



CHILD HEALTH NOW

Small Group Bible Study

Overview

THIS STUDY INVITES participants to explore what Scripture has to say about caring for those in need, especially children.

THE STUDY OFFERS OPPORTUNITIES TO:

- » Explore Scripture.
- » Personally reflect, share, and pray about injustices in the world.
- » Develop a greater understanding of preventable child deaths.
- » Learn about the *Child Health Now* campaign.

» **KEY SCRIPTURE**

Mark 5:21-43

» **USING THIS STUDY**

This study is ideal for a group setting, although individuals can easily adapt it for their use. The lesson is designed for a 60- to 90-minute timeframe.

» **LEADING A GROUP STUDY**

Read this lesson before you facilitate it; then use it creatively to meet the needs of your group members. Expect to spend 20 to 30 minutes preparing for the lesson—praying, reading, working through transitions, and contextualizing material.

PART ONE: WHEN THE WORLD CAME TUMBLING DOWN

Read

WHEN JESUS HAD again crossed over by boat to the other side of the lake, a large crowd gathered around him while he was by the lake. Then one of the synagogue rulers, named Jairus, came there. Seeing Jesus, he fell at his feet and pleaded earnestly with him, “*My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live.*” So Jesus went with him.

A large crowd followed and pressed around him. And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, because she thought, “*If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed.*” Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering.

At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, “*Who touched my clothes?*” “*You see the people crowding against you,*” his disciples answered, “*and yet you can ask, ‘Who touched me?’*”

But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. He said to her, “*Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.*”

While Jesus was still speaking, some men came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue ruler. “*Your daughter is dead,*” they said. “*Why bother the teacher any more?*” Ignoring what they said, Jesus told the synagogue ruler, “*Don’t be afraid; just believe.*”

He did not let anyone follow him except Peter, James and John the brother of James. When they came to the home of the synagogue ruler, Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly. He went in and said to them, “*Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep.*” But they laughed at him.

After he put them all out, he took the child’s father and mother and the disciples who were with him, and went in where the child was. He took her by the hand and said to her, “*Talitha koum!*” (which means, “*Little girl, I say to you, get up!*”). Immediately the girl stood up and walked around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished. He gave strict orders not to let anyone know about this, and told them to give her something to eat.

- MARK 5:21-43

Reflect

- » **THROUGHOUT MARK'S GOSPEL** we see Jesus performing miraculous feats that fulfill the ancient prophecies of the Old Testament and point his followers towards his gift of eternal salvation. Mark, as a potted history of Jesus' life, is a chronicle of intense action, of breathless excitement. It tells of a man of mystery, gradually revealing his identity, as Messiah, to his disciples.
- » **AIMED AT UNBELIEVERS**, Mark's Gospel is fast-paced. Jesus is shown as a biblical action-man. Mark uses his account to take his reader on a whistle-stop tour of the, person and work of Christ, and is an encouragement to respond in faith rather than fear, to the challenges of believing in Christ. Jesus manifests divine power as he overcomes demons, heals disease, challenges ignorance and hatred, accepts the outcast and shows love to his enemies, even at the point of his death. At the center of all this activity, the challenge is to respond, in faith, to the divinity of Christ.
- » **MARK IS VERY BLACK AND WHITE** in his portrayal of what it means to have faith. Characters in his narrative either have faith, and the guts to stand up and put their faith into action, or they simply don't. Furthermore, in Mark, miracles are not seen as leading to faith (compare this with the Gospel of John). Rather, faith is shown as a pre-requisite of miracles taking place.
- » **ONE OF THE JOYS** of Mark's approach to Jesus' life is that he records the reactions and responses of those who meet Jesus. The reader can use these details to piece together some of the, back-story, that surrounds the people whom Jesus encounters. This can help their dilemmas to feel more personal and their challenges to have a deeper resonance for the reader.
- » **IN MARK 5:21-43**, we see two desperate people putting their faith into action as all around them the world comes tumbling down. We witness the mercy and compassion with which Jesus responds to them. We are encouraged to see their attitude in a time of crisis as a model for our own behavior.

Engage

TAKE SOME TIME TO JOURNAL OR DISCUSS THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

- » Most of us are careful not to bother Jesus until we have tried everything else first.
- » What are your most common safety nets, when life is tumbling around your ears?
- » Can you think of people for whom these safety nets don't exist?

Read

BEKELECH'S STORY: A LIFE WITHOUT SAFETY NETS

It is raining hard! At Shone Health Center, south of Ethiopia's capital, Addis Ababa, hundreds of people huddle on a flimsy veranda. Adults hold babies tightly to their chests, protecting the tiny, emaciated bodies from the rain. The babies are sick and hungry. Their hold on life is like a fragile thread, all too easily broken.

Just a few months ago, World Vision began working with staff at the health center to treat severely malnourished children under five years old. Today, over 1,300 children have already received life saving help.

In a country where there are few social services to provide safety nets for the poor and vulnerable, 1-year-old Konjit Guidisa is among the lucky ones! She was admitted to the clinic suffering from severe malnutrition. Her aunt, Bekelech Yohannis, has been doing her best to care for the baby since Konjit's mother died. But, like most things in Bekelech's life, food is in short supply.

"I came to the clinic crying. This baby was dying. Diarrhea and vomiting was killing her. I have four children of my own, and Konjit is now my fifth. I tried breast feeding her but I fell sick with malaria and the milk stopped coming.

We try to get the children some food to eat, at least once a day. Even when there is a meal, it is usually just something starchy, to fill the belly. We cannot get good food like vegetables or meat.

But I am happy because at this hospital Konjit has been getting special porridge. They have treated her well and she is now better. I came crying but now I am very happy because I have seen the improvement."

Konji will soon be discharged and her aunt will make the long journey from her home to the outpatient clinic once a week. A nurse will regularly review the baby's health and replenish supplementary food supplies. In between visits, Bekelech will continue to make ends meet as best she can.

"We have a small piece of land, but it is in the lowlands and in a dry area. I have planted some maize but the crop was burned by the sun. I do not have any food at home, but I have God."

Going Deeper

THIS PASSAGE IN MARK begins immediately after Jesus returns from casting the demons out of a non-Jewish man and is promptly met by a large crowd. The throng that gathered around him included an official from the local synagogue whose daughter is on the verge of death.

This man, Jairus, falls before Jesus and begs him to come and heal her. As administrative head of the synagogue, Jairus was responsible for the officialness of officialdom, for making sure that synagogue life was played out in an orderly and dignified manner. As one of the most important and well-respected men in the community, it was extraordinary for the locals to see him groveling at the feet of a two-bit village prophet!

So what exactly is Jairus doing on his knees in the dust at Jesus' feet? Why has he left a daughter who is so sick that every breath might be her last? Why doesn't such a big-wig simply send his assistant to fetch the healer?

The answer is that Jairus' world has come crashing down around his ears and he does not have any other safety net. Jesus is his only answer! Jairus' desperation at the imminent death of his daughter propels him into an unexpected act of humility and faith on her behalf. Things are so bad that he can't trust the job of persuading Jesus to heal his daughter to anybody who might mess it up. Leaving the sick-bed and begging on his knees, this suave and successful man swallows his pride and places his hope in the only person who can really help him.

Jairus, in worldly terms, is the big man on the block. But he goes in search of Jesus, even though most people were writing off the Son of God as an upstart village boy.

Jairus' world has crumbled and become unrecognizable. His need prompts him to cast aside his dignity and come as a suppliant. He places his faith in Jesus, not on his status: *"Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live."*

Jairus is a fantastic illustration of what it means to truly trust God. Because of his position amongst the religious leaders, some of whom openly opposed Jesus and because of his public acknowledgement of Jesus' authority, this encounter threatens Jairus' standing within the community. Jairus risks everything for a moment of Jesus' time.

Get Personal

TAKE SOME TIME TO JOURNAL OR DISCUSS THE FOLLOWING QUESTION:

» What desperate situations from around the world are you prepared to pray about?

Reflect

JAIRUS SEEMS TO achieve his mission. He starts to leave with Jesus. But all too soon the mercy dash is rudely interrupted by the woman with the flow of blood. During Jesus' detour and the woman's healing, the reader encounters another person whose world has fallen apart only to be rebuilt again by stepping out in faith.

Strictly speaking this nameless woman should not even be in the crowd. Her illness has made her ritually unclean (Leviticus 15:25-27). She knows that by stepping out of the house, she is risking public outrage. Her desperation gives her the courage to take action and to throw the rule book out the window.

Reaching out and touching Jesus is a scandalously defiant act. This woman should not be touching anybody. One touch means pollution for any God-fearing Jew.

Engage

BUT THE WOMAN does dare to reach out and touch Jesus, and she is healed instantly. Finally, after years of stigma and shame she is cleansed, ready to make a swift exit and about to begin her life again. However, she doesn't make the clean get-away that she is hoping for. No one who reaches out in faith to Jesus is ever ignored. When Jesus asks, who touched him, it shows that, in spite of the teeming throng of people around him, he is spiritually alive to one individual's physical need.

At once Jesus realized that power had gone out of him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, "*Who touched my clothes?*"

When Jesus begins to talk to the woman, he asks questions to which, as the Son of God, he must already have known the answer. Perhaps this conversation is as much for the benefit of Jesus' followers as it is for the woman herself? We learn that she has been sick for 12 years and, having spent all her money on doctors, is destitute. Unlike the rich and sophisticated Jairus, who stands up in faith on behalf of someone else, this woman is penniless and seemingly alone in the crowd. She has no one to act on her behalf. Her desperation and her faith lead her to do the unthinkable.

Notes

TAKE SOME TIME TO JOURNAL OR DISCUSS THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

- » Share some examples of times during which you have acted on someone else's behalf out of sheer desperation. Have there ever been any positive consequences?

Go Deeper

IN THIS CONVERSATION WITH THE WOMAN, Jesus rejects the orthodoxy of Jewish legalism like at so many other times during his ministry. Despite her fears of being spiritually unclean, the woman refuses to give up until she has made personal contact with Jesus. So, rather than chastising her for breaking the law, Jesus praises her actions, using the word “daughter.” To recognize the relationship of love and responsibility that binds her to him:

“Daughter, your faith has made you whole. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.”

Which is all very well, but the fact of the matter is that Jesus’ healing of this woman slows things down. By the time he gets to Jairus’ house, the daughter is already dead. It seems like Jairus has put his reputation and career on the line for nothing. It seems like he has exposed himself to the scorn of his peers by daring to believe in the wrong man. And this man, this two-bit prophet, really doesn’t seem to have merited his faith. It’s too late! Jesus hasn’t taken Jairus’ desperation seriously enough or responded quickly enough!

At this point, Jairus could get angry and reproach Jesus. Or he could send his servants to throw Jesus off the property, so that his family can mourn in peace. Instead, when the foundation of his faith seems about to crumble, he obeys Jesus’ command. *“Don’t be afraid; just believe.”* He allows Jesus to enter his house and reach out to his child and as always, his faith is rewarded. Jesus reveals himself to be the Lord of Life.

While Jesus was still speaking, some men came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue ruler. *“Your daughter is dead,”* they said. *“Why bother the teacher any more?”*

Ignoring what they said, Jesus told the synagogue ruler, *“Don’t be afraid; just believe.”*

He did not let anyone follow him except Peter, James, and John the brother of James. When they came to the home of the synagogue ruler, Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly. He went in and said to them, *“Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep.”* But they laughed at him.

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At this point, they were completely astonished. He gave strict orders not to let anyone know about this, and told them to give her something to eat.

Get Involved

- » **EVERY DAY**, more than 22,000 children die before reaching their fifth birthday. Most of these children live in developing countries and die from causes that are preventable or treatable. The main identified causes of death are: pneumonia, diarrheal diseases, pre-term births, asphyxia and malaria. In many of these deaths, malnutrition is an underlying factor.
- » **MANY FACTORS MAKE** it difficult to reduce child mortality. Lesser-developed countries struggle with inadequate health services, lack of clean water and sanitation, illiteracy (especially among women and girls), gender discrimination, and isolation of communities due to poor infrastructure, natural disasters and conflict.
- » **A SIGNIFICANT PROPORTION** of under 5 child deaths occur in the newborn period, the first 28 days of life. Of an estimated 8.8 million deaths of children under 5 in 2008, more than 40 percent occurred in the newborn period.
- » **PREVENTING THE DEATHS** of millions of children requires an integrated approach and low-cost interventions such as: nutrition training; distribution of Vitamin A, iodized salt, and iron; education in breastfeeding, hygiene and sanitation practices; birth spacing and skilled birth attendants; access to antibiotics and immunizations; oral rehydration therapy (ORT); and ready-to-use therapeutic foods (RUTFs).
- » **CHANGES ARE ALSO NEEDED** to improve healthcare facilities and systems, remove social barriers for women, and address indirect factors, such as illiteracy, that cause poor health.
- » **“CHILD HEALTH NOW”** is World Vision’s first global campaign focused on a single issue: reducing the preventable deaths of children under 5. In two minutes, more than 30 children under the age of 5 will die. Most of them will succumb to preventable causes, such as diarrhea, pneumonia, childbirth complications and malaria.
- » **THIS IS MORE** than just a problem facing the developing world. It’s a “silent” emergency. And it is the greatest child rights violation of our time.
- » **THAT’S WHY WORLD VISION** has launched its *Child Health Now* campaign, a five-year commitment to reducing these deaths. Our campaign will draw on the lessons learned in our 1,600+ community programs, where our development strategies are fully linked to our advocacy efforts with local and national government bodies.
- » **THROUGH THIS CAMPAIGN**, World Vision encourages communities to raise their voices about their right to quality healthcare, and press national governments to meet their responsibilities to children, mothers, families and communities throughout their country.
- » **WE WILL ALSO JOIN HANDS** with local government and NGO partners to cooperatively address the critical health-related issues in specific communities. But working locally won’t be enough. As Christians we must also urge wealthy nations to fulfill their

promises to improve conditions in the developing world. More than 190 world leaders have committed to achieve the UN's Millennium Development Goals by 2015. World Vision's Child Health Now campaign calls on the international community to rededicate itself to these goals.

» **WORLD VISION WANTS YOU** to join by urging our elected leaders to put child health at the top of their agendas. Let them know we believe 22,000 child deaths every day are not acceptable, and ask them how they're going to help.

Closing Prayer

- » **PRAY FOR OPPORTUNITIES** to reach out to those who are desperately seeking Jesus.
- » **PRAY FOR THE FAITH** to stand up and believe that change can happen in your own life.
- » **PRAY FOR CHANGE** in the lives of people like Bekelech, and in the situations around the world that seem hopeless.

PRAY:

*Grant us, Lord God, a vision of our world as only your love can make it:
A world where the vulnerable are protected,
Where the hungry can eat their fill,
Where the oppressed find comfort and rest,
And where the poor have the same chances as the rich.
Please give us courage to stand up and work for a better world,
And help us to make it a place where peace is built with justice,
And justice guided by your love.
Amen.*

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About World Vision

WORLD VISION is a Christian humanitarian organization dedicated to working with children, families, and their communities worldwide to reach their full potential by tackling the causes of poverty and injustice. Motivated by our faith in Jesus Christ, World Vision serves alongside the poor and oppressed as a demonstration of God's unconditional love for all people. We see a world where each child experiences "fullness of life" as described in John 10:10. And we know this can be achieved only by addressing the problems of poverty and injustice in a holistic way. That's how World Vision is unique: We bring 60 years of experience in three key areas needed to help children and families thrive: emergency relief, long-term development, and advocacy. And we bring *all* of our skills across many areas of expertise to each community we work in, enabling us to care for children's physical, social, emotional, and spiritual well-being.

Partnering with World Vision provides tangible ways to honor God and put faith into action. By working, we can make a lasting difference in the lives of children and families who are struggling to overcome poverty. To find out more about how you can help, visit www.worldvision.org.

About World Vision Resources

ENDING GLOBAL POVERTY and injustice begins with education: understanding the magnitude and causes of poverty, its impact on human dignity, and our connection to those in need around the world.

World Vision Resources is the publishing ministry of World Vision. World Vision Resources educates Christians about global poverty, inspires them to respond, and equips them with innovative resources to make a difference in the world.



For more information about our resources, contact:

World Vision Resources

Mail Stop 321

P.O. Box 9716

Federal Way, WA 98063-9716

Fax: 253-815-3340

wvresources@worldvision.org

www.worldvisionresources.com