



Moved by the need of a friend we cry out to God for help. And that is good and lovely and pleasing to God. But how do we go about it? Do you find it hard?

One reason we may find this prayer hard is that we cannot rely on words; if we do not know the solution God is working towards we cannot weave helpful phrases. Try instead this imaginative exercise - this is just as much a prayer as an impassioned string of words. Move slowly through it, taking time to see, hear and smell events, and to listen for wisdom.

- Read Mark ch 2: 1-12, the story of the paralytic man being lowered through the roof to Jesus. Just like you, those who carried the man wanted to bring their friend to Jesus.
- There is a first scene, not recorded in the gospel but that must have taken place. At the man's house, his friends must have got him out of bed and on to a stretcher. Imagine going to your friend, suggesting prayer as a way of meeting his or her need. Perhaps they are apathetic, uninterested. Perhaps others around them suggest it is wrong to get up their hopes in this way, better to leave them in peace. How do you feel?
- You cannot lift the stretcher alone, who is going to help you? Perhaps you have praying friends that you automatically turn to. Or there may be others who also care about your friend who you do not really know, but this is a time to accept their help. Or perhaps you simply have to trust God; that as you do what you can, He will stir others to add their support, unseen by you.
- Take time to experience the journey to Jesus, to acknowledge the weight of the stretcher. It is hard getting the stretcher to the roof - are there times when you feel like giving up?
- What happens as you lower him? Do you try calling out to Jesus, explaining the situation? Does Jesus look at you or does He focus on the needy person? How does that make you feel - perhaps a bit upset at not being involved? Had you been hoping that Jesus would acknowledge your hard work?
- When Jesus speaks to her or him, does He say what you expect Him to say or do you feel He has missed the need as you understand it? The scripture recounts two different but related healings from Jesus for this man, what two separate blessings might he give to your friend?
- What is the outcome - for your friend, for you for the crowd/community?

It may be helpful to use this prayer again and again, on your own or with others who want to support your friend (or of course you can adapt it for your nation, church, even yourself). As you get to know the story and to create a background, it will become easier to hear what Jesus is saying. As you stay with this story, both as written in Scripture and as you adapt it to your need, you can also adapt the above prayer outline to your situation (eg include the crowd, the difficulty getting to Jesus).

Then go on to find other passages in Scripture you can use in the same way.