



Child Health: Small Group Bible Study

THIS STUDY INVITES participants to explore what Scripture has to say about caring for those in need, especially children.

TIME REQUIRED: 60-90 MINUTES | INTENDED FOR GRADES 9-12



1

READ THE FOLLOWING FROM MARK 5:21-43: When Jesus had again crossed over by boat to the other side of the lake, a large crowd gathered around him while he was by the lake. Then one of the synagogue leaders, named Jairus, came, and when he saw Jesus, he fell at his feet. He pleaded earnestly with him, “My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live.” So Jesus went with him.

A large crowd followed and pressed around him. And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, because she thought, “If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed.” Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering.

At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, “Who touched my clothes?”

“You see the people crowding against you,” his disciples answered, “and yet you can ask, ‘Who touched me?’ ”

But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.”

While Jesus was still speaking, some people came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue leader. “Your daughter is dead,” they said. “Why bother the teacher anymore?”

Overhearing what they said, Jesus told him, “Don’t be afraid; just believe.”

He did not let anyone follow him except Peter, James and John the brother of James. When they came to the home of the synagogue leader, Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly. He went in and said to them, “Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep.” But they laughed at him.

After he put them all out, he took the child’s father and mother and the disciples who were with him, and went in where the child was. He took her by the hand and said to her, “Talitha koum!” (which means “Little girl, I say to you, get up!”). Immediately the girl stood up and began to walk around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished. He gave strict orders not to let anyone know about this, and told them to give her something to eat.

- MARK 5:21-43

2

ALLOW A FEW MINUTES for the participants to reflect on the reading. Then share the following comments:

- » Throughout Mark’s Gospel we see Jesus performing miraculous feats that fulfill the ancient prophecies of the Old Testament and point his followers toward his gift of eternal salvation. Mark, as the shortest yet most detailed history of Jesus’ life among the Gospels, is a chronicle of intense action, of breathless excitement. It tells of a man of mystery, gradually revealing his identity, as Messiah, to his disciples.
- » Mark’s Gospel portrays Jesus as a man of action. Mark uses his account to take his reader on a fast-paced tour of the person and work of Christ and it is an encouragement to respond in faith rather than fear, to the challenges of believing in Christ. Jesus manifests divine power as he overcomes demons, heals disease, challenges ignorance and hatred, accepts the outcast, and shows love to his enemies, even at the point of his death. At the center of all this activity, the challenge is to respond, in faith, to the divinity of Christ.
- » Mark is very black-and-white in his portrayal of what it means to have faith. Characters in his narrative either have faith, and the guts to stand up and put their faith into action, or they simply don’t. Furthermore, in Mark, miracles are not seen as leading to faith (compare this with the Gospel of John). Rather, faith is shown as a prerequisite of miracles taking place.
- » One of the joys of Mark’s approach to Jesus’ life is that he records the reactions and responses of those who meet Jesus. The reader can use these details to piece together some of the back-story that surrounds the people Jesus encounters. This can help their dilemmas to feel more personal and their challenges to have a deeper resonance for the reader.
- » In Mark 5:21-43, we see two desperate people putting their faith into action as all around them the world comes tumbling down. We witness the mercy and compassion with which Jesus responds to them. We are encouraged to see their attitude in a time of crisis as a model for our own behavior.

3

INVITE THE PARTICIPANTS to take some time to journal or discuss the following questions:

- » Most of us are careful not to bother Jesus until we have tried everything else first.
- » What are your most common safety nets when life seems to be falling to pieces around you?
- » Can you think of people for whom these safety nets don't exist?

4

SHARE THE FOLLOWING COMMENTS with the participants:

Bekelech's Story: A Life Without Safety Nets

It is raining hard. At Shone Health Center, nearly 215 miles south of Ethiopia's capital, Addis Ababa, hundreds of people huddle on a flimsy veranda. Adults hold babies tightly to their chests, protecting the tiny, emaciated bodies from the rain. The babies are sick and hungry. Their hold on life is like a fragile thread, all too easily broken.

A humanitarian organization has been working with staff at the health center to treat severely malnourished children under 5 years old. More than 1,300 children have already received life-saving help.

In a country where there are few social services to provide safety nets for the poor and vulnerable, 1-year-old Konjit Guidisa is among the lucky ones. She was admitted to the clinic suffering from severe malnutrition. Her aunt, Bekelech Yohannis, has been doing her best to care for the baby since Konjit's mother died. But, like most things in Bekelech's life, food is in short supply.

"I came to the clinic crying. This baby was dying. Diarrhea and vomiting was killing her. I have four children of my own, and Konjit is now my fifth. I tried breastfeeding her but I fell sick with malaria and the milk stopped coming.

We try to get the children some food to eat, at least once a day. Even when there is a meal, it is usually just something starchy, to fill the belly. We cannot get good food like vegetables or meat.

But I am happy because at this hospital Konjit has been getting special porridge. They have treated her well and she is now better. I came crying, but now I am very happy, because I have seen the improvement."

Konjit will soon be discharged and her aunt will make the long journey from her home to the outpatient clinic once a week. A nurse will regularly review the baby's health and replenish supplementary food supplies. In between visits, Bekelech will continue to make ends meet as best she can.

"We have a small piece of land, but it is in the lowlands and in a dry area. I have planted some maize but the crop was burned by the sun. I do not have any food at home, but I have God."

5

ALLOW A FEW MOMENTS for the participants to reflect on the story you've just told. Then offer the following comments:

- » This passage in Mark begins immediately after Jesus returns from casting the demons out of a non-Jewish man and is promptly met by a large crowd. The throng that gathered around him included an official from the local synagogue whose daughter is on the verge of death.
- » This man, Jairus, falls before Jesus and begs him to come and heal her. As administrative head of the synagogue, Jairus was responsible for making sure that synagogue life was played out in an orderly and dignified manner.
- » So what exactly is Jairus doing on his knees in the dust at Jesus' feet? Why has he left a daughter who is so sick that every breath might be her last? Why doesn't he simply send his assistant to fetch the healer?
- » The answer is that Jairus' world has come crashing down around his ears and he does not have any other safety net. Jesus is his only answer. Jairus' desperation at the imminent death of his daughter propels him into an unexpected act of humility and faith on her behalf. Things are so bad that he can't trust the job of persuading Jesus to heal his daughter to anybody who might mess it up. Leaving the sickbed and begging on his knees, this suave and successful man swallows his pride and places his hope in the only person who can really help him.
- » Jairus, in worldly terms, is a well-respected figure. But he goes in search of Jesus, a controversial upstart who is increasingly viewed by many with suspicion.
- » Jairus' world has crumbled and become unrecognizable. His need prompts him to cast aside his dignity and come as a supplicant. He places his faith in Jesus, not on his status: "Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live."
- » Jairus is a fantastic illustration of what it means to truly trust God. Because of his position among the religious leaders, some of whom openly opposed Jesus, and because of his public acknowledgement of Jesus' authority, this encounter threatens Jairus' standing within the community. Jairus risks everything for a moment of Jesus' time.

6

TAKE SOME TIME to journal or discuss the following question:

- » What desperate situations from around the world are you prepared to pray about?

7

OFFER THE FOLLOWING comments:

- » Jairus seems to achieve his mission. He starts to leave with Jesus. But all too soon the mercy mission is rudely interrupted by the woman with the flow of blood. During Jesus' detour and the woman's healing, the reader encounters another person whose world has fallen apart, only to be rebuilt again by stepping out in faith.
- » Strictly speaking, this nameless woman should not even be in the crowd. Her illness has made her ritually unclean (Leviticus 15:25-27). She knows that by stepping out of the house, she is risking public outrage. Her desperation gives her the courage to take action and to throw the rule book out the window.
- » Reaching out and touching Jesus is a scandalously defiant act. This woman should not be touching anybody. One touch means pollution for any God-fearing Jew, making them temporarily unclean.
- » But the woman does dare to reach out and touch Jesus, and she is healed instantly. Finally, after years of stigma and shame, she is cleansed, ready to make a swift exit and begin her life again. However, she doesn't make the clean get-away that she is hoping for. No one who reaches out in faith to Jesus is ever ignored. When Jesus asks who touched him, it shows that, in spite of the teeming throng of people around him, he is spiritually alive to one individual's physical need.
- » Refer to Mark 5:30: "At once, Jesus realized that power had gone out of him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, 'Who touched my clothes?'"
- » When Jesus begins to talk to the woman, he asks questions to which, as the Son of God, he must already have known the answer. Perhaps this conversation is as much for the benefit of Jesus' followers as it is for the woman herself? We learn that she has been sick for 12 years and, having spent all her money on doctors, is destitute. Unlike the rich and sophisticated Jairus, who stands up in faith on behalf of someone else, this woman is penniless and seemingly alone in the crowd. She has no one to act on her behalf. Her desperation and her faith lead her to do the unthinkable.

8

INVITE THE PARTICIPANTS to take some time to journal or discuss the following questions:

- » Share some examples of times during which you have acted on someone else's behalf out of sheer desperation. Have there ever been any positive consequences?

9

SHARE THE FOLLOWING comments with the participants:

» In this conversation with the woman, Jesus rejects the a legalistic interpretation of the Jewish law, as he did at so many other times during his ministry. Despite her fears of being spiritually unclean, the woman refuses to give up until she has made personal contact with Jesus. So, rather than chastising her for breaking the law, Jesus praises her actions, using the word “daughter” to recognize the relationship of love and responsibility that binds her to him:

“Daughter, your faith has made you whole. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.”

» Which is all very well, but the fact of the matter is that Jesus’ healing of this woman slows things down. By the time he gets to Jairus’ house, the daughter is already dead. It seems like Jairus has put his reputation and career on the line for nothing. It seems like he has exposed himself to the scorn of his peers by daring to believe in the wrong man. And this man, this lowly prophet, really doesn’t seem to have merited his faith. It’s too late! Jesus hasn’t taken Jairus’ desperation seriously enough or responded quickly enough.

» At this point, Jairus could get angry and reproach Jesus. Or he could send his servants to throw Jesus off the property, so that his family can mourn in peace. Instead, when the foundation of his faith seems about to crumble, he obeys Jesus’ command: “Don’t be afraid; just believe.” He allows Jesus to enter his house and reach out to his child, and his faith is rewarded. Jesus reveals himself to be the Lord of Life.

» Refer to Mark 5:35-43:

While Jesus was still speaking, some people came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue leader. “Your daughter is dead,” they said. “Why bother the teacher anymore?”

Overhearing what they said, Jesus told him, “Don’t be afraid; just believe.”

He did not let anyone follow him except Peter, James and John the brother of James. When they came to the home of the synagogue leader, Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly. He went in and said to them, “Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep.” But they laughed at him.

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10

INVITE THE PARTICIPANTS to join you in prayer.

Pray for opportunities to reach out to those who are desperately seeking Jesus. Pray for the faith to stand up and believe that change can happen in your own life. Pray for change in the lives of people like Bekelech and in the situations around the world that seem hopeless.

PRAY:

O Lord, give us compassion for children who suffer around the world.

It is not your will that any should hunger or thirst.

They are not “someone else’s children”—

They are **YOUR** children.

Help us care for them as if they were part of our own families.

Make straight our paths,

Guide our hands and feet,

And help us to be your messengers of hope.

Amen.

» Visit worldvision.org/lp/acsi-teacher-resources for a video you can show to support this lesson.
(optional)

This resource is adapted from resources created by World Vision U.K.