

Breaking Barriers, Building Bridges Together

Luke 5: 17-26

Today, as we continue our series entitled “Breakthrough” I want to ask you a simple question. How you answer this question will determine if you really are positioning yourself for a breakthrough.

What kind of people do you allow into your life?

Do you allow faith-filled people to surround you? Do they speak life over you? Do they carry you to Jesus? In the moment of crisis, how do they respond?

Or, do you surround yourself with people who speak negatively, who gossip, and who backbite? Who always love to share the next juicy nugget with you? Who, in the moment of crisis, tear down your faith and like to be the realist, always giving you the most negative prognosis?

Or, maybe you don’t have any close friends, which is typical of the world we are living in today. We live in such a connected world, you know, the internet and stuff, but people are more disconnected and lonelier than ever before.

When we are in crisis, doubts creep in. Our hearts can wander. All by ourselves is a dangerous place to be. We need faith-filled friends who will lift us up. We need to surround ourselves with faith-filled friends and be faith-filled friends for others. This is a necessity. We need each other to see a break through. We can’t do this life on our own.

That’s why I’m going to talk about “Breaking Barriers, Building Bridges Together”. Let’s read together this passage from Ecclesiastes 4:9-12.

Where do we usually hear these verses recited? In weddings, right? This is a beautiful picture of how two people, together with Jesus can stand and not fall. But this passage doesn’t talk about marriage at all although it’s a nice application. It’s

talking about the importance of building relationships with others and the significance of helping each other.

Helen Keller said, “Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.”

That’s very true. Yes, you can achieve something, like solve a problem, by doing it by yourself. But you can do so much more and faster when you enlist the help of others. Don’t be a lone ranger.

Like in my job as a web developer. Normally, I work by myself in front of my computer. With three monitors before me. When I encounter a problem in my code I would normally look into it by myself. Sometimes I can work on it quickly. But there are times when the problem is so complex that no matter how many monitors are before me, I couldn’t work on it alone. If you’re like me, however, you wouldn’t call for help until you become so desperate. And you realize you’re wasting so much time. And that’s when I would ask another developer to come by to help me sort it out. And in a few moments, the problem is solved.

We have been watching movie clips from the movie “Breakthrough”. We see the importance of a praying, faith-filled community in the miracle of John Smith. From the moment John fell through the ice, the Smith family was surrounded by friends, family, a church family, a school family, and pastors that walked alongside them.

Here is a clip from the movie where, earlier in the day, Joyce had rested because of her diabetes. The doctor gave her strict orders to take a break. At the end of the rest time, Pastor Jason came in to check on her. Let’s watch it together.

(Play clip #4)

Joyce realized she couldn’t control the situation. At that moment, she needed a faith-filled friend to encourage her and walk beside her. It was a game-changing point in the story. Because the encouragement of others led to a miracle later on that everyone witnessed.

I want to take you to another miracle in Scripture where we see this so well illustrated.

In Luke 5, we read about a man who was paralyzed. He had lived his life laying on this mat. Being paralyzed meant this man could do nothing for himself. He had to depend on someone else for everything. This man was completely dependent on others.

He was also hopeless because, at that time, there was nothing that could be done for him — no surgeries or physical rehab. He would lie on his mat forever. Could you imagine facing life like that? That was his life.

As bad as it was for him physically, there were other devastating issues, too.

In the ancient world, you see, people with physical defects were viewed as dispensable or worse. The ancient Greeks, for example, disposed of new-born babies with deformities. In ancient Israel, people with deformities or disability were treated unfairly and isolated. That was the cruelty these people received from others.

There were also spiritual issues for this man. In that day, people believed physical suffering was brought on by sin. They thought suffering was a punishment from God.

So, this man was thought of as different, less than, useless, and cursed by God. Yet, somehow, he was surrounded by an amazing group of friends. These friends loved this man. We don't know whether the paralyzed man asked for their help to bring him to Jesus. Or whether his friends were the ones who told him that Jesus was teaching and they would carry him to Jesus. It doesn't matter. The thing is, these friends wanted more than anything for their paralyzed buddy to be healed. They realized that their friend needed to be close to Jesus. Whatever it took. Whatever kind of sacrifice they would have to make, they were willing to do it. Those are the kind of friends I want in my life!

Imagine the journey. They carried their friend all the way to Jesus. Think about the strong commitment these friends must have had.

The man and his friends arrived at the house where Jesus was, only to find it completely packed with people who also wanted to get close to Jesus. There was no way inside. In fact, a crowd of people surrounded the house, hoping for a glimpse of Jesus or to hear what He was saying. Not only could they not get in the house, they couldn't even get close.

They carried their friend all this distance and now they couldn't even get near Jesus. That was a big barrier they couldn't break.

No one would've blamed them for giving up. The journey was difficult enough. In spite of their good intentions, things were not turning out the way they hoped.

This group of friends, however, were determined to help their buddy get healed. They were desperate for their friend. Their buddy needed healing. They were not going to let him live another day in that crippled condition. Their buddy needed a miracle, they believed Jesus could do it, and they were going to find a way.

They put their heads together and came up with a plan. I have no idea where this plan came from, but it's typical for guys when they get together. Guys like to solve things, and that's exactly what they did.

Their plan was crazy. They were going to take their buddy up on the roof of the house, tear the roof open, drop him in front of Jesus, and the deal would be done. The roof was a literal barrier but it was not going to stop them. (Show picture of a typical house)

Faithful and faith-filled friends will do things that seem crazy in the natural, but they won't give up until God shows up!

I wish I could have witnessed them moving their paralyzed friend to the roof. They would have had to go to the back of the house and bring him up a tight stairwell to get access to the roof. These guys were committed and not giving up.

They got the man on the roof and started tearing it apart. Could you imagine being inside the house as the flakes from the ceiling started to descend? You look up and see a crack, and emerging through that crack, lots of fingers.

As everyone stared, bewildered, the hole grew larger and finally four smiling faces appeared.

Once the hole was big enough, they **“lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus. When Jesus saw their faith, He said, ‘Friend, your sins are forgiven.’”** Luke 5:19-20.

I love that they came hoping for a physical healing, but Jesus addressed the more important issue of the man’s spiritual condition. Isn’t it just like God to give us what we need, not just what we ask for? Jesus forgave the man’s sins, which is the greatest need of everyone!

But Jesus wasn’t done yet. A moment later, he said to the paralyzed man, **“I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.’ Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God. Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, ‘We have seen remarkable things today.’”** Luke 5:24-26.

I also love that it says, “when Jesus saw their faith.” Whose faith did He see? Not only the paralyzed man’s faith. It was also the faith of his friends that got the man to Jesus. It was the faith of the friends that positioned the man for the miracle he needed. If he had not surrounded himself with the right friends, he would have never gotten to Jesus, never gotten healed physically, and never heard Jesus tell him his sins were forgiven. Without his friends, this miracle never would have happened.

I want to share with you four things that faithful and faith-filled friends do, that position you for a breakthrough:

Faithful and Faith-Filled Friends...

1 – Encourage You with Their Words.

You know you have the right kind of friends by what comes out of their mouths, especially when you are seeking a miracle.

Do they share God's wisdom or their own opinions? Do they have a faith-fueled, God-centered positivity? Or do they speak negative thoughts that intensify your doubts?

Proverbs 18:21 says, "The tongue has the power of life and death". We need friends who are going to speak life over us. Meaning, we need people around us who will encourage us with their words.

I'm sure these were the kind of friends the paralyzed man had. Perhaps, as they found this barrier of people around Jesus, the paralyzed man was thinking, "No way I'm going to get near Jesus. No way I'm going to get healed". I don't think he would even suggest going up the roof and breaking the roof. Maybe he even told them, "Let's go now. No point of staying here." But his friends were there to see this through. I'm sure they lifted him up with their words. "No, we won't turn back. We've come this far. We're sure there's a way. We'll help you".

Our tongue has the power of life and death. We can speak life over our friends or we can speak death. Our friends can speak life over us or death.

We live in a society where we have forgotten this. People throw around words like they have no power and don't matter. Every word we speak matters. We need friends who will speak the truths and promises of God over our lives and situations.

I've heard people say, "I'm just the realist" in this situation. We don't need someone who only sees the physical side of our situations. We need a group of

friends who will speak spiritual truths over our lives. Who will stand with us and speak “breakthrough” truth over what we are walking through.

In the movie we saw last night, every one of those women whose husband was killed would be justified to give up and go back to the US. But they stayed. Why? Because they encouraged one another. I’m sure that’s what happened. Each one of them pointed the others to what God has called them to do. It was a hard time for them. They were facing a great barrier in accomplishing God’s will for their lives. They broke through anyway and saw a miracle because they spoke words of encouragement to each other.

Faithful and Faith-Filled Friends encourage you with their words. They also

2 – Exhibit crazy faith.

We need friends who will exhibit crazy faith. Crazy faith causes people to do crazy things.

What seems crazy to us, sometimes, is exactly what God expects us to do in order to position us for a breakthrough. Carrying a paralyzed man through the city, getting him on top of a roof, breaking open a roof, and hoisting him down. That’s pretty crazy. If you were one of them, would you even think of that? You would if you were walking closely with Jesus. Or if you really want to get close to Jesus. Thank God for these crazy faith-filled friends. Nothing could just stop them.

That crazy faith impressed Jesus, and breakthrough happened. This man was saved spiritually and physically because he had friends willing to do something that looked crazy!

When you are following God, get ready. He may ask you to do some things that seem pretty crazy. We may not understand it but God knows exactly what he’s doing.

The Bible says in **Isaiah 55:8, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD.”**

It reminds me of the time I was a missionary in Russia in a little town called Krasnodar in the early part of 1992. I became friends with an air force lieutenant. His name is Sasha. One day, Sasha invited me and others in our group to go to their base outside of the town to distribute Bibles. We were excited about the prospect of distributing lots of Bibles to military personnel and their families. That excitement, however, was tempered by the fact that it may not be a good idea because we run the risk of being apprehended and questioned why we were doing that. We might be arrested for spying for the US. Russia at the time had just opened to the western world but no one was so sure about their military policies. It was a barrier that we had to overcome if we were going to pursue this plan.

In the end, after praying and encouraging one another, we agreed to go. There were four of us who went with Sasha in the morning to the air force base by bus. To cut a long story short, we were able to distribute all three boxes of Bibles we had. However, it was actually Sasha who did the distribution, going from house to house in the base and offices. He suggested it himself in order to lessen the risk for us.

Entertaining the thought of distributing Bibles in a heavily-guarded air force base sounds crazy. But it happened.

Folks, what may seem crazy to you is exactly what makes sense to God.

Faithful and faith-filled friends are those who encourage you, who have crazy faith, and thirdly,

3 - Carry you to Jesus.

You need friends in your life who will carry you to Jesus. Who will act as a bridge toward Jesus.

This man's friends were not content leaving him paralyzed and hopeless. They were willing do whatever it took for this man to find a breakthrough.

What they committed to do wasn't easy, but they were not okay with the status quo. They did not accept the fact this man was paralyzed and forever would be.

They pushed this man out of his comfort zone. Folks, we need faithful and faith-filled friends who will surround us and push us out of our comfort zones. We need friends who won't just accept that our situation has always been that way and will always be that way. We need friends who love us enough to carry us to Jesus when we can't carry ourselves.

This man was literally unable to position himself to receive a breakthrough. He needed his friends help. It would have never happened without these men that loved him.

Because of the faith of his friends, he was healed.

We also have to be willing to allow people to carry us to Jesus. In the world we live in, we are fiercely independent. We are DIY-ers (do it yourselfers). We don't like to ask for help. We don't like to give up control and rely on others. We think, "But I don't want to ask. I don't want to impose. I don't want to inconvenience anyone." I understand that. I sometimes feel like that, too. But, real friends allow their friends to carry them and, if not, they are not real friends.

We need to be willing to allow our friends to carry us to Jesus. Our relationships and who we spend time around is so important. Let us build a bridge to Jesus with them.

On the other hand, perhaps, you yourself can be a bridge to a friend or a loved one. Do you know someone who's in the dumps? Do you have a friend who needs an encouraging word? Is there someone in your life, a friend, a co-worker, a relative, a schoolmate, who needs Jesus as Lord and Savior?

In our office, many of you don't know, but they've been laying off people left and right since early this year because of, well, let's just say mismanagement. It's like bullets whizzing by to my right and left. Thank God I've never been hit yet.

What I do is to those I know, I give them a book or notes of encouragement. The book I usually give is “More than a Carpenter” by Josh McDowell. One of them texted me and said he has been reading it. I’m praying he comes to Jesus as a result of that.

Do you let your friends carry you? Do you ask? Do you show them your weaknesses and struggles? On the flipside, are you that kind of friend who gives people the confidence that you will carry them? Do people ask you? Do they show you their weaknesses and struggles?

Either way, let someone be a bridge for you or be a bridge for someone.

Again, going back to the movie last night, the four widowed wives did not let their circumstances prevent them from pursuing their God-given calling of acting as bridges to Jesus. Without their husbands, they could have felt helpless. But they realized that someone greater than their husbands was with them. Jesus was with them who is the faithful friend they ever needed. Jesus was the one who carried them through their paralyzing ordeal. As they went to live with the Auca Indians, these words from Deuteronomy must have been ringing in their ears, **“Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.” (Deut. 31:6)**

In the end, it was all worth it. They built the bridge and they witnessed the formerly violent and godless Indians pass and walk that bridge toward Jesus.

Finally, faithful and faith-filled friends

4 – Help you have a godly perspective.

In the middle of a crisis, you need faith-filled friends who will help you see God’s perspective on things.

Think of the paralyzed man. He had a very limited perspective. He could only see what he could see from a mat. His world was pretty small. Can you imagine that existence?

The minute this man was up on the roof and could see the whole city, he had a new perspective. His friends helped him see a whole new world.

This goes along with speaking life. We need faith-filled friends in our lives that will help us see a different perspective when crisis and impossibilities come into our lives.

We need friends who will snap us out of our perspective. We need friends who will carry us to Jesus and help us see His perspective on what we are walking through.

This is especially important when we face situations and challenges that last a long time.

We need faith-filled friends who will take us back to Scripture to find God's perspective. We don't need their opinions. We need God's perspective and His word for our lives.

In the same token, let's be faith-filled friends who help the people in our lives have God's perspective on what they are walking through.

That's how we help people have hope!

Closing

If you don't have faithful and faith-filled friends like what we have been talking about today, I encourage you to start asking God to bring them into your life.

I want to also challenge everyone to be like the friends who carried this man to Jesus. There are people in this church who need faithful and faith-filled friends to stand beside them right now. Let's be on the lookout.

Folks, in doing so, we can break barriers and build bridges together.