**Thesis:** Friendship is a powerful force. From little kids playing make-believe on the playground to adults walking with each other through the extreme ups and downs of life, we were meant to do life with others. Deep friendships can bring us great joy, but the ones rooted in genuine faith are even greater as they show us the depths of Christ’s love.

**Introduction:** This is the Jesus Podcast, gospel-inspired stories crafted for entertainment and transformation! I’m Zak from Pray.com. It’s so good to be with you again today as we look at an unusual yet miraculous encounter Jesus had with a paralytic man. Though it may not be what anyone expected, it was all according to Jesus’ plans.

**Context:** Not long after Jesus appoints the twelve apostles from His growing group of disciples, He travels to teach and heal. As He enters the city of Capernaum, He is surrounded by a seemingly insurmountable crowd. Rather than disappearing for a moment of quiet, He enters into a house where the masses crowd around Him. As the people hang on every word flowing from the mouth of the healer, a surprise awaits them. Today’s story will captivate your heart with a beautiful testimony of friendship and the power of faith. We’ll see some wild ways of bringing our friends to Jesus, and the importance of never giving up on those near and dear to us. As you listen, ask yourself who you relate with the most and ask God to reveal something new, profound, and meaningful about true friendship.

**Message:** *Proverbs 18:18 tells us, “There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.”*

Strong friendships have no replacement in our lives. While it’s good to have a loving family and community in places like our jobs and church, there is something unparalleled when we form bonds with others in heartfelt, vulnerable, and lasting friendships. Today, we heard the recounting of four friends who were determined, above all else, to help one of their own. Taking incredible risks and seeing even greater rewards, it’s evident that Jesus loves it when we take friendships seriously.

As Jesus’ teachings and miracles spread, there was no stopping His swift gain in notoriety and popularity. Wherever He went, He was sure to draw large crowds, and Capernaum was no different. Imagine hearing the word of the new Rabbi from Nazareth coming to your town. This wasn’t an event you would want to miss. And while it was clear that most were there to hear Jesus speak, there were those, like the friends of the paralytic man, who had other ideas in mind.

Having heard that Jesus could heal, they decided this was their moment to help their friend.

In our story today, we see Jason, the paralytic man, unsure of their thoughts. He’s hesitant to put his hope in any form of healing, with the rational belief that he was to be paralyzed for the rest of his life. But as good friends do, his friends quickly take to encouraging him. Despite the seemingly hopeless circumstances the paralytic man finds himself in, his friends continue to try to lift his spirits and help him find joy in life. I’m sure we can all relate to moments like this. Life just gets the better of us, and we feel down on our luck, find ourselves slipping into depression, are afraid of the future, or a myriad of other things.

But a good friend picks us up when we’re down. In return, we can do the same for them. Our personal feelings, emotions, and situations ebb and flow and are constantly changing. Having close friends around us ensures that when we’re feeling down, they can lift us up. And likewise, when we see that they’re down, we can be a friend who encourages them.

Paul tells us in *1 Thessalonians 5:11 “Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.”*

If we’re going to walk well through life, we need friends willing to bear our burdens, look out for our good, and encourage us.

But beyond encouragement, a good friend will take it one step further and sacrifice for us. It was no secret that the paralytic man needed help for basic survival.

Eating, drinking, dressing - everything was dependent upon the help of another. But his friends were happy to make these every day and consistent sacrifices to ensure he was cared for. A good friend will gladly give to and help their friends in need.

While they may be unable to do everything, they will do what they can. We read in *1 Peter 4:10 Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms.*

We all have various giftings, skills, and talents that God wants us to use to bless others, especially our friends in need of help. While it may require a sacrifice of our time, talents, or treasures, knowing that we can be supportive of one another should bring us a great feeling of joy. How far should we be willing to sacrifice for our friends? Jesus tells us in *John 15:12 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.*

True friends love each other with the love of Christ. And He demonstrates how far His love is willing to go to prove His friendship to us by laying down His very life for us. And it’s this very same heart of self-sacrifice that Jesus calls us to show to our friends. Friendship can be inconvenient, if not at times painful. But it shouldn’t be because of your friends. It should be for the sake of enduring the difficulties of life with and for your friends.

This is exactly what Jason’s friends are demonstrating. They’re willing to sacrifice for him, even when it’s inconvenient. Despite the large crowds that had formed around Jesus, confining Him to the house, the paralytic man’s friends didn’t give up. They were going to fight for him. They so deeply loved him that they were willing to go to great lengths to help him. Paul tells us what active love looks like in *Romans 12:10 “Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. 11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. 12 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. 13 Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.”* These friends were certainly devoted to one another and lacked nothing when it came to zeal. This is what true friendship looks like. We’re willing to put ourselves in uncomfortable, if not dangerous, situations if it means fighting for our friends.

This willingness comes from a place of empathy. In our story, Jason didn’t understand why his friends were willing to do what they were planning until Liora spoke up and said, “When one of us suffers, we all suffer.” It was at that moment he understood. Friends feel each other's pains. They experience one another’s sorrows. They empathize with one another. As Paul writes to the Galatians, he says in *Galatians 6:2 “Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ….9 Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. 10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”* Bearing one another’s burdens doesn’t mean that we assume someone else’s problems as our own. It means that we have compassion for them and come alongside them to help out in the ways that we can. For Jason’s friends, this meant a crazy plan of bringing their friend to the healer, Jesus.

In Mark and Luke’s recording of this miracle, we’re told that it was Jesus seeing the faith of the paralytic man’s friends that moved Him to tell the paralytic man that his sins were forgiven. Perhaps this wasn’t the miracle that they initially expected, but it sure ruffled the feathers of the Pharisees who found offense in Jesus forgiving the sins of another. In response to the anger He saw in their hearts, Jesus proves that He not only has the authority to forgive sins, but has authority over all creation. In confidence, He turns to the paralytic man and commands him to get up, take up his mat, and walk home. All of these events were spurred on by the faith of the paralytic man’s friends. They set an example of what Jesus can do when we have passionate and radical faith. It would be hard to believe that the paralytic man didn’t walk away with a transformed and deepened faith in Jesus and the power He possesses.

No matter who we are and what we have in life, we all need friends. Friends like those of the paralytic man. Friends who encourage us, sacrifice for us, fight for us, empathize with us, and help us grow in our faith. Friends who demonstrate the love of God by laying down their lives for us. But the best friend we could ever have who will never leave our side is the One who sets the model of what true friendship is: Jesus Christ.

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