

SMALL GROUP LESSON

Life Foundations: The Best Way To Meet The Master

The logo for 'hyphen' is located in the top right corner. It consists of the word 'hyphen' in a lowercase, sans-serif font. The letters are colored: 'h' is blue, 'y' is orange, 'p' is green, 'h' is blue, 'e' is orange, and 'n' is green. The logo is set against a dark grey rounded rectangular background.

Lesson 2 in the Life Foundations series

Lesson Aim

This lesson will teach you the importance of directly going to God for desperate needs.

Preparation Necessary

It always helps to point out where the geographic locations you mention are located. Capernaum is mentioned twice in the Introduction, while Tyre and Sidon are referenced in Idea 2, so don't hesitate to print off the linked maps or have them ready to show on your laptop if your room has wireless access.

<http://www.keyway.ca/gif/capernam.gif>

<http://bibleatlas.org/area/capernaum.jpg>

<http://scriptures.lds.org/en/biblemaps/map11.jpg>

Supplies Needed

White board with markers

Bibles (Note: At every story point, the scriptural references are given. If your group lacks a strong biblical background, ask everyone to read the verses through the story so they can fully understand the related principles.)

Scripture Texts

Luke 8:42-48—Jairus and the Woman w/the Issue of Blood.

Mark 2:1-12—The healing of the palsied man or “the Roof Crashers.”

Matthew 8:5-13, Luke 7:1-10—The faith-filled Centurion.

Matthew 15:21-28—The Syrophenecian Woman

Additional Scriptures

Matthew 17:14-21 shares the story of the father of the demoniac meeting with Jesus. It follows the same pattern as the other stories, and is worth inclusion if you have the time.

Looking Deeper

Most Gospel commentaries elaborate on these stories in fascinating depth.

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INTRODUCTION

He wasn't just any military man, but a captain in the world's most powerful army. Yet he was also a man of rare sensitivity to spiritual matters, and thankful for his support staff. Stationed in a distant outpost overrun with religious fanatics, he was both policeman and soldier, required to keep the peace in a backwater province that could erupt at any moment. Yet, in the quiet moments between administrative duties and patrols, he pursued his hunger for God. He found a partial answer among the devout of the city, studying with their teachers, then used his personal funds to build them a place of worship.

With great joy, one day he realized that among these strange natives walked a true holy man. No one knows exactly how he came to that conclusion but his faith in the holy man soon became unshakeable, just as the teacher's shining light cast his own life of killing and maiming into deep eclipse.

Then, unexpectedly, his personal valet became deathly ill. While others called for the corps doctors, he instantly realized that only one man was capable of saving his servant's life—except he knew a man of violence was unworthy to approach him.

The captain contacted the devout elders and sent them to plead with the teacher to save his servant's life. They did too good a job. The teacher decided to come to the camp and heal the servant. The captain was horrified.

Frantically, he sent friends to stop the holy man with these words, "Lord, don't trouble yourself to come any further for I am unworthy of your presence. Please, just say the word and my servant will be healed. For I lead soldiers. If I tell them to go, they go. Or "Come here!" and they come. I tell my servant to do something and he does anything I tell him."

Jesus marveled at the captain's faith, and said to those around him, "I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel." The servant was healed that very moment.

This retelling of the first 10 verses of Luke 7, is an amazing display of faith by a non-Jew (as Jesus himself attested), but also reveals some important truths we can learn from. As do the other biblical stories we'll be studying.¹

There are other stories in the New Testament that feature similarly astonishing results to requests. They are astonishing because the miraculous answers—healings, being raised from the dead, demons being cast out—come instantly.

Yet too many requests of the Master go unanswered. Have you ever wondered why God answers some requests instantly, yet others are delayed or seemingly ignored?

Likewise, there are many stories where Jesus is the protagonist, proactively arriving on a scene where a blind man (to use but one example) reacts to His happenstance arrival. These stories are different.

Here's another one—a man was so stricken with palsy that he was bed-ridden. (Palsy often includes partial paralysis and uncontrolled body movements.) Four friends heard that Jesus was in town, which also happened to be Capernaum (Note: show maps), and grabbed their friend's stretcher to get him healed. However, the crowds were so great, and the room he was in was so small, that they weren't able to get to him. So they climbed onto the roof of the house and set

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upon destroying it. Soon, the hole was large enough for them to lower their stricken friend before the Master.

According to Mark 2:1-12, Jesus recognized their faith and forgave the stricken man's sins. After bickering with the doubting scribes, he then healed the palsied man with a simple, "Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house." The man was healed that very moment, amazing everyone—except the four friends desperate enough to tear open the roof.

Along with these examples of instant answers, we'll be investigating other interactions with Jesus to see if we, too, can get instant answers from the King of Kings and Lord of Lords with our needs.

IDEAS

Don't Wait for God, Proactively Seek Him

The life of Christ too often seems like the Master is either surrounded by crowds, challenged by religious leaders, or stumbling onto blind men and other needs as he walks across Israel. When you do a quick survey, you realize how few people actually hunted Christ down to answer their needs. When they did, you realize that (basically) everyone had their needs instantly met.

Jairus was one such man. His daughter was on death's door, so he searched for the master until he found them. (It's quite possible he had been searching for days, as Jesus was across the Sea of Galilee at least the previous day and maybe longer.) Then Luke 8 tells us he fell at Jesus' feet until Christ agreed to come with him. Except there was a huge crowd that prevented fast movement.

Then, coincidentally (?), someone else, who was just as desperate as Jairus, pushed herself on the Master. And, as we've seen, Jesus always responded to those who push themselves on Him with humility, worship, and a sense of desperation.

This woman suffered from an issue of blood for 12 years, was no doubt penniless from the doctor's visits, and weak, old beyond her years by the blood loss. According to Jewish law, she was unclean, making her an outcast, a pariah to be pitied, but avoided. She had no hope except Him.

And so, she snaked herself through the crowd and—probably crawling—she touched the border of his clothes. Then He stopped. And she was horrified. Merely by making physical contact, she had made him unclean. And He knew that. He also knew what she'd done to Him.

He stopped and asked, "Who touched me?"

The disciples thought that was a crazy question. A large crowd jostled around him, bumping and elbowing and brushing against the Master at every step as Jairus desperately led him away. It was a large crowd with genuine needs, yet when they touched Jesus nothing happened.

Jesus insisted someone different, someone desperate, had touched him, for healing power had left him.

The game was up. The unnamed lady stumbled forth, fell before him and declared her story—as well as her healing.

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Jesus must have smiled & thought, 'Ah! So that's why power left me.' He said, "Daughter, be of good comfort: thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace."

And just like that, after 12 years of hopelessness, she was healed. She was no longer unclean. She finally had a future.

Only one man couldn't celebrate this moment. Jairus was told his daughter had died. One woman's miraculous desperation had circumvented his. Yet faith-filled desperation supersedes time. Jesus simply told him, "Fear not: believe only, and she shall be made whole."

His daughter was dead. There were witnesses. The paid mourners were there. Yet when Jairus led the Master into the room where his dead daughter lay, Jesus told her to arise and she stayed dead no longer. She was alive again at that very moment.

Both Jairus and the woman, both desperate enough to find the Master and snatch his attention despite the distractions around him; both were sure that the Lord would be their complete answer, and had their needs fully resolved.

Interaction

(Use the white board to write down the group answers.) Ask your group:

1. Is it possible that our churches are full of people like the crowd, full of unmet needs?
2. Why do so many people pray, yet so few needs seem to be met?
3. Of the people already named in these situations—Jesus, Jairus, the woman, the centurion, the crowd, the disciples—who can you relate best to? Why?

Make Requests with Confidence and Humility

The Syrophenician woman (in Matthew 15:21-28) pushed herself onto the Master. Jesus was visiting the Mediterranean coastline around Tyre and Sidon (Note: show map), north of Galilee, evidently to rest. However, even among the Gentiles, his fame preceded him and this mother appeared, who was both reverential and annoying, when she says, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil." Notice she calls him both "Lord" and "Son of David," signifiers of Him being the Messiah. Notice she won't stop barking at Him until she gets an answer. Notice Jesus answers with silence. Notice the disciples, again clueless to the situation, ask Christ to throw her out.

Christ seems to answer the disciples, not the woman, when he restates His mission, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." She refuses to back down with this verbal sparring. She also refuses to stop acting respectfully. She calls him Lord and makes a direct appeal—"Help me."

Jesus doesn't appear to soften when he answers her directly, "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs." (Note: this is the same meaning for dog that signifies "pets," though that's hardly a compliment.)

She's fierce in her insistence without ever losing her reverence, while always exhibiting humility. She still calls Him Lord, but she refuses to release her deep need when she answers, "Truth, Lord:

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yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table."

This is perhaps the only time Christ lost an argument during his adult ministry (though one suspects he lost happily). Indeed, the New Testament records no case of a humble and sincere appeal being denied by Christ. As soon as she says this, Jesus concedes with, "Dear woman, your faith is great. Your request is granted." (Matthew 15:28, NLT). Her daughter was freed that very moment.

This insistence on reaching the Lord synchs with the four men who insisted that their palsied friend meet with the Master instantly. It also reflects how the centurion reached the Master. All of them insisting on reaching Him with faith and humility and reverence. All touched His heart and received answers.

Interaction

1. Why is it such a challenge to pray with the humility and reverence displayed by the Syrophenecian woman?
2. Have you ever been desperate enough to keep annoying the Lord with your sincere requests until he answered them? If yes, what kept you asking Him? If no, why did you stop?
3. Have you ever kept reminding the Lord of your request, yet found yourself becoming less reverent and humble toward Him? If yes, why was that? If no, how did you maintain that proper spirit?

Prayer 101: Who Are You Praying For?

So we've seen the pattern of direct action and complete humility being rewarded by these four disparate people, but there's another similarity between these stories and people—four of the five incidents (Jairus, the four friends, the centurion, the Syrophenecian woman) were personally interceding for the needs of others. Only the woman with the issue of blood was reaching out to Christ for her own needs (and 12 years of futility by doctors would safely justify her efforts as less than selfish).

It's fascinating to realize all of these people were literally desperate to see someone else healed or redeemed. So desperate, they acted out of character for their milieu and didn't wait for Jesus to happen by, but pushed themselves on the Master at their earliest convenience. They made sure they grabbed his attention to the point he had to act on their behalf—to bless someone else.

William Hendriksen, in his commentary on Matthew, states, ". . .one of the chief characteristics of effective intercessory prayer, namely, to so immerse oneself into the trials and afflictions of others that these experiences become in a sense our own?"²

Intercession is feeling the need of others to the point you're willing to represent them to God Himself. Abraham did this for Sodom and Gomorrah, Moses did this for the children of Israel several times, and Stephen, moments before dying from wounds inflicted by his attackers, did it for those attackers. So did your examples today.

Interaction

1. If you were to estimate, what percentage of your prayer time is centered around needs for yourself?

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2. What percentage of your prayer time is centered around the needs of others?
3. Why do you think that is?
4. Have you ever prayed in deep intercession for others? Would you like to share that experience with everyone else?

CONCLUSION

The well-worn trope that God answers our prayers three ways—“Yes,” “No,” and “Later”—isn’t contradicted by this lesson. Of course there’s no formula to guarantee the God of the Universe, the creator and redeemer of our souls will instantly answer what we want Him to do. But there does seem to be a pattern.

This lesson examines that pattern because it’s important to see how empathetic Jesus was to the faith-filled, the desperate, and the humble. It shows that those who thrust themselves upon him in humility and worship were instantly rewarded—they weren’t trying to follow a magic formula, but trying to have legitimate needs met—which for the majority, weren’t their own.

LED BY THE SPIRIT QUESTIONS

With what spirit do you most often approach God with your needs? Is it difficult to approach Him with reverence and desperation? Why / why not?

Do you often find yourself waiting for God to move on you instead of proactively seeking Him out? Why is that?

What attribute of these characters do you need to most apply to your life? Why?

How will you be able to apply this lesson to your prayer life this week?

What kind of results to your prayers will new faith give you for these new prayers?

PRAYER

Father, you’re so gracious and kind to hear us, no matter what our needs might be. Please help us to be fearless when we approach you in humble desperation. We know you’re a loving Father, who wants to be involved in our lives, as you were in the lives of Jairus, the Syrophenecian woman and so many others, but help us to see that the needs of others are just as important to pray about as ourselves. Help us to be willing to intercede for them so that your hand will be seen on Earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

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FOOTNOTES

The story is also told in Matthew 8:5-13, but the centurion alone is quoted as talking with Jesus. This doesn't necessarily contradict Luke's version, as Matthew seems to have focused completely on the centurion's faith as the point of his retelling, while Luke focused on all the specific details. The dialogue is almost identical. ★