

## “Jesus Heals a Ceiling Fan” // Luke 5:17–26 // In Step #8

\*\*\*NEXT TIME could cut the “claim to divinity” and the whole point of “our greatest need” and simply focus on our desperate faith. Cut passage off after vs. 20 and say, “So many important things to learn in this passage, but I want to focus only on one: the role of this man’s friends in his healing.” \*\*\*\*\*

Happy 2021! 2020 is in the history books and all God’s people said ‘Amen.’ I know a lot of us are really glad to get that year behind us. That’s certainly how I feel. I told you a few weeks ago that because of lockdown you were likely to emerge from 2020 either as a monk, a hunk, a chunk or a drunk so to choose wisely, and I hope you finished the year well.

But I’m actually really excited about 2021 and some things I sense God has for us to do--some of which I’m going to tell you about today.

**Luke 5, if you have your Bibles.** Over the break my family and I watched an old movie I remembered from college called Mrs. Doubtfire--we had to fast forward a couple of scenes--but it was Robin Williams at his best. Robin Williams plays an actor who is down on his luck and makes a mess of his marriage so his wife leaves him, and because his life is so chaotic the courts give her full custody of the kids, but he loves his kids passionately and he's so desperate to see them that he dresses up like an old English housekeeper and applies for a job as their maid so he can see them every day.

I know that sounds impossible to pull off, even in a movie, but that was the genius of Robin Williams. The movie is hilarious and sad and inspiring all at the same time (much like Robin Williams’ actual life, I might add!). The movie illustrates something that all of us have experienced at some point: Desperation will drive you to do some radical things--things you might never dream of doing otherwise.

**I share that because that’s the sense of desperation you get in this story.** On multiple levels.

**Luke 5:17** On one of those days while he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea, and also from Jerusalem. And the Lord’s power to heal was in him.<sup>1</sup> That’s a very interesting phrase. The NKJV translates this phrase as “The power of the Lord was

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<sup>1</sup> (That’s a very interesting phrase. The NKJV translates this phrase as “The power of the Lord was present to heal.” That phrase means that the power Jesus used to heal was not a power he just pulled from his own person, but a power that came from the Spirit of God that Jesus accessed. You might say, “Well, wouldn’t Jesus, if he was the Son of God, have had the power to heal on his own, without accessing the Spirit’s power?” Yes, but one of Luke’s purposes in this Gospel is to show you that the power JESUS used for his ministry you have access to also. If Jesus healed people out of his own power as the Son of God, we could say, “Well, I could never do that. I’m just a plain old mortal. I can’t summon the strength to get out of bed without hitting the snooze 4x, much less make a lame man walk. BUT, you see, if Jesus healed through the power of the Spirit, and that Spirit is present with us also, then we have access to miraculous power also, when we are following the guidance of the Spirit. And that is Luke’s point. Remember, the Gospel of Luke is part 1 of a 2-Works consulted:

*Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in Luke*, commentary, Thabiti M. Anyabwile  
“Jesus Heals the Paralytic,” sermon, Curtis Andrusko  
“Friends,” sermon from Miracles series, Joby Martin  
“A Paralytic Forgiven,” sermon, Tim Keller  
“Mission,” sermon, Tim Keller

present, at that moment, to heal.” The Spirit of God was upon Jesus in a special way, ready to heal if someone would ask for it, and Jesus was especially sensitive to when that was and was ready for someone to ask him for a miracle. Luke is careful to show you that Jesus did his miracles by the power to the Spirit because you have access to that same Spirit, if you’ll learn to be sensitive to when the Holy Spirit is present and wanting to heal like Jesus was.

18 Just then some men came, carrying on a stretcher a man who was paralyzed. They tried to bring him in and set him down before him. 19 Since they could not find a way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on the stretcher through the roof tiles into the middle of the crowd before Jesus. When you are ripping the roof off of a place to get access to someone, that’s desperation.

20 Seeing *their* faith (*THEIR* faith. That’s an important detail we’ll come back to. ‘Seeing *their* faith’) he said, “Friend, your sins are forgiven.” To which the friends probably said, “Uh ... ok. I mean ... that’s good. Sins forgiven is always a good thing. That’s certainly better than “Your sins aren’t forgiven.” But doesn’t this guy have a more desperate problem right now and isn’t it kind of obvious what he really needs?” And Jesus’ response? “No, he doesn’t have a more urgent need than forgiveness of sins.”

21 Then the scribes and the Pharisees began to think to themselves, “Who is this man who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?” Fair question. I explained this a few weeks ago: The only way it would make sense for Jesus to forgive sins is if he considered himself to be the one sinned against. You can’t forgive things that don’t involve you. We all get that, right? Say you and your spouse (or your roommate) had a terrible fight last night. And they said some of the meanest, rudest things that anyone has ever said to you. And you’re furious, and you’re hurt, and their words left you wondering how you can even continue on in a relationship with someone who thinks, much less *SAYS*, things like that about you. And this morning you came on to church; and of course you put on the church act for everyone: “*How are you?*” “*Oh, blessed and highly favored, brother, how are you?*” but inside you are seething and you’re waiting until you get home so you can let them have it. Well, after church I walk up to that person, in your presence, and I look at them and say, “*I know about your fight last night, and I know what you said to her. I just want you to know that you are forgiven for that, you don’t have to feel bad about that anymore.*” You would probably look at me and say, “Uh, excuse me, *PASTOR*. This has got nothing to do with you. You might be a *pastor*, but you can’t forgive something that wasn’t done to you.” And you’d be correct.

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part book written for the early church to instruct the early church in what Jesus wanted to do through them on earth. Part 2 is the book of Acts, the story of the earliest Christians. Luke begins that 2nd volume by saying, “In my former book...” (talking about the Gospel of Luke) I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach.” Began. ‘Began’ means he started something in Luke that he’s continuing in Acts. What Jesus did in Luke during his earthly ministry, he continues now through the church. And the same Spirit that was on Jesus to teach and to heal and to perform that ministry is on us also. And thus, we can sense, in the Spirit--like Jesus did--when the power of the Spirit is present to do something miraculous, and following the Spirit’s guidance, ask God to do the miraculous through us or around us. And that’s going to become really important in how we apply this story, which I’ll show you at the end. See Norval Geldenhuys, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: Luke*, 189. See also my *Jesus Continued...: Why the Spirit Inside You is Better than Jesus Beside You*.

When Jesus forgave sins and they said, “Who can forgive sins but God alone?” Jesus said: “Ding ding ding! You got it.” In forgiving sins, he was claiming to be God. Does that make sense? **I point that out because every once in a while you’ll hear someone**--a NT professor in college or someone--say that in the earliest Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, each written about 20–30 years after Jesus’ death, Jesus never really claimed to be God. That was something only the Apostle John--who wrote his Gospel about 20 years after these Gospels--something only he claimed Jesus did. And they say that was something John added to try and get people to worship Jesus, which from the beginning they hadn’t done. In the earliest days, these scholars claim, they only thought of Jesus as a prophet. Then John came along and added the stuff about him being God. But you can see here in the Gospel of Luke that that accusation is not true. In forgiving sins, or allowing himself to be worshipped, he’s claiming to be God.

And they all understood that. So they started to whisper to themselves” Blasphemy! **22 But perceiving their thoughts, Jesus replied to them, “Why are you thinking this in your hearts? 23 Which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk’?** Now, that’s a good question. **Let me ask you:** *What do you think? Which is easier to say? Is it easier to say your sins are forgiven, or easier to say to a lame man “get up and walk”?* Clearly it is EASIER to say, “Your sins are forgiven.” Why? Because you can’t tell if it happened. But if I say to a lame man, “Walk,” then you can tell right away whether I have the power that I am claiming to have! If I say, “Get up and walk” to a lame man and he doesn’t do it, you know right away I’m a phony. So Jesus’ logic goes like this: *We know that forgiving sins and making the lame walk are both things only God can do. So, if I can say to a lame man, “Get up and walk,” and he does it, then it’s safe to say that if I say to him “your sins are forgiven,” I can do that too. If I can do the verifiable one, you can trust that I can do the unverifiable one as well.* **Do you follow his logic?** In showing that he has the power to make this lame man walk, he is also proving he has the power to make good on his promise to forgive sins.

See what he says next? Verse **24: But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins**—he told the paralyzed man, “I tell you: Get up, take your stretcher, and go home.”

**25 (And) Immediately he got up before them, picked up what he had been lying on, and went home glorifying God.** My **title for this story** is “*Jesus Heals a Ceiling Fan.*” (See what I did there? He’s a fan of Jesus and coming through the ceiling to see him. A-ceiling-fan? Some of you will get that later.)

**26 Then everyone was astounded, and they were giving glory to God. And they were filled with awe and said, “We have seen incredible things today.”** Yes they had indeed!

**There’s 2 main things I want us to see in this story:** They are two very distinct ideas, but I think they are both really important for us right now, and they both center around this theme of desperation. They are: *Our desperate need*; and, *our desperate faith*.

## 1. Our Desperate Need

- **At first, Jesus' offer to forgive this guy's sins almost seems a little cruel, doesn't it?** I mean, isn't it obvious what this man wants? He's a crippled man lying on a bed in front of Jesus. Yet Jesus just ignores that and goes straight for forgiveness? Isn't that insensitive and a little tone deaf?
- But what if Jesus saw that this man's greatest need--greater than his need for healing--was his need of forgiveness?
- **This guy is desperate to be healed, but Jesus is even more desperate to see him restored to God.** This is the constant theme of Jesus' ministry. People yearn for physical relief to their pain; Jesus yearns--in an almost frantic way--to see them restored to God.
  - In Luke 15 he's the Shepherd who leaves the 99 sheep to go after the one lost; the desperate widow who searches her whole house top to bottom to find a lost coin; the scorned Father who stands at the gate anxiously waiting for his prodigal son to come home, who runs with abandon when he finally sees him coming.
  - In Luke 13 Jesus weeps over Jerusalem and says, "O Jerusalem, how many times I've tried to get you to turn to me."
  - In Luke 19 Jesus summarizes his whole ministry as, "I've come to seek--to desperately search for--and save--at the cost of my life--the lost."
- **What do you think the greatest need of your life is?** Here's my question: **What if your *greatest need is different* than your most pressing desire?** **What if the greatest, most pressing need of your life is for forgiveness?**
- **And maybe that strikes you as insensitive.** Maybe you're sitting here today and you've recently been wronged. Maybe you've been abused. And you say, "How dare you say I need forgiveness? I'm the one who's been wronged! Sure, I need to learn to forgive the person who wronged me, and I'm struggling with that, but it seems insensitive for you to say I need forgiveness, too." Well, you're partially right. But listen to Jesus' wisdom; this is really quite practical: If you've been really wronged, what you need most is a way to forgive those who wronged you. And guess what? You can't ever forgive heinous wrongs unless you experience forgiveness yourself.<sup>2</sup> Embracing forgiveness from God enables you to forgive others.
- **It may be true that you've been wronged;** but it's also true that all of us have wronged God far more than anyone has ever wronged us; and realizing that gives you the power to forgive others. Forgiveness turns bitter water into sweet.
- Listen, I don't know who you are, or **what you think your greatest need is—a car, a job, a spouse, a different spouse, a better roommate, healing from cancer--**what you MOST need is forgiveness. And the good news is that that is why Jesus came. That's why he FIRST offers forgiveness to a lame man lying before him in a stretcher before healing his legs. And that's why ultimately the trajectory of his life was toward a cross. Jesus' main purpose on earth was not to teach great morals or do great miracles; his main purpose was to go to a cross to pay the price for our forgiveness. Jesus' main ministry was not what he taught *to us* but what he did *for us*. Saying "your sins are forgiven" was not just a blessing he uttered

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<sup>2</sup> Tim Keller, "A Paralytic Forgiven," Preached at Redeemer Presbyterian Church, February 1, 2015.  
<https://gospelinlife.com/downloads/a-paralytic-forgiven-8751/>

flippantly; forgiveness of sins was something he purchased by his blood. His death on the cross is WHY he can say to you, "I forgive your sins."

- And he proved that by raising from the dead. The Apostle Paul said one of the main purposes of the Resurrection was to show that Jesus' claim to be dying for our sins was true. So, don't just believe Jesus because he says he has the power to forgive sins; believe him because he demonstrated the power to back that up. **You see, here's the deal:** If he could make the lame walk, and command the wind and the waves to cease, and bring dead men out of the grave, and then come back from the dead himself, then he can make good on his promise to forgive your sins.

*So, we've got our desperate need. Second, in this story, we have--*

## 2. Our Desperate Faith

- I pointed this out as we were reading the story, **vs. 20 says that when Jesus saw THEIR faith. Seeing THEIR faith he said...** (Your sins are forgiven and rise up and walk).
- According to Luke, Jesus did this miracle not so much because of the lame man's faith, but because of the faith of his friends. On behalf of *their faith*--their desperate faith--Jesus healed him.
- **You ask: Well, why didn't this man ask for it himself?** I don't know. Maybe he was so sick he could barely speak anymore. Or maybe he'd just been lame for so long he'd given up hope; he just stopped believing the future could ever be any different. And so into that gap--into that void of despair--their faith stepped in and said, *"No, I believe Jesus is good and he cares about you and will help you."* It was **their faith** that loaded him up onto that stretcher and carried him out to where Jesus was. It was **their faith** that pushed its way through the crowd. It was **their faith** that spawned the ingenuity to go to the top of the house and tear open the roof above Jesus' head. It was **their faith** that made them ignore all the people who were yelling, "Hey, what are you doing?" or the guy who was shouting, "Hey, get off my roof!" It was **their faith** that set the man down expectantly at Jesus' feet as if to say, "Jesus, what are you going to do about this?"
- Write this down: **When the paralyzed man could do little for himself, it was the active faith of his friends that made the difference.**
- What is Luke trying to teach us? He's teaching us that sometimes the faith of somebody around us is so weak that we have to believe for them.
  - Maybe that comes in the form a prodigal child who is confused and has stopped seeking God, and so you are the one bringing them every night in their spiritually paralyzed state to Jesus, saying, *"Master, please do something."*
  - Maybe it's a spouse, a friend, a co-worker--God has placed you in their lives because they are too spiritually weak to pray for themselves--maybe they have given up on the marriage, or given up hope--and so you have to believe God for them.
- **In the New Testament, this special urgency to pray--this drive to tear open a roof and lay this person down at Jesus's feet, believing he will heal them--is called the gift of faith.** It's a gift God gives in different degrees at different times when he wants to do something in someone's life. When his power is present to heal.
- It's a gift we don't talk about enough at our church, but one I really want you to recognize and embrace. I read a book a couple of years ago by a friend named Sam Storms who really helped me get my mind

around this. The book is called *Practicing the Power*. Dr. Storms says that when the New Testament uses the word “faith,” it uses it in 3 different ways, and unless you recognize the 3 different uses of the word “faith,” you’ll probably get confused.

- First we have **Salvation faith**: this is the faith that embraces Christ as Lord and Savior. Ephesians 2:8: “By grace you have been saved through faith.” All Christians have that. It’s what makes us Christians.
- Second, we have **Sustaining faith**: This is the general confidence that God is present with us and will never leave us or forsake us; confidence in his goodness, confidence that he is in control and sovereignly working all things for good. This is what we typically mean when we say “so and so has strong faith.” We mean they seem to have an unshakeable confidence in God’s plan. Again, all Christians should have this at all times.
- But finally, Dr. Storms says, there is **The spiritual gift of faith**. And that is what you see here at work in this story. This is a special bestowal of faith that God gives to certain Christians at certain times when he wants to do something miraculous through you or around you. You sense, by the Spirit, an urge to pray, an urge to press into the goodness of God, an urge to lay down someone at Jesus’ feet. This is the kind of faith Paul had in mind when he spoke of *the spiritual gift of faith* in 1 Corinthians 12:9. “Some,” he says, “are given the gift of faith.” I was always confused by that because I thought, “Don’t all Christians have faith? Isn’t it our DUTY to trust God? Why would Paul say some of us have a special gift of it?” Paul doesn’t say “some have the gift of purity or honesty,” so why would he say some have the gift of faith?
  - That’s because **he’s not talking about *salvation faith* or *sustaining faith***, which we all should have, he’s talking about a special spiritual gift of faith, which God gives to those who are walking in the Spirit when he wants to do something miraculous, a faith that moves them to pray and trust God for someone.
  - Let me quote Dr. Storms: **While all faith is an expression of trust and humble dependence upon God, this (spiritual gift of faith) is the experience of faith that arises somewhat spontaneously and unexpectedly in our hearts. (We feel certain God wants to do something; we sense his power is present to heal). When God wants to bless us with a miraculous answer to our prayer, he will take the initiative to cultivate and build into our hearts the fulfillment of the condition he requires. (Jesus only does his miracles in response to faith, so where he wants to do a miracle, he stirs up in believers to believe him for something and ask him for it in faith.) Therefore, each time as we pray, each time we seek God, let us begin by asking God for an extraordinary, powerful faith. Let us ask God that he work in us to produce and sustain the confidence that he is pleased to bless.**<sup>3</sup>

**This is the faith these friends in Luke 5 are showing.** God put it in the hearts of these friends to press through the crowds so that he could work in this man the miracle he desired--the power of the Lord was present to heal--so he put the faith in their hearts that moved them to ask for that miracle!

**My question for you:** What paralyzed person around you has God put in your heart to pray for? A friend? A prodigal child? A parent? A whole people group?

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<sup>3</sup> Sam Storms, *Practicing the Power*, 53.

I recently read a book by **James Banks**, who is a pastor from right here in Durham, pastor of a Presbyterian church--he's become a friend--he talks about the journey of praying for two prodigal kids, one of whom has come back to Jesus and the other who hasn't yet. **Here's what he said:**

*"When we pray for our prodigal kids, we carry them on stretchers of faith to Jesus. We do the heavy lifting, but they receive the benefit. They may be entirely passive or even actively resisting us, but Jesus sees our faith as we bring them to him."*

Parents, don't you sense faith rising up in your heart as I say that? Do you realize that God at this very moment has put you in a place to intercede? To pray! **His power is present to heal**--your desire to pray is evidence of that. But he won't grant the miracle unless you exercise the faith. Had the friends not made the journey and not torn open the roof--had they gotten discouraged, had they looked at the crowd and said, "Oh well, this is too hard, if God really wanted this man healed he'd have made it easier" the man would not have received his miracle!

Even **if it's not a prodigal son or daughter** you are praying for, I bet there is somebody--some person God has put into your heart to pray for. I want to urge you to obey that. Years ago I read a book by **Jim Cymbala** called *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire*, that tells the story of how God brought his own prodigal daughter home, who had forsaken God and run away from home.

Their church does a Tuesday night prayer meeting each week--I've actually been. It's one of the most powerful things I've ever experienced. And one night, Pastor Cymbala shared from Acts 4 about the church boldly calling on God, even in the face of discouragement. Let me let him tell the story:

*We entered into a time of prayer like Acts 4, everyone reaching out to the Lord in concert together.*

*An usher handed me a note. A young woman whom I felt to be spiritually sensitive had written: Pastor Cymbala, I feel impressed that we should stop the meeting and all pray for your daughter. ...*

*In a few minutes I picked up the microphone and told the congregation what [was going on with my daughter.] ... There arose a groaning, a sense of desperate determination, as if to say, "Satan, you will not have this girl. Take your hands off her, she's coming back!" I was overwhelmed. The force of that vast throng calling on God almost literally knocked me over.*

*When I got home that night, Carol was waiting up for me. We sat at the kitchen table, and I said, "It's over with Chrissy. You would have had to be in the prayer meeting tonight. I tell you, if there's a God in heaven, this whole nightmare is finally over."*

*Thirty-two hours later, on Thursday morning, [my daughter walked in, and we both just began to cry.] ... "Daddy," she said with a start, "Who was praying for me? Who was praying for me? ... On Tuesday night, daddy--who was praying for me?" I didn't say anything, so she continued:*

*'In the middle of the night, God woke me up and showed me I was heading toward this abyss. There was no bottom to it--it scared me to death. I was so frightened. I realized how hard I've been, how wrong, how rebellious. But at the same time, it was like God wrapped his arms around me and held me tight. He kept me from sliding any farther as he assured me, I still love you and I'm not walking away'*<sup>4</sup>

That same Tuesday night, the very hour the church was praying, God moved in her soul and showed her that she was headed toward destruction, all the while flooding her heart with a sense of his love.

That's a group of friends being bestowed with the gift of faith. James Banks says, "Our prodigal kids desperately need us to lift them to Jesus on the stretcher of prayer. Even if they don't have faith, he will see ours. And they will be blessed because of it."

2 ways I want to close:

- **First, I want to tell you about something** we are going to start this year, something I hope we'll make a lot more frequent here.
  - We're going to **open up this year, as a church, with a fast**, where we are asking God specifically to do some things only he can do. You say, "21 Days of Fasting and Prayer"? Yes, we'll explain options to do it--some of you may fast for one meal each of those days; some of you may cut certain foods out of your diet for 21 days; others, kids or teens, may fast from some one thing, like social media or video games, the whole time. We'll give you options. But I'd love for everyone to do something.
  - And we're going to give you daily prayer points.
  - You'll be able to sign up for daily email reminders, it'll all be on our website, social media, etc. We're going to saturate everything we do in January in prayer.
  - This will all culminate in an all church Night of Prayer towards the end of January at all of our permanent locations...which you'll be hearing more about in the days and weeks to come.
  - I've told you before, Jesus said we're to be known as a house of prayer. Are we? COVID disrupted things for a while. As we relaunch as a church this year, I want us to do it with prayer as a staple, a core, a foundation, in all that we do. We're not going to fit in at the margins, while we preach and program, we're going to lay it in at the foundation and build the rest of the house around it. This fast is part of that, and I hope all of you will join me in it. Plus, there are miracles in the lives of your sons and daughters and neighbors and even your own life also that are waiting to happen if you'll exercise faith like this and press through for them.
- **Second, I want to give you a chance to pray right now.** At your campus, prayer counselors are coming up, right now. What do you need prayer for? What prodigal son or daughter? You say, "Get up in front of all

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<sup>4</sup> Jim Cymbala, *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire*, 65–67.

these people and come down? Yes. That may be your tearing off the roof. If there are more people than counselors, just take a knee and pour out your heart to God..." Get up now and come.

- For those of you online, if you're watching through Church Online you can stop now and pray with those in your living room. Maybe you're in your HG and you just need to pause this. Right now. Pause it and pray together as a group. Or, if you are alone, simply click the "request prayer" button and it'll actually take you straight to a live prayer counselor in a digital prayer room where you can share your request with one of pastors or hosts.

As our worship teams come at our live locations, let's pray...

