



Four Friends' Faith

Goal: To recognize the impact that faith in Jesus has.

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, 8a, 22, 27

basic supplies
(see p. vii)

story audio (see p. vii)

candle

green cloth

health aids such as a
wheelchair, a walker,
crutches, a sling,
bandage wraps, braces
for ankles or knees

Responding

Celebrating
SCM 25

Praying
bandages, SCM 8b

Offering
card-stock copies of
Grace Notes (GN) 1

Extra
card-stock copies of
GN 2, brass fasteners

GATHERING IN GOD'S GRACE

Post **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,  ) and ways to adapt for children who have special needs or disabilities.

“Praying God’s Grace” and “Extra Activity” require more prep.

Welcoming and Preparing

Welcome each child with “Grace and peace be with you, *(Name)*.” Prompt the children to respond, “And also with you.”

Invite children to help prepare the worship space. Provide a Bible, a candle, a green cloth, **SCM 8a**, and health aids such as a wheelchair, a walker, crutches, a sling, bandage wraps, braces for ankles or knees, and so forth.

As children work to prepare the space, engage them in conversation about items, using the following questions:

- ▼ When have you, a family member, or a friend had to use any of these items? Why?
- ▼ How did it help? What was harder to do during that time?
- ▼ How did others help you, your family member, or your friend? Or in what ways have you seen others helping someone who used any of these items?
- ▼ What are some other ways you have helped a friend or a friend has helped you lately?

Ask some children to help prepare today’s “Responding in Gratitude” activities, and suggest that one or two prepare to lead today’s singing.

Singing

Sing “Jesus Says God Cares for Us”—**MM 12; SCM 22**. Hand out rhythm instruments and have the children play as they sing.

Praying

Turn on the candle as a reminder of Jesus’ presence with us. Invite the children to pray a responsive prayer with you, saying, “Give us faith,” while tapping their heart with their right hand, then gently pounding their fists on top of one another.

God of grace,
give us faith
when we feel alone.
Give us faith
when stuff goes wrong.



Give us faith
when things go right.

Give us faith
when we wonder if you hear our prayers.

Give us faith
when we see you at work in the world.

Give us faith.
Amen.

T *Don't ignore what happens in between activities. Abrupt changes can cause problems with some children. Give the time a focus by engaging the children in a simple activity. Marching from one place to another, lining up by height, or clapping hands can give focus to the task.*

Preparing to Hear the Story C

Ask children to think for a moment and then share their answers to the question, "What is faith?" Record their answers on **SCM 8a**. Wonder together if faith affects only them or others too; and if it affects others, how it does that? Offer that, in today's story, they will hear about how four friends' faith helped another friend. Encourage them to listen for how this happens.

Hearing the Story L C

Invite a child to find Mark 2 in the Bible. Place the open Bible on the worship center. Read **SCM 8**. Conclude the reading by saying, "Word of wisdom, Word of grace," and prompt the children to say, "Thanks be to God."

Invite the children to listen to the story again, closing their eyes and picturing the story in their minds like a movie. Read the story again from **SCM 8** or listen to the story audio. Pause after each paragraph and invite children to share what they are picturing.

Reflecting on God's Grace C

Engage the children in conversation about the story, using the following questions:

- ▼ What did you see in your imagination that surprised you as you listened to this story?
- ▼ How did the faith of the four friends help the paralyzed friend?
- ▼ What does it teach us about what it means to be faithful?
- ▼ What does it teach us about faith and friendship?

Singing

Sing and clap to "Sing Thanks to God"—**MM 23; SCM 27**. Invite the children to sing, clap, dance, shout, and praise as they sing each verse. Turn off the candle.



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.



RESPONDING IN GRATITUDE

Select activities appropriate for your group and for the time available.

Celebrating God's Grace



Sing and clap to "I'm Gonna Sing When the Spirit Says Sing"—**MM 19**; **SCM 25**.

Play the song again and encourage the children to add actions for *walk*, *leap*, and *praise* when they are mentioned in the song.

Provide rhythm instruments and invite the children to play along as they hear the song again.

Form two to four groups and sing the song in a round.

Have a discussion about having faith in Jesus using the following:

- ▼ Wonder together what joy the friends felt when their other friend was healed.
- ▼ Wonder what the other people were feeling.
- ▼ Wonder when we have had faith and felt joy.



Praying God's Grace



Offer prayer for friends who need to know Jesus' love and power. Display **SCM 8b** as a reminder of the four friends and their friend in need. Remind children that the four friends in today's story had heard about Jesus and had faith that Jesus could help their friend. They carried their friend to see Jesus and probably used something like a stretcher to get their paralyzed friend to him.

Provide bandages and pens. Invite the children to sit quietly for a moment and think about their friends, family members, church people, or people in their community who need Jesus' care. This may be someone who is physically hurt, or someone who is sad or scared or lonely. When they are ready, have them open the bandage and write that person's name or initials on a bandage as they say a prayer for them. They may use more than one bandage if they have several people they would like to pray for. Invite the children to peel off the paper on the bandage and stick it on or around the mat on **SCM 8b**.

Pray:

Dear God, may we be good friends and have faith like the four friends in the story. We pray that you will be with the people we have named on our bandages and also those people who are in our hearts, who need your love and care. We know that, sometimes, we can see or read about miracles, like the man standing up and walking; and sometimes there are miracles we can't see, like someone knowing you are with them when they are hurting, sad, scared, or lonely. We give you thanks that you hear our prayers. Amen.

- MS** *Make sure children with mobility issues are included in all activities. Find ways to adapt activities to ensure all are able to fully participate, such as instead of jumping up and down, raise arms up and down or tilt head from left to right.*

Offering God's Grace **LG**

Make bracelets to keep and to share as reminders to be faithful friends.

Distribute card-stock copies of **GN 1** and crayons or markers. Read the sentence on the bracelet together. While the children decorate the bracelets, wonder together how we can be faithful friends.

Have the children cut out the bracelets along the solid lines. Help them carefully cut along the dashed lines. Help the children put on one of the bracelets by wrapping the strip around their wrists and interlocking the two small cuts.

Encourage the children to share their other bracelet with a friend or family member.

- LG** *It's important to help children understand the need to share, act generously, and give freely. They learn that they are responsible for their part in creating a caring community. Kindness and generosity are contagious.*



Extra Activity **C LD**

Distribute a card-stock copy of **GN 2** and three brass fasteners to each child. Have the children form long strips, using the following directions:

- ▼ Cut out the four strips.
- ▼ Punch holes where indicated. (Note that two strips have two holes, and the other strips have only one hole.)
- ▼ Attach the strips using brass fasteners.

Show the children how the strips hinge. Have the children attempt to form the shapes in the story. Encourage the children to use the prompts to tell the story of the four faithful friends to one another. Challenge them to use the strips to tell the story at home—with or without using the story prompts.



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).

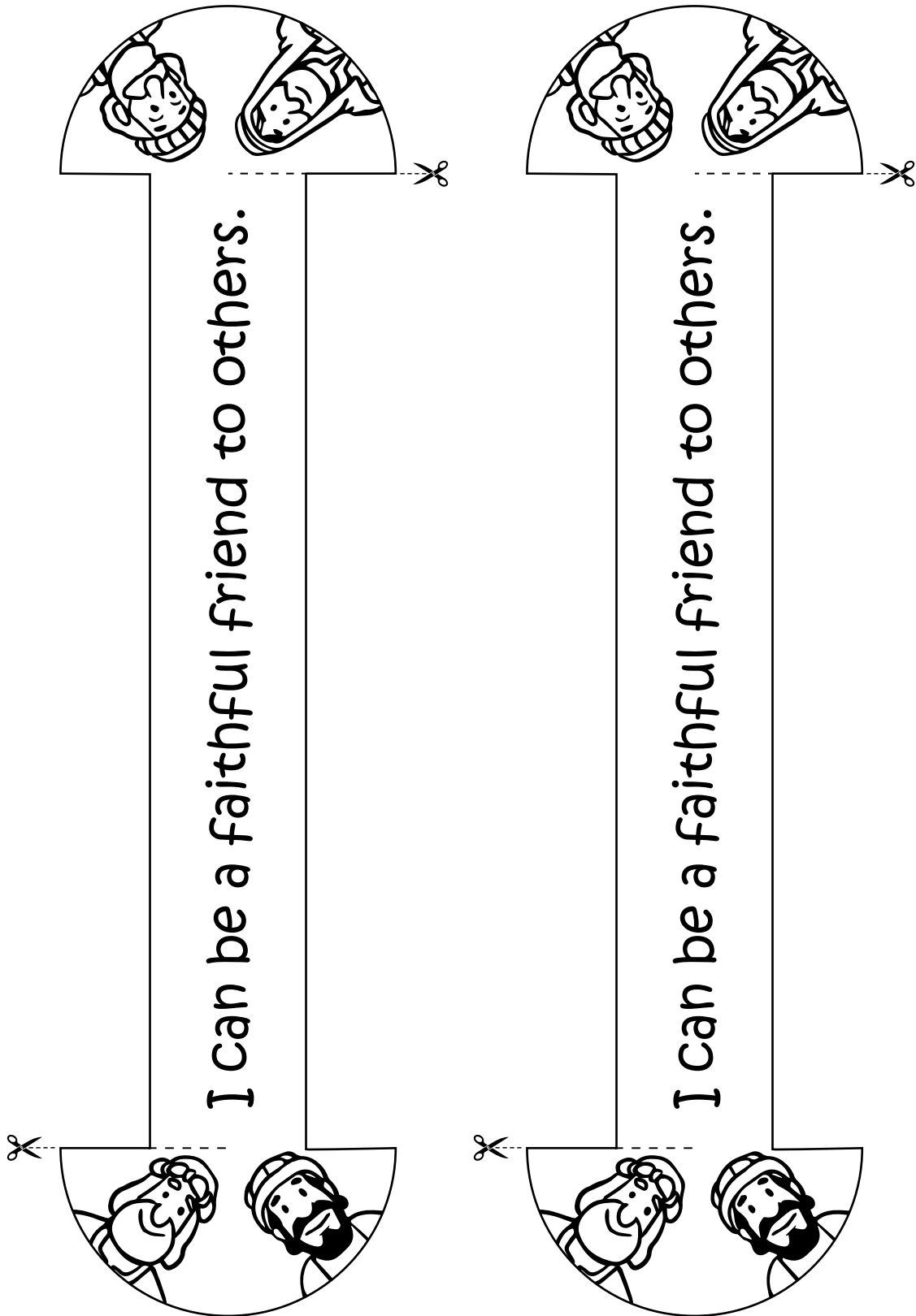
LOVING AND SERVING GOD

Lead children in cleaning up the worship space.

Encourage them to take the bracelets they may have made during “Offering God’s Grace” and the story strips they may have created during “Extra Activity,” so they can share today’s story at home. Remind them to continue to pray for their friends who need Jesus’ love and care.

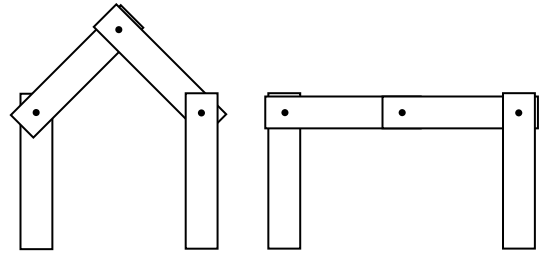
Gather children and bless them, saying:

Go in gratitude for friends who share their faith with you.
Go in grace and share your faith with others.
And go in peace because Jesus loves you.

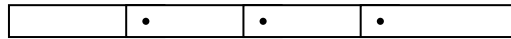


Four Friends' Faith

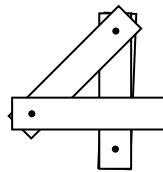
People gathered at a house to hear what Jesus had to say. The house was not like homes today; it had a flat roof.



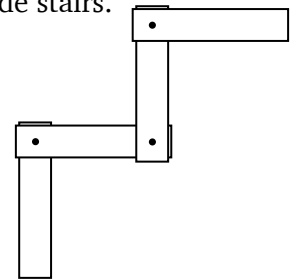
A young man who could not walk laid on his mat wishing he, too, could see Jesus.



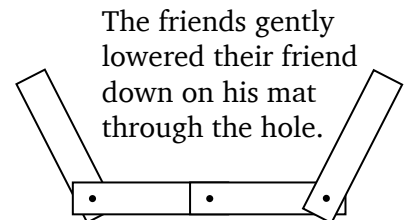
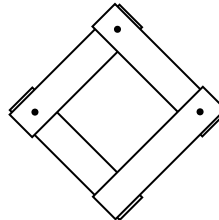
The man had four friends. They wanted Jesus to help their friend.



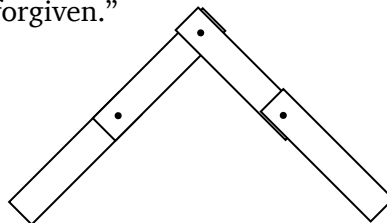
The friends brought him to the house, but they couldn't get to the front door. So, the four friends climbed up the outside stairs.



They found some loose tiles and moved them aside and dug a hole. They made the hole very large.



Jesus looked up and saw the four faithful friends. He turned to the young man on the mat and said, "Son, your sins are forgiven."



The man who could not walk immediately stood up.



He gathered up his mat and walked right out the front door in front of everyone.



