**GFM STAFF CONFERENCE 2023**

**National Staff Conference 2023 - Mundelein**

*Small Group –* ***Session 1 (Tuesday, March 21, 4:30-5:30)***

Goal: Meet each other, connect, and begin to enter into the topic of Evangelism with each other

1. Introduction – What are you looking forward to and/or hoping for in the next few days while at the conference?
2. When you heard the topic of the conference, what did it stir in you? Concerns? Hopes? Etc.?
3. Lectio Divina – Conference Bible Passage

**Mark 2 - NLT**

**2**When Jesus returned to Capernaum several days later, the news spread quickly that he was back home. **2**Soon the house where he was staying was so packed with visitors that there was no more room, even outside the door. While he was preaching God’s word to them, **3**four men arrived carrying a paralyzed man on a mat. **4**They couldn’t bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, so they dug a hole through the roof above his head. Then they lowered the man on his mat, right down in front of Jesus. **5**Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralyzed man, “My child, your sins are forgiven.”

**6**But some of the teachers of religious law who were sitting there thought to themselves, **7**“What is he saying? This is blasphemy! Only God can forgive sins!”

**8**Jesus knew immediately what they were thinking, so he asked them, “Why do you question this in your hearts? **9**Is it easier to say to the paralyzed man ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or ‘Stand up, pick up your mat, and walk’? **10**So I will prove to you that the Son of Man[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=mark+2&version=NLT#fen-NLT-24244a)] has the authority on earth to forgive sins.” Then Jesus turned to the paralyzed man and said, **11**“Stand up, pick up your mat, and go home!” **12**And the man jumped up, grabbed his mat, and walked out through the stunned onlookers. They were all amazed and praised God, exclaiming, “We’ve never seen anything like this before!”

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**Lectio Divina Instructions**

**1. Reading**

In this first step, read through Mark 2. Take your time. Make sure you’re understanding and absorbing the words in front of you. Is there a phrase or verse that really stands out to you? Take note of it. As comfortable, go around the group and share. No explanations. Just share what stood out to you.

**2. Reflecting**

After your first read through the passage, take another look at it with the intent of reflecting. This second time through, let the words interact with your thoughts, feelings, and your life circumstances—past, present, and future. Read. Reflect. As comfortable, go around the group a second time and share a word or two of where it is interesting with your life. And then, when you’re ready, move to the third step…

**3. Responding**

The third time of reading through the passage is for response. You might be moved to praise, adoration, or giving thanks. You might respond to pray for someone using the Scripture at hand. Is there a word or phrase that the Spirit brought your attention? Consider responding to it. As comfortable, go around one last time, and share briefly what has come to your attention.

**4. Resting**

The fourth step in *Lectio Divina* may be the hardest. As you read through this passage once more, focus on resting in God’s presence. You don’t need to do anything. Just *be*. The stillness can be uncomfortable for some, and you might be tempted to cut your time short. Take a few moments to journal or note what has been brought to your attention in these moments together.

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*Small Group –* ***Session 2 (Wednesday, March 22)***

Goal: Let’s Go Deeper Together in Mark 2, understanding what is happening here.

This passage of scripture is uniquely set after the healing of the leper. It’s at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry and people are starting to hear about him. He is starting to draw crowds wherever he goes. He is healing people, driving out demons, and developing his team of disciples. A stir is starting among the religious elite about him.

**Read the text together**.

**Mark 2 - NIV**

**2**A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. **2**They gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. **3**Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. **4**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. **5**When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, “Son, your sins are forgiven.”

**6**Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, **7**“Why does this fellow talk like that? He’s blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?”

**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!”

After reading, please take a few moments to pause. Reflect on what you are seeing this morning. Where is your attention being drawn today?

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*Small Group –* ***Session 2 (Wednesday, March 22)***

1. As a group, take some time to list the characters in this passage. Who are these people? What do we know about them from this passage? (Jesus, crowd – disciples, townsfolk, kids, family, those who are searching for Jesus, those who have heard who he is, teachers of the law/religious teachers, maybe some Romans, some friends who had a friend in need, a man who was paralyzed, a homeowner)
2. Take another moment and list your questions. Are there some you’d like to tackle together? If so, go ahead and jump in. If you need some other suggested questions, here are some more:
3. Why did the friends go through all this trouble? What was their motivation? If you had to describe these friends, what would you say? What do you think they knew about Jesus?
4. Did these friends have a strategy? If so, what was it? Is there anything we can learn from them?
5. What are the power struggles that are implicit in this story? (Why are the religious leaders so angry about Jesus forgiving sins?)
6. According to this passage, whose faith did Jesus recognize? What was the result? How does this sit with you and why?
7. Why would Jesus forgive sins knowing it was strictly prohibitive and potentially lethal?
8. Which is easier to do, forgive sins or heal a paralytic? Why does Jesus forgive sin first?
9. What does this healing reveal about Jesus? What does it reveal about religious teachers?
10. What were the results of what the friends did that day? Do you think the friends found what they wanted that day? Why or why not?
11. Who repaired the roof??? 😊

***In closing, imagine you were witnessing this story in real life – reread the passage aloud one more time then turn to the person beside you and discuss:***

***Where do you see yourself in the story? Which character(s) do you most identify or which one(s) most intrigue you today? What would be your response be to seeing a group of people doing everything they can to get a friend in front of Jesus? Have you seen a modern-day examples of this?***

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Small Group - **Session Three (Thursday, March 23)**

Goal: Lets take a relook and then turn towards application

Today, take some time and pause again. Reflect on maybe what is still sticking with you from yesterday’s study. Has anything else come to mind over the last 24 hours? As we take a third look at this passage today, please be aware of your posture, attitude, responses. What is feeling uncomfortable, encouraging, uninteresting, or confusing.

**Read the text together**.

**Mark 2 - ESV**

**2**And when he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. **2**And many were gathered together, so that there was no more room, not even at the door. And he was preaching the word to them. **3**And they came, bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men. **4**And 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. **5**And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” **6**Now 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?” **8**And immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, “Why do you question these things in your hearts? **9**Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise, take up your bed and walk’? **10**But 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.” **12**And 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!”

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Small Group - **Session Three (Thursday, March 23)**

Let’s now take some time to look for barriers in this text.

1. Where do we see barriers of any kind? What is it a barrier from? Can barriers be both positive, negative, and/or both?
2. The crowd is a significant barrier in this story. How can people be barriers to good things? Recently, a professor said, “Why do we reject Christ for others?” As he continued, he explained that we often think, “oh that person will never follow Jesus” and then never share the Gospel with this person. In a sense, rejecting Christ for this individual. Is it possible to be a barrier in this way? Agree or Disagree?
3. Now, as a group… take some time and brainstorm scenarios that you’ve seen on campus or elsewhere that have barriers for people getting to Jesus – they can be any type of barrier. If possible, list them on a whiteboard.

As a group, choose one scenario and let’s work it out together. What is the barrier (maybe there are more than one)? What is the crowd saying around the barrier? What are the other power dynamics going on? What would it take to remove the barrier? What would it take to go around the barrier? Is there a different frame to look at the scenario through?

1. Now, think about your own scenario on campus or the place you serve within GFM, what are YOUR barriers to helping someone get to Jesus? Turn to the person beside you and share.
2. As you look at your scenario on campus, what are ways you and your students are already helping people get to Jesus? Are there any new ideas that you’ve heard this week that you are thinking about trying?
3. This group of friends, they were a team of sorts. Who is your team? Who is helping you carry the load? Perhaps you need a team… what is one next step that you can take when you return to your normal work to develop this team?