

Up Close and Personal...Encounters with Jesus

Leader's Notes and Bible Passages Available Online

By Shari Miller

[Please do NOT use the "if time permits" sections when your study session time is limited. These sections could possibly be done by the participant in private.]

Faith Talk: How would you explain a "defining moment" in any person's life? Try to arrive at a group definition and write it below. Share one such moment from your life with a partner or in a small group. **Answers will vary, but encourage everyone to share. Make it clear that everything confided within the group stays within the group.**

As we consider three people from Biblical accounts who had "defining" encounters with Jesus, we will explore how the life of each person was changed and what significance that has for each one of us.

Opening Prayer: Dear Father in heaven, we praise You that You have given us life here on earth, but more importantly life eternal through the sufferings, death and resurrection of Your Son Jesus. Our sins are forgiven for Jesus' sake. Continue to direct and guide us in our daily lives as Your Holy Spirit empowers us to share the Good News of salvation in our everyday lives. We boldly ask that You bless our study of Your Word. In Jesus' great name we pray, Amen.

Sins Forgiven!

Read **Mark 2:1-12**. Describe Jesus life-changing encounter with the paralytic man. **Encourage participants to summarize in their own words what happened in this encounter with Jesus.** What two gifts did Jesus give to the paralytic man? **Forgiveness of sins (spiritual healing) and enabling the paralytic to walk (physical healing).**

¹And when he [Jesus] returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. ²And many were gathered together, so that there was no more room, not even at the door. And he was preaching the word to them. ³And they came, bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men. ⁴And when they could not get near him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him, and when they had made an opening, they let down the bed on which the paralytic lay. ⁵And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." ⁶Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, ⁷"Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" ⁸And immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, "Why do you question these things in your hearts? ⁹Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise, take up your bed and walk'? ¹⁰But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he said to the paralytic— ¹¹"I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home." ¹²And he rose and immediately picked up his bed and went out before them all, so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, "We never saw anything like this!"

If time permits: How might society have viewed this paralyzed man? **He was paralyzed as punishment for past sins, useless, aimless, helpless, deserving of pity, "good for nothing."** How might today's society view the paralytic? **Society today might still view the paralytic in much the same way.**

What do you believe was the defining moment in this encounter with Jesus? **Answers may vary.** Why was the forgiveness of his sins the most significant moment for this paralytic? **He was healed spiritually by Jesus.** How might this forgiveness have changed his life? **The paralytic would no longer carry the burden and guilt of his sins. He would also now "walk eternally."**

How do our sins paralyze us? What words and phrases in the following Bible passages describe our sin and its effects?

Psalms 25:11 **great guilt**

¹¹For your name's sake, O LORD, pardon my guilt, for it is great.

Psalm 38:4 iniquities, heavy burden

⁴For my iniquities have gone over my head; like a heavy burden, they are too heavy for me.

Ephesians 2:1-3 dead in trespasses, followed the world, disobedience, passions of our flesh, desires of body and mind, children of wrath

¹And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ²in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— ³among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

The Good News is that Jesus meets each of us by grace “up close and personal” on the cross of Calvary. What do the following passages assure each believer in Jesus Christ? **Jesus accomplished our salvation once for all; our sins have been forgiven and our God remembers our sins no more!**

Psalm 103:12

¹²as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.

Isaiah 1:18

¹⁸"Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.

Jeremiah 31:34

³⁴And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

John 19:30

³⁰When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Faith Talk: How does this “up close and personal” forgiveness through Jesus Christ specifically change your life? Share with a partner or in a small group. **Answers will vary. Encourage sharing within the group.**

New Life Given!

Read **Luke 7:11-15**. Describe Jesus’ encounter with the widow from Nain and her son. **Encourage participants to summarize in their own words what happened in this encounter with Jesus.** What was the defining moment in this encounter? **Jesus had compassion on the widow and brought the young man back from the dead - He restored the widow’s child to her.**

¹¹Soon afterward he went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a great crowd went with him. ¹²As he drew near to the gate of the town, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow, and a considerable crowd from the town was with her. ¹³And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep." ¹⁴Then he came up and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, "Young man, I say to you, arise." ¹⁵And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother.

If time permits: In the space of a very short time, the widow of Nain experienced many emotions. Identify some of those emotions. **Some emotions might include: grief, sorrow, despair, unbelief, confusion, joy, thankfulness.**

What do you speculate the widow did following this “up close and personal” encounter with Jesus? **Answers may vary, but she probably did not keep it a secret. She might have been joyful and probably spoiled her son who was with her once again!** What about her son? **Answers may vary – he might have been dazed and confused, but happy to be alive!**

How does our Savior Jesus give us new life? **We receive new life through our Savior Jesus and His perfect life, suffering and death on the cross. Because He rose from the dead, we, too, will rise to everlasting life in heaven.** See **John 3:16.**

¹⁶"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

How does the Holy Spirit keep us in this life-giving faith? See **Romans 10:17, Titus 3:3, and Matthew 26:26-28. Through the Word and Sacraments – the Means of Grace.**

Romans 10:17 ¹⁷So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. **The Word of God**
Titus 3:5 ⁵He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit. **Baptism**
Matthew 26:26-28 ²⁶ Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." ²⁷And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, ²⁸for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." **The Lord's Supper**

Grief...to joy! Read **Ephesians 2:4-10**. How are our lives changed through the new life that Jesus has given to us in Christ Jesus? **Once we were dead in our sins, but are now alive in Christ!** What actions in our lives show others this life-giving change? **We do all for the sake and in the Name of Jesus – our actions reflect the love of Jesus!**

⁴But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ— by grace you have been saved— ⁶and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Faith Talk: How does the knowledge that we inherit eternal life for the sake of Jesus affect our life here on earth? Share with a partner or in a small group. **Answers will vary. Encourage sharing within the group.**

A Bold New Vision!

Read **John 4:5-26**. Describe this “up close and personal” encounter with Jesus. **Encourage participants to summarize in their own words what happened in this encounter with Jesus.** How did Jews feel about Samaritans in **verse 9**? **Hostility between Jews and Samaritans.** How did society of the day treat women? **Denigrating attitudes toward women; they were considered second-class citizens; inconsequential.** In light of these facts, how might this Samaritan woman have felt about herself? **She might have thought of herself as insignificant, worthless, a “nobody.”**

⁵So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶Jacob's well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour. ⁷A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." ⁸(For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) ⁹The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) ¹⁰Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." ¹¹The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?" ¹²Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock." ¹³Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." ¹⁵The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water." ¹⁶Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." ¹⁷The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; ¹⁸for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true." ¹⁹The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. ²⁰Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship." ²¹Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. ²²You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. ²⁴God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." ²⁵The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things." ²⁶Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he."

Read **John 4:28**. After the Samaritan woman's “defining moment” with Jesus and once she realized that Jesus was the Messiah, what did she do? **So the woman left her water jar and went away into town...** What might that water jar have represented to the woman? **Her past; her burdens; her former way of life.** Why could

she leave it behind? **The Lord Jesus had set her free from her former way of life – He knew what she had done, but forgave and loved her anyway. She was not worthless!**

Read **John 4:28-29; 39-42**. What was this woman's bold new vision? **She was compelled to tell about the Savior; she wanted to give testimony of Jesus Christ.**

²⁸So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, ²⁹"Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?" ³⁹Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me all that I ever did." ⁴⁰So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. ⁴¹And many more believed because of his word. ⁴²They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world."

Faith Talk: What "water jars" can hinder our sharing of the Good News of Jesus Christ? **Answers will vary. Encourage sharing within the group.**

What commission and what promise does God give to His children in **Matthew 28:18-20**? **Commission: Go and make disciples, baptizing and teaching. God's promise: "I am with you always."**

¹⁸And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

What promise and what evangelism plan does Jesus give His followers in **Acts 1:8**? **Promise: the Holy Spirit. Evangelism plan: Jerusalem (homes), Samaria (communities/country), and to the world!**

⁸But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

Faith Talk: What can be our bold new vision for sharing the Good News about Jesus in our homes, in our communities and in our world? **Answers will vary, but we should be compelled to tell about our Savior by the power of the Spirit, just as the Samaritan woman did.**

Conclusion: Defining moments in life might be viewed as those events that help to define who we are and how we live our lives. The Holy Spirit works in us through Word and Sacraments to give us faith and to nurture that faith. We are God's children. Our thoughts and actions are defined by our Savior, as we follow Him, the perfect example. May we have our Lord's peace and joy as the Spirit helps us to boldly share the Good News about Jesus in our homes, in our communities and in our world.

Faith Walk:

1. Rejoice every morning this week in the salvation you receive because of Jesus' saving work.
2. Find out your baptismal date – the most defining moment of your life! Thank God for making you His own dear child.
3. Identify people in your life who need to hear the Good News about Jesus. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you to share that news and your hope for eternal life. As a group, pray for and support missionaries and their families around the world (see www.lcms.org for more information).
4. Read about "Women Disciples" in The Lutheran Study Bible, pp. 1726.

Close by Singing: "Jesus, Lead Thou On" (LSB #718; LW #386; TLH #410)
or "Lord Take My Hand and Lead Me" (LSB 722; LW 512)

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