

Drawing the Circle

Week 3 Evangelism

March 18-19, 2017

Today we are in the 3rd week of Draw the Circle. It's been wonderful to see so many Crossroaders Drawing the Circle around their prayers. Some are praying for breakthroughs at work, relationships and at their jobs. As you look at the walls, some of the circles are dedicated to those who are far away from Christ. Today we are going to zero in on Drawing the Circle around those who we are in relationship with who are not in a relationship with God.

Years ago I drew circles around those with whom I was in a close relationship. I began praying daily for my Dad, my brother and my best friend. My dad was the most challenging because after praying for him daily for quite a while I finally built up the nerve to share the gospel with him. We were on the couch in our living room late one night and I shared Jesus with him and told him how much I wanted to see him come to Christ. He just looked at me and said that he was not ready to come to Christ.

I continued to pray daily for my father. Not long after this, late one night I was going to use the restroom and I heard my dad struggling to talk, "Help, James, help." I walked into his room in the pitch dark, and saw him there on his bed, gripping his chest saying barely above a whisper that he was having a heart attack. I put his arms around me and we struggled to the car. I put the car in reverse, and then back into park and turned to my dad and said, "This might be it Dad, if this is, you know you aren't in a relationship with Christ. I can handle you dying, but I can't handle you not being in Heaven. It looks like you need to make a decision." He and my mom looked at me like I was insane and my mom said, "Drive." While my dad was in the hospital, he came to Christ and has continued to pursue Christ for many years now.

I had been asking God to break my dad's heart for Christ. Turns out it happened literally *and* spiritually. I don't think God caused his heart attack; that was going to happen sooner or later any ways. But, it did wake my dad up to the reality that he was mortal and that he needed a savior.

When we turn to Mark chapter 2 we come across a group of guys who were desperate for someone they cared deeply about to have an encounter with Jesus as

well. There were a group of 5 friends, yet one of them had a need that they couldn't meet themselves. They knew Jesus was the only hope for their friend. His legs didn't work. He couldn't walk. In that culture, if you can't walk, you can't work. If you can't work you don't have money for a house or food. This man might have been homeless. He probably begged for money on the street corners and in the markets.

One day, his four friends heard that Jesus was in their town teaching at someone's house. They believed that if they could get their friend to Jesus, Jesus could heal him. So the four guys picked up their friend who couldn't walk and carried him to Jesus on a mat. When they got to the house, the crowd was so large that there wasn't room for any more people inside the house. People were standing outside in the yard!

In this room, there are hundreds of us. Could you imagine if you saw someone coming through this room right now carrying a sick person on a mat or cot? What would we do? I would like to think that we would move! We would get out of the way. "He needs help, he's disabled, move out of the way!" Let me show you what I'm talking about. (*volunteers carry a person on a mattress/cot to the front*)

In this culture, almost everyone believed that if you had a disease, or a disability it was because of sin. They believed that disabilities and sickness were punishment from God. This was really bad theology, but at that time, that's what they believed. If you couldn't walk, if you were blind, if you were deaf, then you must have sinned or your parents sinned or your grandparents sinned and God was punishing you.

The Bible says that these four guys carrying their friend couldn't get to Jesus "because of the crowd." The crowd could care less if the guy was going to see Jesus or not. They just ignored him, which brings us to an observation. We all have someone that we know who needs to be brought to Jesus. We can't count on the world/crowd to do this. We can't trust that it will just happen. We can't assume that someone else will. If anything, it's the world/crowd that gets between our friends or family members and a relationship with Jesus, just as the crowd got in the way of the men carrying their friend to Christ. We don't see in the text where the crowd became concerned for this man who desperately needed to have an encounter with Jesus. Nope, it was the friends who cared for him, the friends who loved him that carried the burden literally.

Thankfully this group of friends didn't give up! They found a way to get their friend to Jesus. Let's read what happens next: **Mark 2:4-5** "*Since they could not get him*

to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

When they can't get through the front door, the friends have a brainstorming session. There are no bad ideas in a brainstorm. And then the one friend who's sort of "out there" says, "Let's climb onto the roof and cut a hole in the ceiling and lower him down with ropes." Everyone just sort of stares at him like he's crazy. "Don't you know what these roofs are made of? Straw and manure! Feel free to dig yourself, my friend." "Are there any other ideas?!"

But that's what they did. They ripped a hole in the roof and lowered their friend down in front of Jesus. And what does the text say? *When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, "Son, your sins are forgiven."* Jesus saw the hope of the paralyzed man and his friends! And he forgave the paralyzed man! They were going to do whatever it took. They were not going to give up.

This is beautiful. His friends went all out and their friend had an encounter with Jesus. And Jesus forgave his sins. Ok, I assume some of you are thinking right now, "He's paralyzed and he has his sins forgiven but, isn't Jesus forgetting something? The man is still paralyzed! What about that?"

So, I think it's time for a sidebar. Let's recap. The friends want their friend healed, they carry him on mat through a crowd, they climb a roof, they dig a hole, they create an ancient pulley system to lower their friend down...it was probably just two ropes, but anyway...where's the healing? This is one of those moments in history that Jesus is processing things on a whole other level than the average human was at that time. The friends are thinking where's the healing? Then the religious folks were baffled at the audacity of Jesus offering forgiveness. *Mark 2:6-7 Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, "Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"* The scribes just don't get that they are in the presence of God. They are in the midst of someone who sees this situation on a larger, spiritual level.

Jesus has all of these crowds pushing in looking for healing or as some of the other crowds have come to him looking for food or another miracle. And Jesus wants to provide those things...yet he has this great opportunity to point to what's most important. We all have these tremendous human needs. But Jesus wants to teach everyone...**First things first**...being in a right relationship with God at the end of the day is the number one priority of this life. So, Jesus breaks it down for them.

Mark 2:8-12 ⁸ Immediately, Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, “Why are you thinking these things?” ⁹ Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up, take your mat and walk?’ ¹⁰ But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” So he said to the man, ¹¹ “I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.” ¹² He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, “We have never seen anything like this!”

Boom! Not only does he forgive him, but now Jesus blows people’s minds by healing the paralyzed man. Now, the scripture doesn’t say this, but I am convinced that after this happened Jesus dropped the mic and walked out of the house saying...Jesus out!

What lessons can we learn from this story?

1. **God wants everyone to be in right relationship with him.** Jesus was more focused on the paralyzed man’s spiritual condition. Yes, he addressed his physical need, but he focused on the spiritual need. We have friends and family who have physical needs, emotional needs, and God wants to address those needs. Those needs may be open doors and opportunities for someone to realize their utter need for Jesus. God may be using hurt and suffering and pain and loss in someone’s life as a megaphone to draw them into relationship with him.
2. **God only expects our obedience; the results are up to him.** The four friends couldn’t heal their friend. They couldn’t forgive his sins. Only Jesus could. God never expects us to transform someone’s heart or change their mind or argue them into believing in Jesus. He simply asks us to bring them - we make the introduction. The heart transformation - the results - are in his hands.

So, what steps can we take today to bring our Friends or Family to Jesus?

1. **Start with Drawing the Circle.** It’s not easy! It will take effort, time, energy, but most of all it takes the power of God working in our relationships. We must begin drawing the circle around our relationships with others who need to Encounter God.
2. **Adopt an “it’s not about me” attitude.** These four friends said “It’s not about me.” They pushed through the “what if” questions...what if Jesus doesn’t heal our friend? What if we can’t get through the crowd? What if it’s embarrassing? What if we look foolish? They said “it’s not about me.” And they did everything to get their friend on the mat to Jesus.

So, I have to ask today...“Who is on your mat?” What I’m asking you is, who is that friend or family member that needs to encounter God? If you were to Draw the Circle around someone who is close to you who needs to be in a relationship with Christ, who would it be? These four friends loved him so much they didn’t give up until their friend met Jesus. I’m so glad that my mom, my grandmother, my youth pastor and my pastor didn’t give up on drawing the Circle around me. I bet you are glad someone Drew the Circle around you.

As we get older, it’s not easy to bring a friend to meet Jesus. Maybe we already tried and felt that rejection. Maybe we have made it a policy in our adult lives to avoid awkwardness at all costs. As adults we long for silence, except of course for awkward silence. Have you ever tried carrying a grown man??? These guys were sweaty and out of breath carrying him onto the roof and lowering him down. But they wouldn’t quit. The paralyzed man might have been upset that his friends were taking him away from his best time to beg for money. He might have doubted that Jesus could really heal him. I don’t know. But, once he encountered Jesus he was changed. He was healed spiritually and then physically.

Once we bring our friends to Jesus and he heals them spiritually then he can begin to work on the other areas of their life that need healing.

- Perhaps they are suffering a deep loss in life that only Jesus can comfort.
- Maybe they are paralyzed emotionally...Jesus can heal them.
- Maybe their marriage is paralyzed...it hasn’t moved forward in years.
- Maybe they’re stuck in addiction and can’t fix it on their own.

The man on the mat might have felt embarrassed as his friends carried him through the crowd to meet Jesus. But once he encountered Jesus, his life was changed.

Here at Crossroads, we believe that God meets people right where they are. No matter our hurt, habit or hang up, anyone can come to God here at Crossroads and not feel embarrassed. Easter at Crossroads is just a few weeks away - what a great opportunity to bring a friend to encounter God. Your friend may not believe in God. They may want nothing to do with Jesus. No matter where anyone is at spiritually, they will be welcomed here on Easter. It’s hard work bringing our friends to meet Jesus. But let’s not give up so easily. Remember, it’s work, but it’s the most worthwhile work that we can do.

Who's on your mat? Who are you hoping to bring to Jesus? When your friend meets Jesus and begins a relationship with God, their life will be changed forever! Their sins are forgiven. They can find healing for things in the past. They will find hope for the future. Will you step out in faith? Will you bring your friend to meet Jesus?

When you came in today, everyone should have received 2 wooden circles like this one. If you didn't get two, there are some in the back and some up front here. I'm encouraging you to write the name of your friend who needs to meet Jesus on *both* circles. Put one circle in your pocket, to remind you to pray for them. Then, in a moment, come forward and put the second circle on the cot here. When you put your circle on the mat, pick up someone else's circle. You're going to pray for someone else's friend. You may not even know who they are, but you can still pray for them. How many friends did it take to get one man to Jesus? Four. It takes teamwork. It takes us drawing the circle together - with one another. Praying and supporting each other.