

Adult Bible Studies



Embracing Life

Spring 2025

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Focal Passages: Matthew 5:1-3; Mark 5:25-34

Background Texts: Matthew 5:1-3; 9:20-22; Mark 5:25-34

Purpose Statement: To boldly reach out to Jesus when we are in need

Matthew 5:1-3

¹Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up a mountain. He sat down and his disciples came to him. ²He taught them, saying:

³“Happy are people who are hopeless, because the kingdom of heaven is theirs.”

Mark 5:25-34

²⁵A woman was there who had been bleeding for twelve years. ²⁶She had suffered a lot under the care of many doctors, and had spent everything she had without getting any better. In fact, she had gotten worse. ²⁷Because she had heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his clothes. ²⁸She was thinking, If I can just touch his clothes, I’ll be healed. ²⁹Her bleeding stopped immediately, and she sensed in her body that her illness had been healed.

³⁰At that very moment, Jesus recognized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and said, “Who touched my clothes?”

³¹His disciples said to him, “Don’t you see the crowd pressing against you? Yet you ask, ‘Who touched me?’ ” ³²But Jesus looked around carefully to see who had done it.

³³The woman, full of fear and trembling, came forward. Knowing what had happened to her, she fell down in front of Jesus and told him the whole truth. ³⁴He responded, “Daughter, your faith has healed you; go in peace, healed from your disease.”

Key Verse: “Happy are people who are hopeless, because the kingdom of heaven is theirs” (Matthew 5:3).

The first step in the 12-step program used by Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, and many other recovery programs is for participants to admit that they have an addiction problem. This can be the most difficult step for many people. The second step is to come to believe that God can bring them out of addiction. Addicts must admit that they cannot do it alone and that they need a higher power to help them. Only then can healing begin to happen. Acknowledging that we have a need and recognizing that only God can help us are the first steps in all our struggles and addictions. We cannot begin to heal until we know our needs and decide to seek help from God.

The woman in Mark 5:25-34 was keenly aware of her need. She had been to many doctors and spent all her money, but she had only gotten worse. Many people can say that of themselves even now. On the surface, her problem was quite straightforward: She “had been bleeding for twelve years” (Mark 5:25), but this physical problem brought many other social and religious issues.

According to Jewish law, she was always ritually unclean. Therefore, she could not avail herself of religious life in the Temple or elsewhere. Her inability to make atoning sacrifices, visit the Temple, and participate in other rites kept

her from following the Law and thus alienated her from Israel's God. From a social standpoint, she was ostracized. Because she was considered ritualistically unclean, anyone who came into contact with her was also unclean until they performed the steps toward purification.

We don't know if she was married, but she would not have been considered a good candidate for a bride. In her time and place, a woman depended on her male next-of-kin for a home, food, and other necessities. Some historians suggest that the average lifespan for women in her time and place was around 40-45 years, so much of her lifetime had been consumed by this problem. It is an understatement to say that she knew her needs. She was continually reminded of them, and they affected every aspect of her life. She was at the end of her rope. She was desperate, and no one had been able to help her.

Reaching Out to Jesus

The woman in Mark 5 apparently had heard about Jesus. She sought him out. According to Mark 5:21, Jesus had just crossed the lake of the Gerasenes a second time when a large crowd gathered around him on the shore. He was approached by a synagogue leader named Jairus who begged Jesus to come and save his daughter.

Jesus was on the way to Jairus's house when the woman with the hemorrhage approached him. She delayed him on his way to Jairus's house long enough that Jairus's daughter died according to the messengers (verse 35). Jesus still went to Jairus's house and commanded Jairus's daughter to get up (verse 41). She got up and walked around. Mark tells us that she was 12 years old (verse 42).

Even with all the commotion around Jairus's daughter, the bleeding woman still reached out to touch Jesus' clothes (verse 27). She had faith that if she could just touch his clothes, she could be healed (verse 28). Indeed, she was healed, and her bleeding stopped immediately (verse 29).

Jesus turned around in a crowd that was already huge and crowding in on him (verse 24), but Jesus still asked, "Who touched my clothes?" (verse 30). Even the disciples couldn't understand how Jesus could wonder who touched him because the people crowded in on him (verse 31). They implied that he was being touched on all sides, but something about this woman's touch was different.

What need do you have that is hardest to admit? What needs have a stigma?

Faith, Boldness, and Belief

The woman had reached out to Jesus in faith and boldness, but when he noticed what had happened, she was "full of fear and trembling" (Mark 5:33). She could have slipped away in the crowd, but she bravely spoke to Jesus, even falling in front of him in a posture of worship.

The woman's faith, boldness, and belief were not lost on Jesus. It turned out that he was not angry with her. Quite the opposite. He called her "Daughter" (verse 34)! She probably had not heard a term of endearment like that for at least 12 years. Not only that, but Jesus implicitly praised her for her faith and sent her on her way with a blessing: "Go in peace" (verse 34). She had been healed when she touched Jesus' clothes, so these words of endearment, praise, and blessing came in addition to her healing.

When Jairus's messengers came to say that Jesus was too late, Jesus was not upset that the woman had taken

some of his time. She reached out to him in her need, and this pleased him. He was gratified to see her faith. In her despair, the woman held onto hope that Jesus would heal her. Maybe she came to him when she had no other alternatives. We should not look down on her for this. Her options were limited, and this might have been the only time she had access to Jesus.

We can take the woman's account as our example of faith and boldness. We may have ailments the doctors can't heal. We may have illnesses such as addiction and have trouble admitting them or asking God to rid us of them. Perhaps we have relationships that need healing. Some of us might come to Jesus when we're at the end of our rope, but the good news is that we don't have to wait until we hit rock bottom to come to him. Jesus is pleased when we push through all our obstacles to reach out to him and be healed.

The spiritual practice connected to the lessons in this unit is sacrifice. The woman Jesus healed had little to give except herself, yet she still sacrificed further ridicule and the possibility of waylaying Jesus on his way to Jairus's house. Jesus realized what she had been through and what sacrifices she made to seek his healing. He honored those, and he still raised Jairus's daughter afterward.

What might make you reluctant to seek help from Jesus? Are you sometimes afraid that you don't have enough faith?

Living in New Hope

If you have ever known someone who desperately needed help (it might have even been you), you might recall that often reaching out is the hardest part. To reach

out is to signal not only one's need for help but also one's vulnerability and utter dependence on another's love and mercy.

Jesus was a sign of hope to the unnamed woman before she even met him. Perhaps she had heard of his healing and miracles. Perhaps she had been following him for some time, waiting for the courage to approach, working up the nerve to admit she needed help. In any event, the woman had hope and moved from despair to hope.

It is all too easy to live in despair. After all, there are so many problems in the world, the church, and our lives that it's sometimes a wonder we get up and get going in the morning. But some of us don't. Some of our sisters and brothers are in deep despair. Some who are caught in addiction often struggle to find hope. Some are depressed. Perhaps someone reading this today can relate.

It can be easier, at least in the moment, to succumb to despair. Turning toward hope can be difficult, but the good news is that Jesus is right there for us when we need to reach out to him, and he is never angry when we try. Jesus is hope walking and living among the people. He is God dwelling with us, the God who desired to be with the people in the Tabernacle and the Temple. In Jesus, God moves through the crowd. Talk about availability!

There is enough of Jesus' healing and hope to go around. He was not spent after the woman of our story touched him and was healed. He went on to raise Jairus's daughter. We do not need to be timid when reaching out to Jesus because he wants us to come to him. He also did not require the suffering woman to demonstrate her faith before she was healed. He praised her for having faith

after she was healed. This tells us we can come to Jesus despite our despair, depression, or other troubles.

This Wednesday is Ash Wednesday, the start of Lent. In many churches, believers will have their foreheads marked with the sign of the cross in ashes. We will be reminded that we are dust and will return to dust. On Ash Wednesday, we will be called to confess our sins and fall into God's arms for forgiveness. If we are ailing, it is time to come to Jesus for healing. We might think of Ash Wednesday as our act of reaching out to Jesus.

We will find that Jesus is there. He is surrounded by many people on every side, but he turns to each of us and gives us his full attention. We worship him and tell him everything just as the woman in Mark's Gospel did, and Jesus calls us "Daughter," "Son," or "Child" and blesses us.

Reach out to Jesus with your needs now. Can you see him turning to you, listening to you, and blessing you?

Blessed Are the Poor in Spirit

Throughout this series of lessons, we will pair a Gospel account with a beatitude from Matthew 5:1-12. With this lesson, we remember how Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3, NRSVUE). No doubt the unnamed woman who sought out Jesus was poor in spirit. She was poor in money, too. She spent all she had on doctors, but she brought her poverty of spirit to Jesus, and he healed her.

When Matthew referred to the kingdom of heaven, he generally meant that God would have the divine will manifested in the world now and in the future. Though heaven is God's paradise, the phrase "kingdom of heaven" is not limited to the afterlife.

The woman Jesus healed became part of the life-affirming, healing restoration that Jesus came to bring to the world. She went away healed and blessed. She experienced the kingdom of heaven in an encounter with Jesus. An encounter with Jesus does that: It turns everything upside down. Those who are poor in spirit will encounter heaven on earth in the person of Jesus, and he is drawn toward them. Jesus certainly calls the poor in spirit to him. As he said later in Matthew, “Come to me, all you who are struggling hard and carrying heavy loads, and I will give you rest” (11:28).

Are you struggling under a heavy load? Are you experiencing a poverty of spirit? Reach out for Jesus right now.

Jesus, we reach out to you at this moment. Each of us needs your healing. Turn to us, heal us, and bless us, we pray. Grant us a portion of your kingdom’s presence here and now. Thank you; in Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Daily Bible Readings

March 3	Matthew 5:4
March 4	Psalms 5:11-12
March 5	Isaiah 30:15-18
March 6	Psalms 119:111-112
March 7	2 Corinthians 1:3-7
March 8	2 Corinthians 7:8-11
March 9	Psalms 126

The Spiritual Practice of Sacrifice

As we go through the season of Lent, many spiritual practices come to mind: worshiping, reading Scripture, reading devotionals, journaling, praying, and fasting. Fasting may seem like a foreign concept to many Western Christians today, but they often talk about it during Lent if you consider abstinence from certain rich food or strong drink to be a form of fasting.

Fasting is a form of sacrifice. If we were to research the word *sacrifice* in a Bible dictionary, we would come across long articles about sacrifices in the Old Testament (Abraham almost sacrificing Isaac and the sacrificial offerings in the Temple, for example). When we look to see what a Bible dictionary says about sacrifice in the New Testament, it points us toward Jesus' attitudes toward the Temple priests and what had become somewhat cultic practices. For example, Jesus turned over the tables in the Temple. These tables were related to the sacrificial system, but there is no evidence to support a claim that Jesus was trying to rid the Temple of the sacrificial system laid out in the Hebrew Bible.

Christians do not observe the Temple sacrificial system the way first-century Jews did, but that system was in the minds of the early Christians who helped us try to make sense of Jesus' death. It was put forward that Jesus was the ultimate sacrifice. Perhaps you have heard this as an explanation for why Jesus died: that he was God's sacrifice for our sins. This "sacrificial atonement" explanation is one of many explanations that have been put forward since Jesus' day. It was certainly one of the first.

The writer of Hebrews interpreted Jesus' death in terms of a heavenly sanctuary in which Jesus sits at the right hand of

God. There, Jesus is High Priest and the ultimate sacrifice for the sins of the people. His sacrifice, unlike those of the Israelite priests, was offered once. This is partly why Christians did not adopt the Temple sacrificial system of the Israelites.

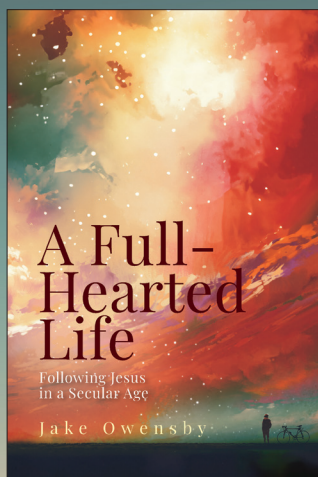
So what does sacrifice mean for Christians today? Sacrifice is more than fasting. Consider the sacrifice of time. Time is one of our most valuable possessions. We even speak of time as a form of currency. People say they spend time, save time, waste time, lose time, gain time, and the like. Therefore, a Christian can sacrifice time to God as a valuable offering.

Another sacrifice is giving money. Few people live in a barter system anymore, so it is easier for us to give money to sustain God's work and for the church to use that money to equip the church for disciple-making. In the area of Christian giving, I have heard it said that God calls us to sacrificial giving, that is, giving such that it costs us something.

In many areas, the spiritual discipline of sacrifice comes down to surrendering our will to God's will. Sacrifice is about putting God first, and it should be part of a lifelong commitment to obedience. Paul called the church to imitate Christ Jesus in his attitude of sacrifice (Romans 12:1). Being a living sacrifice is an act of worship. Many liturgies for Holy Communion acknowledge that just as Jesus offered himself, we offer ourselves to God's service as a holy and living sacrifice.

Sacrifice is a vital spiritual discipline for Christians that intersects other spiritual disciplines such as fasting and almsgiving, but sacrifice is an attitude and a way of approaching the Christian life as a whole. We did not create ourselves, time, or any resource we enjoy. Everything is a gift from God. To return it to God may not be easy sometimes, but this is one way in which we show our love for God and others: to sacrifice in the spirit of Jesus, who gave up everything for our sake.

The latest from Jake Owensby



Meaningful answers for life's big questions


A Full-Hearted Life: Following Jesus In the Secular Age,
by Jake Owensby

Everyone must ask life's big questions and find meaning in their lives, even people who reject any hint of the supernatural. But it seems the defining mark of our secular age is not the absence of belief, but rather the effect that the sheer number of competing belief systems out there has on us. That effect is fragilization.

And so, belief is fragile.

This book is not traditional apologetics. It doesn't try to offer proof of God's existence or that Jesus is God incarnate or that other belief systems are false. Instead, its aim is to help you see for yourself how Christian belief and practice can lead to a better life...to make life meaningful. At the same time, it helps readers understand and empathize with non-believers, making it a useful discipleship tool for laypeople, pastors, and other leaders.

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