

*Momentum for Life: Invest in Relationships.*

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**INTRODUCTION:** Jesus reminds us that the way of discipleship is a commitment to daily discipline and denial. He said, "If anyone wants to be my disciple, you must deny yourself, take up your cross daily and follow me." Notice that word daily. Not once a week, but every day you should take up your cross, come and follow Jesus. We have been looking at disciplines that bring momentum for life.. So far, we have looked at two disciplines Mary's devotion to God, and Readiness for life long learn the secrets of the heart. Today we are looking the discipline of investing in key relationships.

Two friends were walking through the woods when they thought they heard something. They turned around and saw a big black bear coming towards them. Both men started to run when one of them stopped to change into tennis shoes. The second man said 'You don't have time to change shoes. You can't outrun that bear!' The first man said, 'I know I can't outrun the bear. I only have to outrun you!

Sadly, many of us have know far too many friends like this. Turn to Mark 2 and get your outline out, we are going to look at a pericope:

Where hundreds are swarming for attention, but only few are true friends. Jesus also practiced community. Like you and me, he was very much involved in crowds. The word 'crowds' in the Bible is associated with Jesus on a daily basis. But in the midst of his activity in crowds, he made sure he stayed in connection with a group of 12 people.

***Do Not Invest in the Crowd Mark 2:1,2***

***A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. <sup>2</sup>So many gathered that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them.***

One of the inhibitors to momentum and recovery in your life is the inhibitor that I call the paralysis of isolation. Every day, you and I find ourselves actively engaged in crowds. There are all kinds of crowds. There is the work crowd, there is the school crowd, there is the crowd associated with the activities of our children and there is the church crowd. It is easy to make the mistake that our associations within these crowds, that are very much a part of our lives on a daily basis, are one and the same as the experience of authentic community. Crowds are pseudo-communities, including church crowds, where relationships are experienced at the superficial level. Crowds are

drawn together by activities, rather than to seek accountability and deeper meaning in our life. Every crowd is defined by activities that draw us together. Think of the basketball crowds and little league sports crowds. You come together on the basis of those activities. Whether you are working in a school work group, or even a large church group, you never get beyond superficial levels. People say, "How are you doing?" You say "Fine!" No one knows about your addictions or your struggle with your ex. Everything is just fine. Everybody is just fine, as frog hair!

We experience this superficiality at multiple levels. We experience it relationally, we experience it emotionally, we experience it spiritually and we experience it sexually. We come to this place of being alone and feeling this sense of aloneness, even when we are in crowds.

Have you ever felt alone in a crowd? We have learned to mask this aloneness we feel. We have become masters of pain avoidance because of this culture of superficiality. This culture of superficiality has resulted in a cult of self, where we idealize rugged American individualism.

Everything is about me: it's personal, it's private, it's "none of your business." Do you know what I am talking about, this cult of self rugged

individualism? I can see myself as independent from communities of accountability. I am self-sufficient, so it is none of your business. I don't really need you other than in a superficial kind of way. When I disconnect myself from a community of accountability, I create isolation.

All sin and destructive habits occurs in isolation. When I begin to say, it is none of your business, it is private, it is persona, I don't need anything other than the crowds that I experience activity in...I begin to disconnect myself from authentic community. And as soon as I disconnect from communities of accountability, authentic communities of accountability, I begin to disconnect from myself. I experience isolation and isolation is death. We do not exist for self gratification; we exist that our lives may honor and glorify God. That is the sole purpose for our existence.

What I want you to see in this story is the contrast between crowds and four friends. Crowds, through which no one can get, are the inhibitors that keep people from coming to the real Jesus, the true Jesus, the transforming power of Jesus. Mark shows how this contrasts with these four friends. don't know what I am going to be doing this afternoon, they don't know

where I hurt, they don't know where I need prayer. No one could be transformed by this. A lot of us look at the church crowd and mistake the church crowd for community. As long as I am just hanging out in the crowd, the crowd is going to prohibit me from coming to the accountability of authentic relationships and community that will allow true transformation to happen in my life. Friends are the people who share and get involved in your life. They are the ones who are involved with you below the superficial level. They are invested in your life. It is the Key Relationship we must invest in. As the old saying says: True friends are like Diamonds... they are real and rare. False friends are like leaves... they are scattered everywhere.

Jesus said in Matthew 18: ***"Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there I am with them."*** It is about two or three; it is not about crowds. This is so important. Jesus lives in the intimacy of authentic community. There is a way that I experience the presence and the healing of Jesus in the midst of two or three friends that I can't experience when I am by myself. There is a way that I connect to the power of Jesus only in the midst of two or three. I can never experience Jesus in the same way by myself. I want to ask you a

question. Who carries you? Who knows stuff that goes on in your life that almost no one else would know about? Who is so living with you in your stuff that they are praying for you right now? They are so connected to what is going on in your life that the Lord wakes them up in the middle of the night, and they pray for your children. Who is carrying you? These people are the one we must invest in. This is why we emphasize small groups we need to two or three that will carry us. Take a moment and write down two or three friends that are true friends, that you are going to invest in?

***INVEST IN RELATIONSHIPS THAT WILL CARRY YOU TO JESUS MARK 2:3***

***Some men came, bringing to him a paralytic, carried by four of them. <sup>4</sup>Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus and, after digging through it, lowered the mat the paralyzed man was lying on.***

These men wanted to get their paralyzed friend to Jesus, but couldn't get him there because of the crowds that blocked the door into the house where Jesus was teaching. So, they took the paralyzed man onto the roof of the house, broke up the roof and lowered their friend down to Jesus through the hole in the roof. Houses in that day usually had

one of two types of roofs. The first consisted of beams, covered with criss-crossing sticks. This wooden foundation was then covered by clay tiles, which was in turn covered with more clay and finally grass was placed on the top. The other type of roof was covered with overlapping clay tiles. These roofs were accessible via a stairway on the side of the house. Either way, to get this man to Jesus, they had to dig through the layers of the roof to get the clay out of the way! When they did this, their friend experienced the grace of God that resulted in the forgiveness of his sins and the healing of his body! But, none of this happened until they got the clay out of the way! Until they invested time, energy and innovation. Just think of the investment of these friends-to their friend the paralytic: If you have ever carried a gurney-a casket-you know carrying some one helpless is an extreme toll on ones energy: once to the house, they then need to carry him up a flight of stairs. The tearing apart of the roof was not hard-but depending on the amount of layers of clay and dirt it took time! You spell love: T.I.M.E. Lastly, I think of the innovation of the friends of the Paralytic. In many paintings of this miracle, artist picture the friends lowering the man down by rope. I want to know did they make the rope or did they acquire the rope at the last minute?

Either way it took innovation to get their friend past the crowd, to Jesus!

Notice verse five. "When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, 'My son, your sins are forgiven.'" Whose faith did Jesus see? Did he see the paralyzed man's faith? No, he saw the faith of his four friends. Notice the synergy of group faith. I am going to tell you, straight up and honest their have been times I have been ready to through the towel in several areas God has called me to: As pastor I have at times begged God-give me a new calling! As a dad the chaos and choices my children have made I wanted to drive right by our house and keep on going. Over 24 years of marriage there has been times the easy way out would have been to just give up?! What got me through-friends who remove the roof between me and Jesus! My good friend Greg: once told me suck it up-every Pastor has the same problem. I have had people throughout my life who knew my junk and knew at the moment it was not good and prayed did not judge me. Jennifer no matter how rough it got, has always encouraged us both to look and work for solutions. Do you know what will get you through life and the commitments in life? Investing in key relationships that will get you to Jesus!

If you doubt this notice Jesus knew that he could not fulfill God's purpose and be obedient all the way to the cross if it weren't for his friends, his authentic community, who were carrying him. In the garden of Gethsemane, the night before his crucifixion, he took his eleven friends with him. Here is what Jesus said: "*My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.*"

Jesus, the Son of God was saying, "I can't do this by myself, guys! I can't do what the Father is asking me to do tomorrow, emotionally or spiritually, if you do not stand with me and carry me." When he said "stand watch with me," these were the folks who were anticipating where evil was going to attack tomorrow. A watch is like the sentry on a guard tower. These are the people who are so intertwined with your spirit and love you in such a way that even when you fail, they are going to stand watch. When you forget how to pray against evil, you have this group of friends who are praying in Jesus' name on your behalf. Can you identify those people who you know would come for you, no matter what you need? Whatever it is, those people are going to be there for you. How can you find relationships you can invest in at ECC?

### ***SERVE***

When reading the gospels, notice how God chose his disciples. This is why I love it. They weren't the brightest or best, they weren't the

stars. I often wonder why God chose me. I wasn't athletic, I wasn't academic, I wasn't artistic. God doesn't use that selection purpose. God is looking for folks who will totally and fully embrace the mission of God and are risk takers, persons of valor. In short they serve.

The best place to find relationships worth investing is serving in the Kingdom of God! What a person values enough to give of themselves reveals to us their heart, their goodness and focus. Jesus chose friends because they were willing to serve something beyond themselves. If you want to find friends that will bring you to Jesus, find places to serve in the church and you will begin to find relationship worth investing in. That is exactly one of the reasons we are having teams Sunday on the 31<sup>st</sup> we want to give everyone an opportunity for a place to plug in and serve. Because service allows us to find true friends.

### ***SIGN UP FOR A SMALL GROUP***

In the second chapter of Acts it talks about friends who got together. They broke bread in each other's homes. That means you don't just come here and sing songs. You find some friends, and then you go out and eat together. You go home together; you talk about the struggles in your life and your temptations. You talk about struggles in your marriage and your relationships. You talk about your jobs. Here is the truest experience of church. This is what we are trying to build in

each small group of the church from Sunday Morning Bible School, to Sunday night Bible Studies and our small group. If this what you are looking for find a small group to get involved with so you can find friend worth investing in it.

### ***STICK WITH IT***

Focus on those friends who challenge you to become the best Jesus follower you can be, as well as inspire you to do bigger and greater things for God's kingdom. Vital friendships not only surround you when you are struggling, but also give you a kick in the pants when you need it. Inspiring relationships feed on each other and God uses same-minded people to accomplish extraordinary things that could never be attempted or completed alone. But remember what I said earlier: True friends are like Diamonds... they are real and rare. False friends are like leaves... they are scattered everywhere. One thing this means is that it takes time to find friends-so don't try one service project-one small group and if it flops do not give up if you don't find a diamond the first time keep going.

### ***INVEST IN THOSE WHO CARRY YOU MARK 2:4-12***

*Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus and, after digging through it, lowered the mat the paralyzed man was lying on.*

*<sup>5</sup>When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven."*

*<sup>6</sup>Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, <sup>7</sup>"Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"*

*<sup>8</sup>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? <sup>9</sup>Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk'? <sup>10</sup>But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins . . . ." He said to the paralytic, <sup>11</sup>"I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." <sup>12</sup>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!"*

It's easy to tell someone his sins are forgiven; it's a lot more difficult to reverse a case of paralysis! Jesus backed up his words by healing the man's legs. Jesus' action showed that his words were true; he had the power to forgive as well as to heal. Talk is cheap, but our words lack meaning if our actions do not back them up. We can say we love God or others, but if we are not taking practical steps to demonstrate that love, our words are empty and meaningless. How well

do your actions back up what you say?

The crowds words were something like: Oh my Jesus is such a great teacher -he is the best-but if you remember when they did not get what they wanted in John 6 they left him. The Jewish leaders I am certain were saying we got your back Jesus, but what your saying is Blasphemy because you can't possibly be God and we know that their actions, back room deals and gossip demand the life of Jesus later on. The truth is we can say a lot of things-but it is our actions that cement friendship. Here is three investments you can make in friends willing to carry you to Jesus.

### ***Act***

The paralyzed man's need moved his friends to action, and they brought him to Jesus. When you recognize someone's need, do you act? Many people have physical and spiritual needs you can meet, either by yourself or with others who are also concerned. Human need moved these four men; let it also move you to compassionate action. Because of this I am certain, from this point forward the paralyzed man acted when he saw a need in his friends lives. We invest in key relationships by acting to meet needs.

### ***Ask for what you need?***

We may be tempted to say It wasn't the paralyzed man's faith that

impressed Jesus but the faith of his friends. Except for one thing-I have a suspicion it was the paralyzed man who asked his friends to carry him to Jesus? One of the greatest acts of faith, to make our needs known to God and man. One of the greatest acts of friendship and love is to express our needs.

For better or worse, our faith affects others. We cannot make another person a Christian, but we can do much through our words, actions, and love to give him or her a chance to respond. Look for opportunities to bring your friends to the living Christ. I am certain this day forward the paralytic, took opportunities to express his needs, and to encourage his friend to ask in faith their needs from God.

### ***Acceptance***

Mark 2:10 is the first time in Mark that Jesus is referred to as the "Son of Man." The title Son of Man emphasizes that Jesus is fully human, while Son of God emphasizes that he is fully God. As God's Son, Jesus has the authority to forgive sin. As a man, he can identify with our deepest needs and sufferings and help us overcome sin. In short Jesus accepted the paralysed man just the way he was, it was the first step for healing. Friends who know our worst and still accept us as we are, are always the first step to health in life. When we find

this type of healing acceptance, what should we do in return? Accept our friend as they are, not as we want them to be! (Praise Band Come up front)

**Conclusion:** Folks, I want to ask you a question. Who is carrying you? Jesus, the Son of God, knew that he could not do it with the daily crowds. He was always intimately connected to the eleven. The paralytic could not do it without his friends. You can not do it without friends-the friend that sticks closer than a brother is Jesus-if you need to accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior come up front to confess your faith that Jesus died to heal you, and be immersed in his blood that bring forgiveness. If you have been attending for awhile and God is calling you to this community to invest in friends-we would ask you to come forward and confess your faith to this congregation as to who Jesus is!