

**Luke 5:17-26 (1984 NIV)**  
***What a Friend We Have in Jesus***

**Introduction**

As part of an assignment for a doctoral thesis, a college student spent a year with a group of Navajo Indians on a reservation in the Southwest of the US. As he did his research he lived with one family, sleeping in their hut, eating their food, working with them, and generally living the life of a modern-day Navajo Indian.

The old grandmother of the family spoke no English at all, yet a very close friendship formed between the two. They spent a great deal of time sharing a friendship that was meaningful to each, yet unexplainable to anyone else. In spite of the language difference, they shared the common language of love and understood each other. Over the months he learned a few phrases of Navajo, and she picked up a little of the English language.

When it was time for him to return to the campus and write his thesis, the tribe held a going-away celebration. It was marked by sadness since the young man had become close to the whole village and all would miss him. As he prepared to get up into the pickup truck and leave, the old grandmother came to bid him goodbye. With tears streaming from her eyes, she placed her hands on either side of his face, looked directly into his eyes and said, "I like me best when I'm with you."

(<https://www.cofchrist.com.au/blog/2022/1/27/i-like-me-best-when-im-with-you-the-blessing-of-family-and-friends>)

That should be the way we are to feel when we come into the presence of Jesus Christ. We learn to appreciate ourselves as worthy and valuable in His presence and love.

Indeed, to be a true friend in Jesus to other people is to generate in them the same statement as that of the Navajo grandmother—"I like me best when I'm with you."

If I ask you to think of some people whom you would consider as true friends, you would probably have some names and faces in mind. But what are some qualities in these people that mark them out as true friends to you? What is your definition of a true friend?

Here are some definitions of a true friend:

- One who multiplies joys and divides grief.
- One who understands our silence.
- A volume of sympathy bound in cloth.
- A watch that beats true for all time and never runs down.

Walter Winchell, a well-known American journalist of his time, once crafted a definition of a true friend that supposedly won a prize for best definition. It goes something like this—"A true friend is the one who walks in to you when the whole world has walked out of you." Indeed in the world of harsh realities, I don't have to convince you that we need someone like this from time to time.

In Luke 5:17-26, we see Scripture painting for us a beautiful portrait of true friendship. There are at least two features we can see in this beautiful portrait of true friendship. The first is ...

**I. A true friend not only carries you up when you're champ, but also lifts you up when you are down (vv. 17-20).**

17 One day as he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law, who had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem, were sitting there. And the power of the Lord was present for him to heal the sick. 18 Some men came carrying a paralytic on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus. 19 When they could not find a way to do this because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus. 20 When Jesus saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven."

In our story today, we see a paralytic, someone who is down and out. We also see how different people respond to this paralytic. The first group of these people are the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law (i.e. the scribes).

- These are the "separatists" in Jesus' time; they separate themselves from the other people because they pride themselves on being more righteous and more holy before God.
- Thus, they think that they are not like the other people; they must distance themselves from the rest lest they are seen to have compromised themselves.
- And we see them right here among the crowd to whom Jesus is teaching.
- Of course, as "separatists" they are not there to be a part of the motley crowd; they are not there seeking to learn from Jesus or to be ministered by Him. Rather, they are there purely to find fault with Jesus in His teachings and actions.
- So, the appearance of the paralytic before them provides just that timely opportunity even though they feel nothing but scorn for this invalid.
- To understand why this is so, you have to understand the socio-religious climate at that time.
  - As a paralytic, this man is viewed as having a socially unacceptable condition because he is religiously unclean.
  - People with physical infirmities are looked upon as having done something wrong to bring such woes upon themselves.
  - The common thing to say to these people is, "You have sin in your life, and God is punishing you for it."
  - Such people would hardly have any friends because befriending them would mean risking "tainted" by them.

- So, don't ever think of asking a Pharisee or scribe to help a paralytic up on his feet; they would not touch him with a 10-foot pole!
- We shake our heads and tell ourselves that those were the long-gone days, but we today are not so "separatist".

My wife and I have known a couple who lost their two-year-old daughter many years ago. The girl suffered from an incurable blood disorder.

As this couple were going through the pain of seeing their little girl nearing death day by day, many of their relatives were distancing themselves from them. These people feared that they would become "tainted" with the bad luck of this couple. They believed that this couple (not Christians then) had offended some god, and they were now being punished for some wrong doing.

We shake our heads and tell ourselves that only the pagans would believe and behave in such a manner. But we Christians are not like that; we know better.

However, the fact of life is that even Christians today can have a Pharisee in them when they say to someone, "If you are not healed; if you are still inflicted, there must be something wrong with you. God must be angry with you."

- Indeed, it is obvious that the Pharisees and scribes in our text today respond to the paralytic, one who is down and out, with a scornful and hands-off attitude.

The next group of people we see is those "some men" mentioned in v. 18.

- From the context of the story, it is not too far-fetched to conclude that these men are no strangers to the paralytic. In fact, they are concerned friends of this man and want to see him get well.
- Their friend is down and out. Somehow, they still believe that if they can lift up their friend and bring him to Jesus, he has a chance to be healed.
- And that's exactly what they do. In the parallel account in Mark 2, we are told that there are actually four men who carry the paralytic to Jesus.
- But when they get near the house where Jesus is, they realise that it is jam-packed. There is no way to get in through the door (or even the windows).
- Now, they have a very good reason to stop helping their friend, haven't they? But they cannot bring themselves to do that.
- So they look up and they see the roof. Yes, up the roof they go, carrying the paralytic with them.
- And when they have reached the roof top, they tear up the roof, making a hole that is big enough for their friend to be lowered down right in front of Jesus!
- Imagine the commotion.
  - All the people are listening attentively to Jesus.
  - Then there is this sudden drop of debris from the roof top as the four men step heavily on the roof tiles to look for the best spot to lower their friend.

- And as these men tear up the roof, one giant hole suddenly opens up. Imagine the owner of the house screaming, “My roof! My roof! Is it an earthquake?!”
- The others in the house just gape in awe and amazement as they see a life-size man being lowered before their eyes on a mat.
- Let me pause and ask, “How many of you can really say that you have friends who will go to such an extent to help you?”
- Without doubt, true friends these four men are to the paralytic—they carry him up not because he’s champ; they literally lift him up when he is down and out ... as if he’s a champion.
- But there is something else more important than just showing themselves to be true friends of the paralytic.
  - In taking all the trouble to bring their friend before Jesus, they have demonstrated their faith in Jesus. In v. 20a, we are told that “Jesus saw their faith”.
  - We are not sure if this includes the faith of the paralytic, but it probably does. Otherwise, the paralytic will probably resist the dangerous climb up the roof top. But it does certainly speak of the faith of the four men. Their action not only shows friendship, but more importantly, it shows faith.
  - Their friend is paralysed and helpless; no doctor seems to be able to heal him; he is like a man without hope and help.
  - But his four friends have faith in Jesus. They believe that if they can just bring the paralytic into the presence of Jesus, he will have a chance to be healed.

What does this mean for Christians like you and me today? Let me ask you to do something.

- Close your eyes and at my word “begin”, I want you to count with me from 1 to 3, and then open your eyes.
- If you are ready, close your eyes now and let’s count 1 ... 2 ... 3. Open your eyes!
- Imagine just when you open your eyes at the end of our count, the Lord Jesus returns.
- Question: How many of those you love as family, relatives, and friends are lost forever without knowing Jesus Christ?

Like the paralytic in our text today, many people are dependent on Christians who care enough and who believe enough to bring them into the presence of Jesus Christ.

- As believers, we can do this by inviting them to church; by sharing the gospel with them; by offering them the encouragement and the help they need as we reach out to them with the love of Jesus Christ in our words and actions.

You remember the couple I mentioned earlier; the couple who lost their young daughter?

Not long after the death of the girl, Iris (who was my fiancée then) and I got married. We invited this couple to our wedding ... and they couldn't believe it at first.

The lady called up and asked, "Are you sure you want to invite us? Even our own family and relatives are avoiding us. They are afraid that our bad luck may affect them."

We affirmed our intention to invite them and they were so happy to be at our wedding.

Today, this couple are baptised believers worshipping faithfully in a church. In fact, not long after the death of their child, the Lord blessed them with a son in addition to their elder daughter.

I did not share the gospel verbally with them (someone else did so sometime after the loss of their child). But I believe that by our little act of inviting them to our wedding, Iris and I had shown them the encouragement and love of our Lord at their time of need.

I am sure you are capable of doing better than us, but I trust that my point here is clear to you.

- We may not be called to tear up a roof in order to lower down a friend before Jesus. But we are all called to touch someone in the Lord's love in some measure as He leads and enables us.

To be a true friend in Jesus' name is to help someone experience His presence, love, and acceptance; to help someone realise that even though he is down and out, the Lord is still giving him a chance to stand up again in life.

A second feature in this beautiful portrait of true friendship painted in our text today is this ...

## **II. A true friend desires God's very best for the other person (vv. 20-26).**

20 When Jesus saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven." 21 The Pharisees and the teachers of the law began thinking to themselves, "Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" 22 Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, "Why are you thinking these things in your hearts? 23 Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? 24 But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins ..." He said to the paralyzed man, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." 25 Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God. 26 Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, "We have seen remarkable things today."

When Jesus sees the paralytic lowered right in front of Him, He recognised that it is a calling out in faith for help. Verse 20 tells us—“When Jesus saw their faith, He said, ‘Friend, your sins are forgiven.’” In their parallel accounts, Matthew and Mark, who were Jews, used the more affectionate term “son”—they recorded that Jesus told the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven.”

But here in Luke 5:20, the writer Luke who is Gentile, prefers to paraphrase by using the word “friend” (also translated “man”). Perhaps he wants to communicate an endearing term like “friend” rather than a family term like “son” to the Gentile audience He has in mind.

When the paralytic is lowered before Jesus, Luke tells us that the Lord says to him, “Friend, your sins are forgiven.”

- Hey! Has Jesus gotten it wrong?
- The man comes to be healed of his paralysis, not to be forgiven of his sins.
- For Luke, believed to be a doctor, this must be an interesting situation—has Jesus misdiagnosed the case and administered the wrong treatment plan?
- No, Jesus has not made a mistake. In fact, He is right on target and He is really addressing the real sickness—it is the sickness of the human nature, not just that of the human body.
- Unseen to the human eyes, Jesus discerns that this man is paralysed by sin; that he is sin-sick.
- The Bible tells us that because of the Fall of Man, sin has entered the world. Rom. 3:23 says, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”
- We are not sure if the man’s sickness is the direct result of some specific sin committed by him, but what we are sure is that he needs forgiveness because of the sin of the fallen human nature in him. And the Lord Jesus forgives him.

Here is a fable about a scorpion and a beaver.

The scorpion asked the beaver to take him across the river on his back. “Are you insane?” asked the beaver. “While I’m swimming you’ll sting me and then I’ll drown.”

“Oh, come on,” laughed the scorpion. “Why would I sting you? Then I’d drown too. Come on. Be logical.”

“That makes sense,” said the beaver. “Hop on and off we’ll go.”

The scorpion climbed on the beaver’s back, but midway across the river, he gave the beaver a mighty sting.

As they both sank to the bottom, the beaver asked, “Why did you do such a wicked and stupid thing? You said yourself that there would be no logic for you to sting me. Why then did you do it?”

“Logic has nothing to do with it,” sighed the scorpion. “It’s just my nature.”

- Jesus knows that it is in the fallen human nature to sin, regardless of one's physical condition—paralysis or no paralysis. Thus when He says, “Friend, your sins are forgiven,” He is actually addressing first thing first.
- To the four friends of the paralytic, their first concern is to see the man healed of his physical sickness. That's good; that's noble; that's as best as they can see.
- But that's not the Lord's very best for him—the Lord's first concern for him is for him to be forgiven; to be healed of his sickness of sin.
- So when Jesus tells the paralytic, “Friend, your sins are forgiven,” He is introducing Himself as more than one who has the supernatural power to heal physical sickness. Jesus is really introducing Himself as one who has the divine authority to forgive sins.
- Jesus tells the paralytic that his sins are forgiven before He heals his paralysis because He knows, He desires, and He gives God's very best to him.
- Yes, it is good to be healthy and wealthy. But the very best that God has for us in Jesus Christ; the very thing that is of first importance between the Holy God and a fallen man is for the man to be healed spiritually—i.e. to be forgiven of his sins so that he can be in close friendship and fellowship with Jesus Christ, sent by God the Father to bring forgiveness of sins to our fallen world.

What does all this mean for us today to know that we have such a Friend in Jesus Christ?

- Firstly, it means that in many of our problems in life, Jesus wants to deal with the root issue rather than the surface symptoms; and that can be painful and even threatening.
  - The Lord may be calling us to be honest and confess the struggle just as it is—SIN.
  - It can be a struggle with unbelief; it can be a struggle with false guilt; it can be a struggle with hatred; it can be a struggle with envy.
  - And the Lord is saying, “Stop giving names and labels; just confess that struggle as a sin in your life.”
  - Would you do that today as the Lord speaks to you?
- Secondly, to know that we have such a Friend in Jesus often means we have to respond in obedience if we are to receive His very best for us.
  - That can be challenging because we may not be able to reason out how we can do what the Lord is saying—we may think it is irrelevant; we may think it is illogical; we may think it is old-fashioned; we may think it is not street-smart.
  - But the Lord says, “Respond in obedience to me if you are to receive and enjoy my very best for you.”
  - In v. 24 Jesus tells the paralytic, “Get up, take your mat and go home.” It is interesting to note that the man does not start debating or rationalising how this is possible.
  - Instead v. 25 says, “Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God.” The man simply responds

in obedience and receives the Lord's very best for him—i.e. not only physical healing, but forgiveness of sins as well.

- Would you also do that as the Lord speaks to you?

When Jesus says, "Your sins are forgiven," He immediately clashes with the theology of the Pharisees and scribes.

- You see, these religious leaders and experts believe that physical sickness is a sign of divine displeasure and punishment for some sin in a person's life.
- If God is the one who is displeased and the one who punishes this man because of sin, then only God Himself can forgive that sin.
- If Jesus claims to forgive the man of his sins, then Jesus is claiming to be God—and that's blasphemy because as far as the Pharisees and scribes are concerned, Jesus is as human as you and I.
- Now, these religious elites have heard and seen what Jesus has said and done just like the other witnesses. Yet, they cannot or will not accept that Jesus can forgive sins.
- Why? Well, not because they are honest doubters who seek for more evidence. Rather, they are hardened unbelievers who want to box Jesus into their own idea of what they want Him to be—i.e. He's just a man, and He's no God no matter what they have heard and seen Him to have done.
- These hardened elites are blinded by their own pride and self-sufficiency, and refuse to see, believe, and accept anything that is not in line with what they have already determined in their heart and mind.

Some of you here are not yet believers in Jesus Christ.

- I humbly and lovingly urge you not to close up your heart and mind like the Pharisees and scribes in our text today.
- Do not be hardened unbelievers like them, refusing to accept what the Bible teaches about Jesus because you have already determined in your heart and mind who Jesus is and is not.
- Be open to what the Bible says about Jesus.
  - The Bible tells us today that Jesus can forgive sins—your sins and my sins.
  - Our human nature is fallen, and thus, we stand sinful before God.
  - Because of our fallen human nature, we are bent towards sin in so many ways, as if we are in some kind of bondage.
  - But today, Jesus is saying to you who have yet to believe in Him, "I want you to put your faith in me, and be forgiven of your sins. I want to be your Friend; I want you to have God's very best in your life—i.e. to be free from this bondage to sin and live a new life."
  - Would you do that today?
- The Pharisees and scribes murmur in unbelief against Jesus in their hearts, and Jesus challenges their unbelief in v. 23, "Which is easier: to say 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk?'"
  - Of course, the Pharisees and scribes would consider that it is easier to say something that cannot be verified by sight, like "Your sins are forgiven"—nobody can verify if you are a fraud or not.



- Contrarily, it is more difficult to say something that can be verified visually—like “Get up and walk.” People can verify if you are a fraud or not, depending on what they see happens or does not happen.
- So Jesus challenges the unbelief of the Pharisees and scribes, and He goes on to heal the man of his paralysis.
  - This is to show them that He is no fraud; to give them visible evidence that He indeed has the authority to forgive sins.
  - We can say that Jesus makes His authority to forgive the man’s sins a visible reality when He exercises His power to heal the man’s paralysis, thus proving that He is no fraud. Jesus has chosen to verify His invisible authority to forgive sins with His visible power to heal physical sickness in our text today.

What does this mean for us today?

- For you who have yet to believe in Jesus Christ, here’s a gentle call—trust in Jesus for He’s no fly-by-night fraud. He really has the divine authority to forgive sins.
- For those of us who profess faith in Jesus Christ, here’s a challenge—let’s show the world that we are no frauds; let’s make visible what is invisible; let’s show by our verbal words and visible actions that our commitment to Christ is real. This is what it means for us to be Christlike—i.e. living our lives before others such that we can verbally as well as visibly testify that our love, faith, faithfulness, and unity as the Lord’s people is indeed real and true.

## Conclusion

Friendship is a gift from God and we want to thank Him for it. In our world of harsh realities, we need true friends who will stand by us and with us from time to time.

What do we learn about the God’s gift of true friendship today?

- We learn that a true friend will carry you up when you are down and out. And in Jesus Christ, we have this Friend. The Lord says in Matt. 11:28, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” Jesus is the Friend whom we can ask to help carry our load when it becomes too heavy in life.
- Also, we learn that a true friend will desire God’s very best for us. In Jesus Christ, we have this Friend. He desires God’s very best for us—He wants to heal our broken heart, our shattered spirit, and our troubled mind. In other words, He wants to meet our needs at the deepest level and not just on the physical surface, even though this physical dimension is important to us and to Him as well.

To those who are still seeking the truth, I say, “Don’t be like the crowd in our text today. They were amazed and fascinated by what they saw, but they failed to put their faith in Jesus Christ. Also, don’t be like the Pharisees and scribes in our text today. They saw even the miraculous, but they simply refused to believe because they had already

made up their mind about Jesus—i.e. He has no divine authority to forgive sins. I humbly and lovingly urge you to put your faith in Jesus Christ—He wants to call you as His friend because He wants to be the Friend to you. And what a Friend you will find Him to be if and when you come to Him in faith and trust Him as the Friend sent from God to you. Would you be open to consider this today? We will be most happy to talk more with you if you would approach us after the service.”

To my fellow believers in Jesus Christ, I say, “Thank God for His gift of true friendship in the Person of Jesus Christ today. As our act to be Christlike, let’s seek to be such a friend to others today.”

Yes, may we all be open to consider what it means to each one of us personally to trust Jesus as the Friend sent from God to us, and to be such a friend to others today. Amen!