WITHIN REACH · WEEK 5

Carry Them to Jesus

September 13, 2026 · Mark 2:1–12 · Pastor Bart Denny

THE BIG IDEA

Sometimes love carries: we help our ONE get close to Jesus, and we trust Him with what only He can do.

This guide works two ways. On your own, take one section a day through the week, or use the daily readings near the end. In a group, plan on about an hour: read the passage aloud, talk through the background, then choose the questions that fit your group. Nobody has to answer every one.

Read **Mark 2:1–12** at least twice, once quietly and once aloud, and then read Luke's account in **Luke 5:17–26**. This is the fifth week of Within Reach. We've been asking God to help us see our ONE, praying for them and loving them, and last week, in John 1, we heard Philip's simple invitation: "Come and see." This week takes another step. Sometimes an invitation isn't the end of it. Sometimes a person needs help getting close enough to meet Jesus.

Where this passage sits

Mark tells the story of Jesus at a quick pace, and chapter 1 moves fast. Jesus calls His first disciples, then teaches in the synagogue at Capernaum "as one who had authority" (1:22). He drives out an evil spirit and heals Simon Peter's mother-in-law, and by evening "the whole town gathered at the door" (1:33). He heals a man with leprosy, and word spreads so widely that He can hardly enter a town openly (1:45).

So when Jesus comes back to Capernaum in chapter 2, the house fills at once. Mark adds an important detail: "he preached the word to them" (2:2). Jesus had already told His disciples, "Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come" (1:38). His healings show His compassion and His authority, but He came proclaiming the good news and calling people to repent and believe (1:15).

This story is also the first of five in a row (2:1–3:6) where religious leaders question Jesus. The first question is the biggest one: who does He think He is?

A few words worth a closer look

"Home" (2:1)

Capernaum, on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee, had become Jesus' base. The house may have been Peter's (1:29).

"An opening in the roof" (2:4)

Houses there usually had flat roofs reached by an outside stair, made of wooden beams covered with branches and packed clay. Mark's wording is vivid: they "unroofed the roof" and dug through it. Luke, writing for readers who knew tiled roofs, says they lowered him "through the tiles" (Luke 5:19).

"Saw their faith" (2:5)

Jesus sees the faith of the friends as well as the man. Their faith had become visible in what they did.

"Son" (2:5)

A tender word, often used for a child. Before Jesus says anything else, He speaks to this man as family.

"Blaspheming" (2:7)

To claim what belongs to God alone. The teachers of the law are right that only God can forgive sins (Isaiah 43:25). They're wrong about who is standing in front of them.

"Son of Man" (2:10)

Jesus' favorite name for Himself, reaching back to Daniel 7:13–14, where "one like a son of man" is given authority, glory and an everlasting kingdom.

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1 Notice the ONE who needs to meet Jesus

READ Mark 2:1–3, Luke 5:17–18 and Mark 5:25–34

There's a house full of people, but Mark turns our attention to five men. Four are walking, and one is being carried. We don't know the man's name, what caused his paralysis or how long he'd lived with it. We don't know whether the four were relatives, neighbors or friends. None of them says a word in the whole story. Their actions tell us what we need to know. Luke tells us what they were trying to do: "lay him before Jesus" (Luke 5:18).

Before anybody tore open a roof, something simpler happened. Someone looked at this man and thought, *He needs to meet Jesus.*

Pastor Bart told about carrying his sleeping children back to the car after long days at SeaWorld or Busch Gardens, back when the family moved from coast to coast with the Navy. A sleeping child weighs twice as much as the same child awake, and they're no help at all. If they're going to get where they need to be, someone has to carry them. Sometimes love carries.

He also told a story from September 11, 2001, twenty-five years ago that week. When the North Tower was hit, Port Authority fire warden Mike Fabiano thought of his coworker John Abruzzo, who was quadriplegic and used a power wheelchair. Fabiano and several coworkers got John into an evacuation chair and took turns carrying him down sixty-nine floors. Firefighters offered to take John so they could keep going. They stayed, and they got him out. In the middle of an emergency involving thousands of people, someone asked, *What about John?*

That's what Jesus does again and again. He sees the person inside the crowd: He touches the leper (1:41), stops for the blind beggar everyone wants silenced (10:46–52), and turns to find the frightened woman who touched His cloak (5:30–34). These four men had seen one man, too.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Who helped carry you toward Jesus: a parent, grandparent, friend or someone who kept praying for you? What did they do?

2. Why do you think Mark never tells us the four men's names or gives them a single line?

3. The man couldn't get to Jesus on his own. In what ways might your ONE be unable, or unready, to come on their own?

4. In the 9/11 story, someone thought, "What about John?" What keeps us from noticing the one person in a crowd?

5. Read Mark 5:25–34. What does Jesus do that the crowd didn't? What does it tell you about how He sees people?

6. Who has God put on your mind as you read this passage?

2 Help your ONE past the obstacles

READ Mark 2:4, Mark 10:13–16, Philippians 2:3–4 and 1 Corinthians 9:19–23

There's some irony here. The house is packed because people want to be near Jesus, and the crowd around Jesus has become the very thing keeping this man from getting to Him. Mark doesn't say whether anyone refused to move. He just says, "they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd." It's possible to be close to Jesus ourselves and still make it harder for someone else to get near Him. Later in Mark, people bring children to Jesus and His own disciples try to stop them. Jesus is indignant: "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them" (10:14).

The story could have ended at the door. The four had already carried him that far, and nobody could say they hadn't tried. But the obstacle changed their plan without changing their purpose. They still wanted this man in front of Jesus. So they got him up on the roof and started digging. Picture it from inside: Jesus teaching, the room full, scraping overhead, a little dirt falling, then more, and finally daylight. There may have been a repair bill and an angry homeowner. Their concern for this man was greater than their concern for keeping the day convenient.

Paul puts the same principle into words: "not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others" (Philippians 2:4). And he takes it into his mission: "I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some" (1 Corinthians 9:22). Paul doesn't change the gospel or who Jesus is. He changes himself. He gives up preferences and comfort to remove unnecessary barriers to the good news.

So the main lesson here isn't simply persistence. It's love willing to be inconvenienced for someone else's encounter with Jesus.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. How might a crowd of people who love Jesus still keep someone else from getting near Him? Can you think of examples?

2. What obstacles might stand between your ONE and Jesus: practical ones (rides, schedules, children), emotional ones (nervousness, past hurts) or intellectual ones (questions)?

3. "The obstacle changed their plan without changing their purpose." Where have you given up because the first way didn't work?

4. Paul changed himself, not the gospel. What's one preference or comfort you could give up to help someone hear the good news?

5. What does it cost you, realistically, to help carry someone toward Jesus? What makes it worth it?

6. Where is the line between creatively removing barriers and pressuring someone who isn't ready?

3 Get your ONE to Jesus, and trust Him with what's next

READ Mark 2:5–12, Isaiah 43:25, Daniel 7:13–14 and John 9:1–3

The man is lowered right in front of Jesus, and Jesus says something no one expects: "Son, your sins are forgiven." Everybody can see that this man can't walk. Jesus sees a deeper need.

We need to be careful here. Jesus isn't saying the man was paralyzed because of a particular sin. In His day, many people assumed disability and sin went together. When the disciples later asked about a man born blind, "Who sinned, this man or his parents?" Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned" (John 9:2–3). Jesus corrects that idea. What He shows us here is that this man, like every one of us, needs forgiveness even more than healing.

The teachers of the law immediately think, "He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" It's a good theological question. God says, "I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions" (Isaiah 43:25). Sin, at its deepest, is rebellion against God, so forgiveness belongs to Him. The question isn't whether Jesus can say the words. It's whether He has the authority to make them true.

Pastor Bart compared it to a courtroom. If someone in the back row stood up and said, "Case dismissed," everyone would turn around and ask, "Who are you?" When the judge says the same words, everything changes. So Jesus asks, "Which is easier: to say 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say 'Get up, take your mat and walk'?" Anyone can claim the first, because no one can see whether it happened. So Jesus does something visible to prove something invisible: "I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." The man came into the house on his mat, and he walks out carrying it "in full view of them all."

The four friends couldn't have scripted that conversation. They got their friend in front of Jesus, and Jesus took it from there. That's a healthy picture of our part: we bring someone close and help remove obstacles, and then we trust Jesus to do what only He can do.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. If you'd carried your friend all that way, how would you have felt when Jesus said "Your sins are forgiven" instead of "Get up and walk"?

2. Why is it important that Jesus doesn't link this man's paralysis to a particular sin? Where have you heard that kind of thinking?

3. In what sense is forgiveness a deeper need than physical healing? Is that hard to believe when someone is suffering?

4. How does the courtroom illustration help explain why the teachers were upset?

5. Why does it matter that Jesus calls Himself the Son of Man here?

6. What would change in your efforts to reach your ONE if you really trusted Jesus with what happens next?

Bring your ONE

READ James 2:1–4 and 1 Corinthians 11:23–26

There's something uncomfortable in this story. The crowd wasn't trying to keep the man away. They were just in the way. Churches can do that without realizing it. Most of us know how Sunday morning works here, where to go and when to stand and sit. Someone walking in for the first time may know none of it, and may be carrying more than we can see: nervousness, a bad experience with church, questions they aren't sure are safe to ask. James warns a church about welcoming one visitor warmly because he looks important while treating another as if he barely deserves a seat (James 2:2–4). The way we receive people says what we believe about people. So introduce yourself, help someone find their way, sit with the person who looks unsure, and listen before you answer a hard question. None of that creates faith, but it can keep us from becoming the crowd in the doorway.

Then the challenge got personal: **Bring your ONE.** Think about what might make it hard for them to come. Maybe they don't want to walk into a church alone. Maybe you've already invited them and they need you to follow up. Pick them up, meet them outside and walk in together, or sit beside them so they aren't wondering all morning what happens next. Do what love allows you to do, and trust Jesus with the rest.

This Sunday closed at the Lord's Table, which kept us from thinking of ourselves only as the ones doing the carrying. We come as people who needed Jesus too. We couldn't forgive our own sin. The same Jesus who said "Your sins are forgiven" gave His body and blood for us.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Think about walking into a church for the first time. What would help most? What might make you want to leave?

2. What is one specific thing you could do this week to help your ONE get to church or get closer to Jesus?

3. How does remembering that you needed to be carried change the way you see the person you're trying to reach?

Through the week

☐	**Monday**	Mark 1:21–45. Watch how quickly word spreads about Jesus. What draws people to Him?
☐	**Tuesday**	Mark 2:1–5 and Luke 5:17–20. Thank God for the people who helped carry you toward Him.
☐	**Wednesday**	Mark 10:13–16 and James 2:1–4. Ask God to show you any way you might be "in the doorway" for someone else.
☐	**Thursday**	Mark 2:6–12 and Isaiah 43:22–25. Thank Jesus for His authority to forgive your sins.
☐	**Friday**	Philippians 2:1–4 and 1 Corinthians 9:19–23. Pray for your ONE by name, and ask what you can do to help them come closer.

Try this

Ask yourself one question this week: *What might make it hard for my ONE to come?* Then do one concrete thing about it: offer a ride, set a time to meet outside, follow up on an earlier invitation or simply sit with them. And this Sunday, look for someone who seems unsure and help them find their way.

Close in prayer

Father, thank You for the people You've used to help bring us closer to Jesus. Give us eyes to see the ONE You've placed within our reach, and courage to do what love requires. Keep us from standing in the doorway for anyone. Help us be faithful in what we can do, and teach us to trust Jesus with what only He can do. Thank You that through Christ our sins are forgiven. In Jesus' name, amen.

Notes

Watch the sermon online

Scan the code or visit **pathwaywes.com/sermons/carry-them-to-jesus** for the video, this guide and Pastor Bart's blog post on this week's message.

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