



## Introduction

In many of the stories about Jesus, he performs a miracle of some kind. The challenge for us is not to get distracted by these miracles and think that all they tell us is that Jesus had super-hero powers. Because the lesson of these stories is not just that he helps, but who he helps, and why. Help children pay attention to *the person* that is healed by Jesus, the person Jesus chooses to tend to or love.

### **Text to read aloud:**

Once, when Jesus was walking around his hometown, he saw some people carrying a man who was lying on a mat. The man's arms and legs didn't work and he couldn't move around, so the man needed other people to carry him.

Now, in Jesus's time, people thought that those who had sicknesses or injuries were being punished by God for something wrong that they had done. But Jesus didn't think that was true. He knew God loves all people.

So when he saw the man's friends helping him, he was moved by their love for him and he said to the man, 'Don't be afraid. If you've done anything wrong, I'll forgive you.' Some priests standing nearby heard this and thought to themselves, 'who does this Jesus think he is? He doesn't have the right to forgive anybody of anything.'

*Talking points (see Appendix A of Love First for additional commentary)*

*Invite children to make observations about the illustration.*

*What do they notice? Who is talking to whom?*

*In Jesus's time, disability was thought to be punishment from God. We don't believe that anymore, and Jesus didn't either. Do you think the man's friends believed it? How do you think the paralyzed man felt when Jesus approached him and showed love toward him?*

*How are people with disabilities treated in our world today?  
How do you think Jesus would treat them?*

*If it were you, how would you feel when Jesus's loving you made others angry?*

*In Jesus's time, people believed only God could forgive. Ask children to think about times they've forgiven or been forgiven.*



**Text to read aloud:**

But Jesus knew what they were thinking, so he said to the priests, 'Why are you being so hard-hearted? Even if you can't heal every sickness or fix every problem, you can always show love, just like this man's friends are doing. And that's all I'm trying to do, and it's what *you* should be doing too.

'But if you don't believe love is enough, then I can do more too.' Then Jesus turned to the man who couldn't move and said, 'Stand up and walk home.' And the man stood up, picked up his mat, and walked home.

*Talking points (see Appendix A of Love First for additional commentary)*

*Children may marvel at Jesus's power here, but help them to remember who Jesus healed, and how, is as important as the fact that he healed. What does this say about Jesus that he heals a paralyzed man that no one else dared try to heal because his disability was seen as a punishment from God?*

*Imagine how others were feeling when Jesus performed this miracle: the paralyzed man, his friends, the priests.*

*How have we felt when someone was loving toward someone that we found difficult to love?*

*How have we felt when someone was loving toward us, even though we were not feeling loveable or loved?*



**Text to read aloud:**

Right after this Jesus met a man called Matthew. No one liked Matthew because Matthew cheated people out of their money and then spent all of the money on himself. Jesus said to Matthew, 'Come with me.' So Matthew got up from where he was sitting and the two of them went to Matthew's house for dinner.

*Talking points (see Appendix A of Love First for additional commentary)*

*So now Jesus befriends a thief and cheater. How do you feel about that? How do you think Matthew, the cheater, feels? Do you think he was surprised? Worried?*

*Imagine the other people who saw Jesus going to Matthew's house. How would you feel if you had done something wrong and someone approached you in a loving way?*

*Have you ever been able to be loving toward someone after they were unkind? What was that like?*



**Text to read aloud:**

At Matthew's house there were a whole bunch of thieves and cheats, and they all came to have dinner with Jesus and Matthew. When the priests saw Jesus was eating with cheaters and robbers, they grumbled to Jesus's friends and said, 'Why is Jesus eating with all the worst people?'

But when Jesus heard what the priests were saying, he said, 'What God wants most is for us to love others. Good or bad, rich or poor, healthy or sick, we just need to love. And sometimes people who do bad things need the most love of all. I'm here to love everyone.'

*Talking points (see Appendix A of Love First for additional commentary)*

*So what does this mean for us? When are we loved by God? When are we not loved by God? (Never!) (Be sure to make clear that even though we might not feel loveable or loved, we are, in fact, always loved by God.)*