

Which 4 Friends Will Carry You to Jesus?

You probably know the story of the paralyzed man who was healed when Jesus was teaching in a house in Capernaum. Mark's Gospel says the poor guy was carried by four men. We don't know how long they traveled. What we do know is the unnamed men were determined to get an audience with Jesus. They were desperate.

When they arrived and saw the crowd blocking the doorway, the four friends came up with an ingenious idea. They climbed on the flat top of the house and removed the wooden slats, packed clay and straw, which first-century roofs were made of (see Mark 2:3-5). They didn't have a permit to dismantle the house. I imagine some of the dust and debris fell on the people below, including Jesus and the smug scribes who were spying on Him.

Some Bible scholars believe this unusual scene happened at Peter's house, because Mark tells us that Jesus was staying with Peter, and that He healed Peter's mother-in-law there (see Mark 1:29-31). It's fascinating to think that right after Peter invited Jesus to stay with him, his house may have been unexpectedly "remodeled" by four strangers! That's what happens to all of us when we allow Jesus full access to our lives.

After the dust settled and sunlight burst through the hole in the ceiling, Jesus didn't rebuke the men for making a mess. He welcomed the noisy intrusion. And He admired the four men for their recklessness. Mark 2:5 (NASB) says, "And Jesus, seeing their faith, said to the paralyzed man, 'Son, your sins are forgiven.'"

The paralytic couldn't get near Jesus on his own. His legs

were useless. But he had four friends who cared enough about him to carry him to the healer. And when they ran into an obstacle, they were so determined to help their friend that they staged a radical home invasion.

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Do you have four friends who would do that for you?

This past weekend at a men's retreat in Georgia, I told that story and asked the guys to think about their network of support. I meet so many Christians today who have difficulty making friends. Some live in isolation because of shame or depression. Others struggle with fear of rejection. Still others battle social anxiety.

I have one friend, David, who drove more than 14 hours to attend the men's retreat in Georgia last weekend, but he told me he almost turned around just before he arrived. He didn't know many of the men at the event, and the walls he had constructed around his heart had become a prison. Thankfully he pushed through his fears, and he kept driving.

Three days later, when the retreat had concluded, he told me: "It feels like the walls have fallen." David was free. And he has many new friends because, with God's help, he dismantled the walls of loneliness.

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What about you? Who will carry you to Jesus when you need help? Do you have friends who love you enough to take risks to support you? If you do, I hope you will take time to thank them. If you don't have a strong support network, make that a goal for the coming new year.

Also, don't wait for friends to come to you. That's not how it works. Proverbs 18:24a (NKJV) says: "A man who has friends must himself be friendly." In a sermon about Jonathan and David, British preacher Charles Spurgeon said: "Anyone can selfishly desire to have a Jonathan, but he is on the right track who desires to find a David to whom he can be a Jonathan."

In a time when so many people feel crippled by fears, insecurities, introversion and social awkwardness, remember that the Bible says we have not been given a spirit of timidity (see 2 Tim. 1:7). You can get up from your pallet and walk! I pray you will follow the example of my friend David, who pushed through his fears and dismantled the walls that kept him isolated.

In the classic Christmas movie "It's a Wonderful Life," Clarence the angel gave a depressed George Bailey a copy of the book "Tom Sawyer," and in the front of the novel he wrote: "Remember, no man is a failure who has friends." The angel showed Bailey all the ways he had helped others, and then Bailey's friends gathered at his house to help him face a crisis.

If isolation is a habit for you, stop it. You don't have to be friendless. God created all of us for community. Let your friends carry you, and then learn to carry others.

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