

What Do You Seek?

Session 2: The Deeper Paralysis

A study for seekers, and for the friends who walk with them

Part One: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim: The group discovers that when Jesus finally gets a man lowered in front of Him with an obvious problem, He addresses a different problem first, and that His diagnosis, sin as real separation, is more hopeful than the modern alternative, which has no cure at all.

Catholic Touchstone: The Lord Jesus Christ, physician of our souls and bodies, who forgave the sins of the paralytic and restored him to bodily health (CCC 1421).

The Knock and the Door: Piece Two

This week's piece, in one sentence: Something in us is genuinely broken; the Bible calls it sin, means separation from God, and treats it as a sickness to be healed rather than merely a rule to be punished.

Sequence matters for seekers: last week established that we were made for God. Only against that backdrop does sin make sense, as the thing standing between us and what we were made for. Presented in this order it lands as diagnosis, not accusation. The read-aloud script is in the Discussion Guide.

What You Need to Know

Mark 2 opens with Jesus “at home” in Capernaum, and the crowd so thick that “there was no longer room for them, not even about the door” (Mk 2:2). The doorway is jammed. Four men carry a paralyzed man onto the roof, break it open, and lower him on his pallet in front of Jesus. Mark’s verb literally means they dug through it, which fits the packed-earth roofs and outside stairs typical of Capernaum houses; Mark does not call the four his friends, but everything they do says it. It is faith expressed as demolition.

Then the surprise the whole session turns on: with a paralyzed man in front of Him, Jesus does not say “rise.” He says, “My son, your sins are forgiven” (Mk 2:5). Either He has badly misread the situation, or He can see a deeper paralysis under the visible one, and treats the deadlier condition first.

The scribes object silently with flawless logic: “Who can forgive sins but God alone?” (Mk 2:7). Their premise is correct. Sin, whoever else it wounds, is finally against God, so only God can absolve it. Hold that premise; the group returns to it next week, when it becomes the hinge of the question of who Jesus is.

The healing (Mk 2:10-12) is then offered as evidence: “that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” The visible miracle authenticates the invisible one. And down the same chapter, at Levi’s dinner, Jesus states His own mission in medical terms: “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I came not to call the righteous, but sinners” (Mk 2:17).

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Psalm 103:2-3. The psalm pairs exactly what Mark 2 pairs: the God “who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases.” The paralytic scene is this verse acted out in a living room. The group finds it live.

Isaiah 59:2. “Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God.” Sin defined relationally before it is defined legally: a wall, not merely a violation.

Voices of the Church

St. Ignatius of Antioch *Letter to the Ephesians, 7 (c. AD 107)*

“There is one Physician, of flesh and of spirit... Jesus Christ our Lord.” Writing on the road to his martyrdom, within living memory of the apostles, Ignatius already speaks of Christ in exactly the register of Mark 2: the doctor who treats the whole patient.

St. John Chrysostom *Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew (summary)*

Preaching on this healing, Chrysostom draws the audience's attention to the order of Christ's words: the soul is treated before the body, because the soul's disease is the older and deadlier one. The paralysis everyone could see was the smaller problem in the room. This is a faithful summary of his homily rather than a direct quotation.

St. Augustine *Confessions, Book 2 (summary)*

Augustine spends a startling number of pages on a petty teenage theft of pears he did not even want, because it let him examine sin in laboratory conditions: he loved not the pears but the transgression itself. His conclusion, that sin is love bent out of shape, disordered love, is the classic Catholic account, and it explains why sin cannot be fixed by information alone. A summary of his analysis, not a quotation.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 1849:** sin defined: an offense against reason, truth, and right conscience; a failure of genuine love for God and neighbor.
- **CCC 1850: sin is an offense against God; it sets itself against His love for us and turns our hearts away from Him.**
- **CCC 1440: sin is before all else an offense against God, a rupture of communion with Him.**
- **CCC 1421:** Christ the physician of souls and bodies, with this very healing of the paralytic cited.

Hosting Your Seeker Friend

This Week's Coaching

Sin is the week the room can go quiet, so watch your pronouns: it is always “we,” never “you.” If anyone confesses something real tonight, the leader receives it with gratitude and zero commentary; the two standing rules are doing their heaviest work this session. If your friend has been hurt by shame-heavy religion, do not defend the Church's worst messengers; point at the text, where Jesus leads with “My son” before anything else. And notice what this session never asks: nobody is asked to name their sins aloud. The diagnosis is offered; the appointment stays private.

Thread Watch (leader only)

- **The First Word:** note it silently: the friends act, but the first words spoken in the scene are Jesus' own, and forgiveness arrives before anyone asks for it. Nobody in Mark 2 requests absolution.
- **Doors and Thresholds:** the door is explicitly blocked (Mk 2:2) and they come through the roof. Protect the detail; do not connect it to anything yet.
- **The scribes' premise:** "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" is next week's hinge. Plant it firmly; resolve nothing.

Session Goals

1. Present Piece Two: sin as real separation and real sickness, in that order, after last week's made-for-God foundation.
2. Walk Mark 2:1-12 inductively, landing the surprise of verse 5 and the logic of verses 7-11.
3. Land the live discovery in Psalm 103:2-3, forgiveness and healing paired.
4. Steelman the strongest modern objection to the whole category of sin, and answer it from the text.
5. Close with Mark 2:17: the physician's own mission statement, which turns the diagnosis into an invitation.

Time Note

75 minutes of content in a 90-minute evening. If long: cut the Dig Deeper box first, then merge Build questions 4 and 5. Never cut the steelman; for a seeker this session's credibility depends on it.

Part Two: Discussion Guide

Opening

Leader prays alone, briefly. Restate the two rules in one sentence if any new faces are present.

“God, you see everything we carried in here tonight, the visible things and the other things. Be gentle and be honest with us. Amen.”

The Knock and the Door (read aloud, under 3 minutes)

Piece Two: The Deeper Paralysis

“Last week we put down the first piece: you were made for God, and the ache is a homing signal. Here is the second piece, and it is the hard one, so I want to say it carefully. Christianity claims something is actually wrong with us. Not that you are worthless, the opposite of that, but that something real stands between us and what we were made for. The word for it is sin, and the Bible's first definition is not a broken rule but a broken connection: separation. Here is why that is strangely good news. Most accounts of the ache on offer today say it is just how things are; there is no cure, only management. The Christian account says it is a sickness, and sickness is the one category that comes with the possibility of a physician. Tonight's story is about a man whose visible problem was not his biggest one, and about who noticed.”

Win

David Foster Wallace, no churchman, told a graduating class in 2005: “Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship.” He went on to argue that whatever you center your life on, money, body, intellect, power, will eat you alive, not because it is evil but because it cannot bear the weight.

1. What do people actually build their lives around, whether or not they would use the word worship?
2. Have you ever watched something good become destructive because it was asked to carry too much? What happened?

Build

Read Mark 2:1-5 aloud.

1. Picture verse 2 literally: the house is packed and the doorway itself is jammed. What do the four friends do about it, and what does Jesus call what they did (v. 5)?
2. Here is the strangest sentence in the story. A paralyzed man is lowered in front of Jesus, and Jesus says, “My son, your sins are forgiven.” If you were the man on the mat, what would you be thinking?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

They dig through the roof, and Jesus “saw their faith”: faith, in Mark, looks like four friends and a demolition project. Then the shock: Jesus treats a problem nobody mentioned. Either He missed the obvious, or He sees a second paralysis under the first and triages the deadlier one. Note also the first word: “My son.” Tenderness before anything else. And nobody in the scene asked for forgiveness; it arrives first.

3. Where else in the Bible do forgiveness and healing show up as a matched pair? Let's find one.

Live discovery: *have the group find Psalm 103:2-3 and read it aloud.*

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Psalm 103:2-3 blesses the God “who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases,” in that order. Mark 2 is this verse performed live: forgiveness first, healing second. Jesus is stepping deliberately into a job description the psalm gives to God alone, which sets up the scribes’ objection perfectly.

Read Mark 2:6-12 aloud.

4. The scribes think: “Who can forgive sins but God alone?” Is their logic actually wrong? Why would forgiving sins be something only God can do?
5. Jesus then heals the man “that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” What is the miracle functioning as, in His own words?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The scribes’ premise is airtight: if I wrong you, my mother cannot forgive me on your behalf; only the offended party can absolve. Sin, whatever else it damages, is finally against God, so only God can wipe it. Their logic is perfect; hold onto it, because it becomes explosive next week. The healing, meanwhile, is offered as evidence: a visible sign authenticating an invisible claim. Jesus stakes the checkable on the uncheckable, in front of hostile experts, in public.

Where the Skeptic Is Strongest (steelman)

Say it at full strength: “Sin is manufactured guilt. Religious institutions invented a disease so they could sell the cure, and plenty of people have been genuinely damaged by shame-based religion. I don’t need forgiving; I’m a decent person.” Grant what is true: religious shame has been weaponized, and the wounds are real; the Church’s worst messengers deserve the criticism. Then look at what the text actually does. Jesus attaches sin not to control but to healing, and His first word to the sinner is “My son.” And run one honest experiment that needs no religion at all: take only your own standards, the ones you hold other people to, and ask whether you have kept them for a single month. The wall Isaiah describes (59:2) is not a priest’s invention; we hit it with our own codes. The question is not whether something is broken. It is whether there is a physician.

Dig Deeper (optional)

Down the same chapter, Jesus eats with tax collectors and answers the grumbling with a mission statement: “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I came not to call the righteous, but sinners” (Mk 2:17). Notice what this does to the entry requirements. The only qualification for Jesus’ attention is the disease. The people most disqualified by religion are, on His stated policy, first in line. Ask the group: who is this sentence good news for, in this room?

Send

3. The paralytic’s friends did the carrying when he could not walk. Who has carried you at some point? Has anyone ever been carried by you?
4. “Diagnosis, not accusation.” Does tonight’s account of sin feel different from versions you have met before? How?

Live It This Week

1. Try the honest experiment from tonight: your own standards only, one week. Just notice.
2. Think of the person who carried you, the friend, the parent, the stranger. If they are alive, thank them this week in any form.

3. Optional: read Matthew 16:13-20 before next time. Jesus asks a question, and everything in this study hangs on it.

Closing

Leader alone, briefly: “God, if there is a wall, we did not build it alone and we cannot take it down alone. Send the physician. Amen.”

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.” Mark 2:17

Before you dismiss: hand out Take-Home 2; standing reminder to keep the sealed sheet from Week 1 safe and folded.

Part Three: Leader Reference Card

Every Passage in This Session

Primary Text

- Mark 2:1-12, the blocked door, the roof, forgiveness first, the scribes' logic, the evidence healing

Live Discovery Text

- Psalm 103:2-3, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases

Supporting Texts

- Isaiah 59:2, iniquities as separation (steelman answer)
- Mark 2:13-17, Levi's dinner and the physician saying (Dig Deeper and memory verse)

Catechism

- CCC 1849, 1850, 1440, 1421

Memory Verse

- Mark 2:17

The Knock and the Door

- Piece Two: sin as separation and sickness; the scribes' premise planted for Session 3