if others have enough faith for them in a time of need. Faith in Jesus has an impact in and of itself. Faith in Jesus will change situations, attitudes, and outlooks in ways we may not expect. Reassure children that Jesus knows their concerns and sees their faith.

Gracious God, may I be a faithful friend to others and show the way to Jesus. Amen.



Supplies

Music & Melodies
(MM) 2023–2024

Stories, Colors & More
(SCM) i–iv, 8, 21, 25

basic supplies
(see p. vii)

blanket or mats

snack

Guided Play

choice 1: kitchen items;
dining items such
as plates, tableware,
glasses, placemats, and
napkins; pretend food
(optional)

choice 2: pillowcases,
stuffed animals and/or
dolls

Exploring

choice 1: a box large
enough for a child to
sit in, doll, receiving
blanket or cloth

choice 3: copies of
Grace Notes (GN) 1

choice 4: copies of **GN 2**

GATHERING IN GOD'S GRACE

Before the Children Arrive

Designate a story corner and lay out a blanket or individual mats for the children so their backs will be to the door.

Use **SCM i–ii**, “Your Visual Schedule,” to provide clear expectations and a visual cue for the group.

See **SCM iii–iv** for the key to icons (for example, **LG** **T**) and ways to adapt for children who have special needs or disabilities.

Select the activities that will work best for you and for your children. You do not need to do everything suggested!

Before the session, obtain a box large enough for a child to sit in, such as a refrigerator or dishwasher box. Cut off one flap and fold the others to the inside of the box. On the side that has the flap cut off, cut a hole large enough for a doll to fit through.

“Exploring God’s Grace” choice 1 requires more prep.

Welcoming and Guided Play



Greet the children as they arrive and say, “Grace and peace be with you.” Prompt them to respond, “And also with you.” Be sensitive to any children who might be coming for the first time. Introduce yourself to parents/caregivers whom you do not know personally. Tell the parents/caregivers that today’s story is about four friends who had faith that Jesus could help their friend.

Invite the children to choose a guided-play activity to start:

- 1. Friendship Feast**—Invite the children to pretend that friends are coming over to their house. Suggest they make a pretend feast in the kitchen area and prepare the table for guests. Show them how to set the table for four people. Encourage them to do this with others as they arrive and help each other to set the table.
- 2. Friends Helping Friends**—Tell the children that their friend (a stuffed animal or doll) cannot walk. Using pillowcases, invite the children to take an end or corner and carry the dolls or stuffed animals around the room. Encourage the children to be careful and not drop their friends!
- 3. Four Friends**—Cover a table with mural paper. Write the words “FOUR FRIENDS” in large letters in the middle of a table. Provide markers, crayons, and pencils. Invite children to name four of their friends. Help them write the four names, then draw or write some things they do with their friends.

M *Children requiring more movement than others can benefit from dynamic activities. Set clear expectations about boundaries for appropriate movement to position these children for success.*



Transitioning to Story Time

When the children are ready to move into group time, call them to the story corner, singing “Tell Me the Stories of Jesus”—**MM 16; SCM 21**. This is a difficult song; repeat words and phrases as appropriate.

Where Is Jesus?



Teach this song to the children to the tune of “Where Is Thumbkin?” having them repeat the lines after you as indicated:

Where is Jesus?
Where is Jesus?
Do you know?
Do you know?
He is in the house, helping all the people
in the house,
in the house.

Where is *(Child's Name)*?
Where is *(Child's Name)*?
Do you know?
Do you know?
(She/He) is in the house, listening to Jesus
in the house,
in the house.



Hearing the Story



Open the Bible to Mark 2 so the children know the story comes from the Bible. Tell the children that the story is about four friends who had faith that Jesus could help their friend.

Read **SCM 8**, ignoring the directions in the parentheses on the first reading. Express the emotions of the story in your voice, gestures, and facial expressions. Conclude the story by prompting the children to say, “Amen.”

Invite each child to pick a number between one and four. Have all the ones sit together, twos sit together, and so forth. Tell the children that when they hear their “Friend” number and you point to them as you read the story they will say the following lines:

- ▼ Friend 1: What should we do?
- ▼ Friend 2: Let's help our friend!
- ▼ Friend 3: How can we help?
- ▼ Friend 4: I have an idea!

Read the story again, pointing to the “Friends” and prompting their lines as indicated in the parentheses in the story.

Today's story from Luke's Gospel can be found in *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible*, edited by Elizabeth F. Caldwell and Carol A. Wehrheim (Louisville, KY: Flyaway Books, 2018), www.pcusastore.com.



EXPLORING GOD'S GRACE



1. Being Jesus

A B MS C T SD

Invite the children to experience being Jesus in the crowded room when the four friends lowered the man down through the roof.

In an open area, set the prepared box so that the hole for the doll is on the top. Choose a child to sit in the box. Lay the blanket or cloth (mat) on the floor and place the doll (person who was paralyzed) on it. Have two to four children take the corners of the mat and lower the person down through the hole. Wonder with the children:

- ▼ What did Jesus think when he saw the man come through the roof?
- ▼ What was it like to be one of the friends?
- ▼ How did the man on the mat feel?

Take turns so that all who wish can experience being a friend and being Jesus.

2. Playing a Game

B MS

Play a game. Tell the children that they will be the faithful friends. Give the children the following instructions:

- ▼ Tell the friends to walk around the room.
- ▼ Let them know that you will tap one of them on the shoulder and that child needs to freeze in place. Like the friend who was on the mat, they can't move.
- ▼ The frozen friend needs four friends to unfreeze him or her.
- ▼ One friend at a time can unfreeze the frozen friend by tapping him or her on the shoulder and saying, "I can help" or "Come see Jesus." (If you have a small number of children, a friend can unfreeze more than one time.)

When the frozen friend is unfrozen, everyone cheers and the game begins again with a new frozen friend.

FM *To help children build fine motor skills, encourage children to try activities that require eye-hand coordination, such as coloring and simple lacing. Cheer their efforts.*



3. Making a Scene

L FM LG C

Hand out copies of **GN 1** and crayons, and invite the children to color the man who couldn't walk and the crowd of people.

While the children are coloring, for each child, fold a paper lunch bag in half and cut the bottom half off. Then make a doorway in each bag by cutting half way up the center of one side of the bag then cutting half way to each edge (see sidebar). Fold each door open. Cut a bracket-shaped hole in the bottom of the bag large enough to fit the man then fold it open. This becomes the hole in the roof of the house.

Help the children do the following steps:

- ✎ Cut out the crowded room scene.
- ✎ Glue the scene to the inside back of the paper bag.
- ✎ Cut the mat out and punch a hole in each corner.
- ✎ At each end of the mat, thread one 15" length of yarn down through one hole and up through the other.
- ✎ Gather the four ends of the yarn.
- ✎ Lower the man into the room.

Have the children practice telling the story so they can share it with family members at home.

LG *Communication is key to leadership and relationships. By nurturing communication skills, such as storytelling, children are given the ability to build relationships and inspire others.*

4. Coloring Page

C

Hand out copies of **GN 2** and crayons. Invite the children to color the picture. Engage the children in conversation as they color, using the following wondering questions:

- ✎ I wonder, "What was it like to make a hole in the roof?"
- ✎ I wonder, "What did people think when they saw the hole and the young man being lowered in the room?"
- ✎ I wonder, "What would you do for your friends?"

Use "wonder" questions that do not force a child to remember facts. Wondering questions help a child think aloud. Answers are neither right nor wrong. They help teach children to speak from their hearts.





LOVING AND SERVING GOD



Call the children together, singing “Sing Thanks to God”—**MM 23; SCM 25**. Invite the children to sing, dance, clap, and shout along with the song.

Wonder together how we can help our friends and how our friends help us.

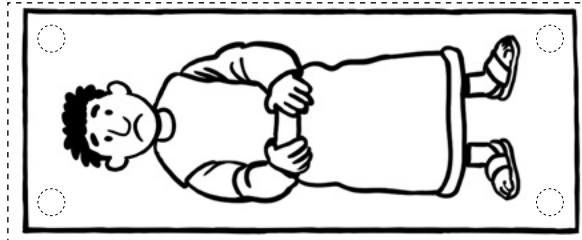
Call the children to snack time. Invite the children to repeat each line of the following prayer:

Thank you, God, /
for the food before us. /
Thank you, God, /
for the friends beside us. /
Thank you, God, /
for the love between us. /
Amen. /

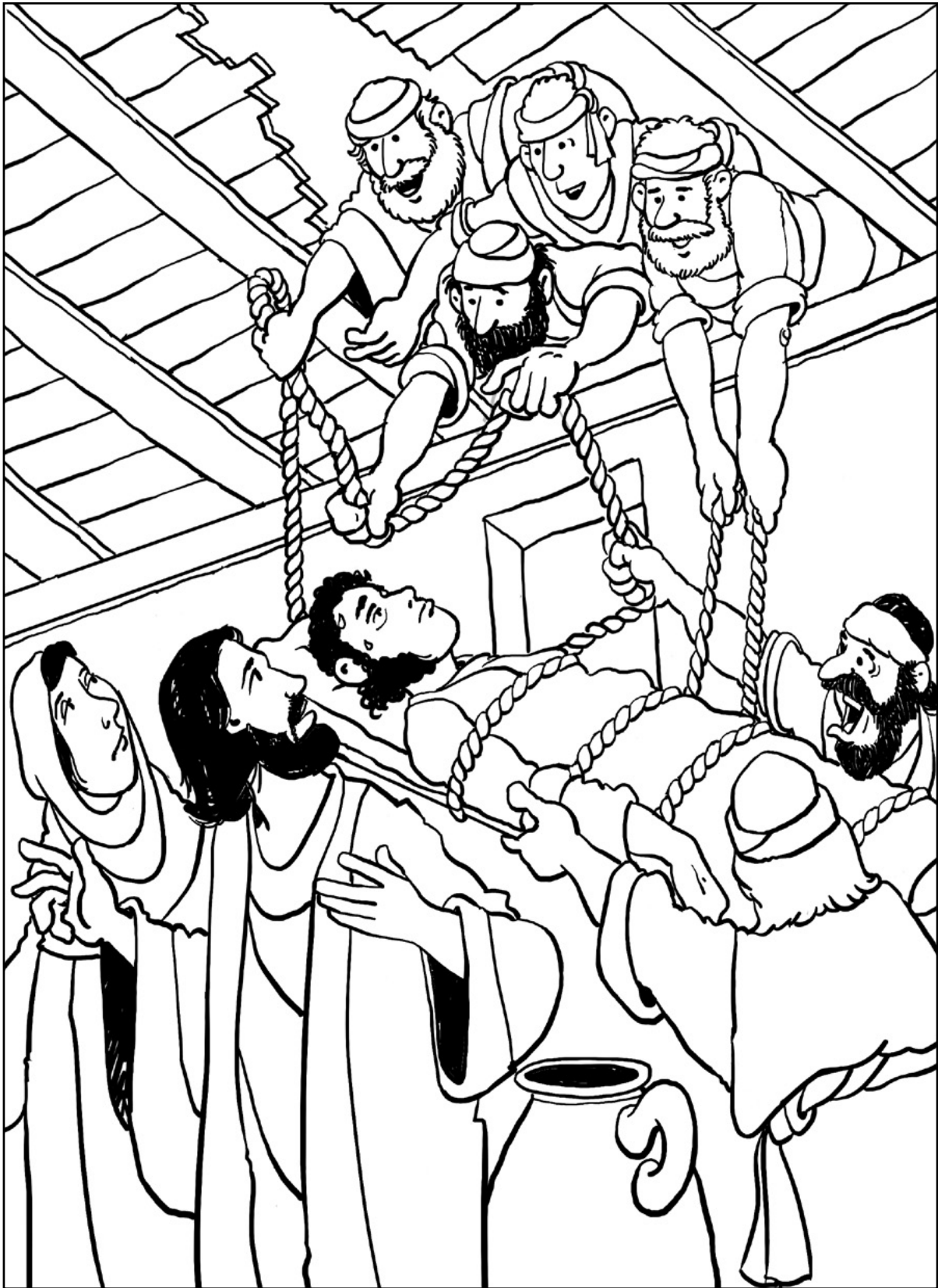
As the children leave, bless them: “(Name), go and be a good friend to others. God loves you and is with you. Amen.”



Ask parents and caregivers for their email addresses so you can send the Grace Sightings link, or invite them to visit www.pcusastore.com/GGGdownloads. Remind the parents and caregivers about the story audio (see p. vii).



Four Friends' Faith



Four friends had faith that Jesus could help their friend.

