



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 and knees

Responding

Claiming

six or more pipe
cleaners for each child,
shoebox for each child

Praying

bandages, **SCM 8b**

Offering

optional: wheelchair,
walker, crutches,
blindfold

Extra

card-stock copies of
Grace Notes (GN) 1,
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, **LG** **T**) and ways to adapt for children who have special needs or disabilities.

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

Welcoming and Preparing

C **LG**

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 the 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?
- ▼ 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. Invite a couple of volunteers to practice reading the Scripture passage for today’s reading.

Singing

SD

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

Praying

C **L**

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 may upset some children. Engage the children in a simple activity, such as marching in place, lining up by height, or clapping hands.*

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.



Today's story 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.

Hearing the Story L C

Invite a child to find Mark 2 in the Bible. Have volunteers read Mark 2:1–12. Conclude the reading by saying, "Word of wisdom, Word of grace," and prompt the children to say, "Thanks be to God." Place the open Bible on the worship center.

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.



RESPONDING IN GRATITUDE

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



Claiming God's Grace

LG C TD SD

Provide each child pipe cleaners, a shoebox, fabric scraps, and decorating supplies. Invite them to make main characters from today's story from the pipe cleaners, as they choose, as well as the setting for the story using the shoebox. By creating this story kit, they have something to take home and use as they re-tell the story there.

While the children are working, wonder together about their friends and what lengths they might go to for them. Ask them to tell you any stories of themselves or their friends going out of their way to help one another.



Praying God's Grace

LG TD

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 the bandage as they say a prayer for them. They may use more than one bandage if they would like to pray for several people. 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 be with the people we have named on our bandages, and those people who are in our hearts as well, who need your love and care. We know that, sometimes, there are miracles that we can see or read about, 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.



Offering God's Grace

MS

Identify ways that friends with physical disabilities may struggle at your church. Remind children that the friend who was paralyzed couldn't walk; that is why his friends had to carry him. Comment that, in today's world, someone who cannot walk may be in a wheelchair. Take a walking tour of your building and identify if there are places that someone with physical disabilities would have trouble accessing. Brainstorm ways to make adjustments in those areas so that all are easily welcomed. Send your suggestions to the pastor and church leadership in charge of the building and grounds.

Option: If available, have the children take turns using a wheelchair, a walker, crutches, or a blindfold to navigate areas of your church with the help of friends.

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.*



Extra Activity

C LD

Distribute a card-stock copy of **GN 1** and three brass fasteners to each child. Have the children form a long strip, 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 the children in cleaning up the worship space.

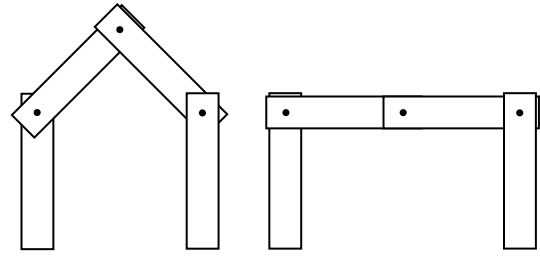
Encourage them to take the story kits they created during "Claiming God's Grace" so they can share today's story at home. Remind them to continue to pray for their friends who need Jesus' love and care.

Gather children and bless them, saying:

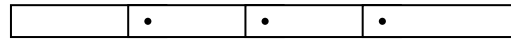
Go in gratitude for friends who share their faith with you.
Go in grace and share your faith with others.
And go in peace because Jesus loves you.

Four Friends' Faith

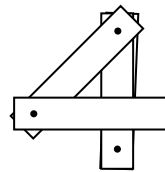
People gathered at a house to hear what Jesus had to say. The house was not like homes today; it had a flat roof.



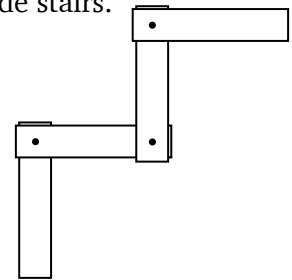
A young man who could not walk laid on his mat wishing he, too, could see Jesus.



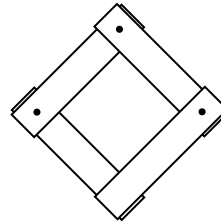
The man had four friends. They wanted Jesus to help their friend.



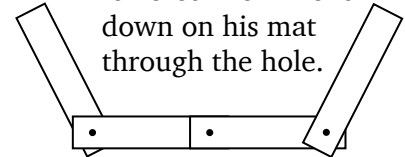
The friends brought him to the house, but they couldn't get to the front door. So, the four friends climbed up the outside stairs.



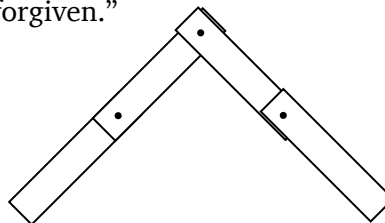
They found some loose tiles and moved them aside and dug a hole. They made the hole very large.



The friends gently lowered their friend down on his mat through the hole.



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.



