

Jesus and suffering people

12 MEETINGS FOR SMALL GROUPS

1. JESUS AND THE PARALYZED MAN Mark 2:1-12

BACKGROUND: At that time, it was typical for houses in Israel to be flat-roofed and built of limestone and bricks. The roof could be accessed from the outside by the stairs, and it was a place where the family would often spend time. Paralysis occurs typically when a person is middle-aged or older. It is usually caused by a brain bleed and results in the loss of ability to speak.

1. * What kind of care did this man need in his everyday life?
* What was a typical day like for the family that had to take care of him? Remember that at that time, houses did not have an indoor bathroom or a sauna, for example.
2. * At the time, all Jews believed in the existence of God. What may have been this man's attitude toward religion or God after being paralyzed?
3. * Verse 5 indicates that the man had sinned. What kind of sins is a person capable of doing even when immobilized?
* Discuss whether pain and sickness make us better or worse people.
4. * What is the most challenging aspect of carrying a grown man on a mat through a city?
* Why didn't people step outside of the house to allow the sick man and those carrying him enter (verse 4)?
* Why didn't the four men turn around when they saw that the house was packed with people and that they were not let in?
5. * Who were these four men (verse 3)? Discuss different possibilities.
* How were they able to carry the paralyzed man onto the roof by the stairs without him slipping off the mat?
* What kinds of tools did the men need for making the opening in the roof, and where did they get them?
* What kinds of comments did they possibly hear from the inside when digging through the roof?
6. * The four men had brought their friend to Jesus for him to be healed. Why did Jesus then first forgive him his sins (verse 5)?
* Why did Jesus act specifically in this order of first forgiving the man his sins and only then healing him?
* What did it mean to the paralyzed man to be forgiven all the things weighing on his mind?
7. Imagine asking Jesus for help in your most difficult problem and him saying to you, "Son/daughter, your sins are forgiven." Would this make you happy or angry?
* If you could choose between having a good conscience and a solution to your problems, which one would you choose?
* How did the paralyzed man's attitude toward his illness change after knowing that he could now get to heaven?
8. * At the beginning of verse 5, Jesus talks about the faith of the carriers, not that of the paralyzed man. It is likely that the sick man did not yet believe in Jesus when he was laid down at his feet. What was the moment when the paralyzed man became a believer?
* Why didn't the teachers of law believe that Jesus could forgive people their sins (verses 6-7)?
9. * Answer the question Jesus asks in verses 8-9.
* How much did it cost Jesus to heal the man? How much did it cost Jesus to forgive him his sins?

10. * Why didn't the man thank Jesus before leaving the house (verses 10-12)?
 * Why didn't the pharisees believe in Jesus even though they witnessed this miracle?

GLAD TIDINGS: If a sin is weighing on your mind, know that Jesus says to you, too: "Son/daughter, your sins are forgiven." Jesus had to pay for this promise by dying on the cross. What does his promise mean to you? (You can answer this question quietly in your heart.)

2. JESUS AND THE DESPERATE FATHER

Mark 5:22-43

BACKGROUND: The person appointed to the post of a synagogue leader was usually someone who was generally respected in the city. All other synagogue leaders mentioned in the Gospels except for Jairus were hostile toward Jesus. Jairus only had one child at a time when everybody wanted a lot of children, especially sons (Luke 8:42).

1. * Try to imagine what the parents may have felt when they started expecting the long-awaited child.
 * What had everyday life possibly been like in the three-membered family for the past 12 years?
2. * How might the relationship between spouses change when their child falls ill? Think about different possibilities.
 * What may have happened to Jairus's faith after his child became ill?
3. * Why did Jairus resort to Jesus' help even though Jesus was not regarded highly in Jairus' social circle?
 * What does his way of asking Jesus for help reveal about the synagogue leader (verses 22-23)?
4. * Try to imagine what happened in the father's heart in verse 35.
 * Have you ever felt like there is no point of bothering Jesus anymore, and if so, what was the situation?
5. * Why did Jesus tell Jairus not to be afraid even though the worst possible outcome had occurred (verse 36)?
 * What do you fear the most in the world? (You may answer this quietly in your heart.)
 * How would you react if Jesus told you not to be afraid when your worst fear had just come true?
6. * What should Jairus have believed in even after his daughter's death?
 * What would Jairus have done if he hadn't believed in Jesus at all?
7. * Jairus' wife had to witness her child's death while her husband was gone. What may have been the state of her heart when Jesus and her husband entered the house of mourning?
 * Funeral atmosphere already prevailed in Jairus' home. What did Jesus want to say to the funeral guests in verse 39?
8. Carefully read the description of how Jesus brought the little girl back to life (verses 41-43). Which parts of this description stand out to you?
 * Why did Jesus strictly forbid them to share this miracle with others even though it would have been good PR for him?
10. * How did the life of this small family change after this incident?
 * What do you think went through the family members' minds when they later heard rumors about Jesus' own death and resurrection?

GLAD TIDINGS: Today, Jesus says to you, too: "Don't be afraid, just believe." He means to say: "Give this matter to me. I can take care of it." Jesus himself was only afraid of one thing, namely separation from his Father. He was so afraid that he was sweating droplets of blood in Gethsemane. In this way, Jesus showed that separation from God, that is, hell, is the only thing that people should be afraid of. The Lord can and will turn everything else into a blessing. Do you believe that?

3. JESUS AND THE LOSER

Mark 5:25-34

BACKGROUND: Under Moses' law, a woman was **cultically unclean** during her menstrual period. Nobody was allowed to touch her or even any object she had touched. If they did, they would also become unclean until the evening. A woman was not allowed in the temple during her menstrual period (Leviticus 15).

1. * If the woman in this passage was 30 to 40 years old, she would have lost her health relatively young. How did her illness impact her life if she was married? How about if she was unmarried?
 - * How does constant bleeding affect a person's health?
 - * What does this kind of disease do to a woman's sense of self-worth?

 2. What may this woman have thought about God after coming down with this kind of disease at a young age?
 - * How may the woman's relationship to God have changed throughout the years of illness?

 3. From verse 26 we can conclude that the woman had previously had some money. Think about different possibilities of how the woman could have come to own the money and the purpose for which the money had originally been intended.

 4. * We can assume that the "gynecologists" of the time were not highly qualified. Why did the woman keep going to the doctors if they were of no use to her (verse 26)?
 - * What had the woman possibly thought on the day she paid her last penny to a doctor and had nothing left?
 - * What had the woman perhaps thought of doctors and healers in general (verse 26)?

 5. * How could this woman, who had been disappointed by healers time and time again, be so sure that she would be healed by touching Jesus' robe (verse 28)?
 - * What was the difference between Jesus and the other healers?
 - * Are you as confident as the woman in this passage that Jesus can just as easily solve your most difficult problems?

 6. * Why did the woman not ask Jesus for help, like the others who were ill?
 - * Why did the woman choose to be healed specifically by touch?
 - * How did the woman know that she had been healed from her disease?

 7. * Why did Jesus ask the question even though he was well aware who had touched the tassel of his robe?
 - * Why did Jesus not let the woman return to her home without speaking to her first?

 8. * What may the woman have thought when she heard Jesus asking, "who touched me" (verse 30)?
 - * What did the woman see in Jesus' eyes when he turned around and looked at her (verse 32)?

 9. * Why was the woman trembling; what was she afraid of (verse 33)?
 - * The woman did not want to say a word to Jesus and yet, she ended up telling him "the whole truth" (verse 33). What was the whole truth?
 - * Have you ever told Jesus the whole truth about yourself and your problems? If you haven't, why not?

 10. * Verse 34 can be translated in two ways: Your faith has saved you / made you well. What in the woman's behavior was a sign of faith?
 - * Why did Jesus call her "daughter" even though he was approximately the same age as her?
- GLAD TIDINGS:** Jesus himself became unclean once, making whoever touched him unclean. This took place when his blood was shed in floggings and on the cross. This was the price that the Redeemer had to pay to save the woman – and you! What does this fact mean to you today?

4. JESUS AND THE MERCENARY

Luke 7:1-10

BACKGROUND: The **centurion** had enlisted himself for King Herod's mercenary army and was living in Capernaum. All the soldiers of Herod's army were foreigners and idolaters. John the Baptist had given them this warning: "Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely – be content with your pay." (Luke 3:14) A centurion commanded about 100 soldiers. The centurion was clearly interested in Judaism, but without circumcision it was impossible for him to be accepted into God's holy people. His **servant**, in contrast, was a Jew. Take note that no devout Jew ever set foot in a gentile home.

Verses 1-2

1. * Try to imagine the difficulties that the invader troops must have faced in the foreign country.
- * In what kind of situations could the invaders get to know the locals?
- * How may the differences between the religions have impacted the relationship between the invaders and the Jews?
- * In what kind of conflict was the centurion's servant constantly living?
- * Think about different reasons for the officer to hold his servant in such high regard.

Verse 5.

2. * The officer was born a pagan and an idolater. How do you think he became interested in the God of the Jews that cannot be seen?
- * What may have been the reason for the foreigner officer to be so attached to the Israeli people? Think about different possibilities.
- * It must not have been cheap to build a synagogue. Try to guess how many months' wages the centurion had donated to the building.
- * Why did the centurion invest so much money in a synagogue the services of which he could not attend?

Verse 3-4

3. * Jewish elders usually never associated with mercenaries – and they were hardly any fans of Jesus. Why did they then agree to act as messengers for the officer?
- * Why did the officer not go to Jesus and say to him: "Do as I say because I built a synagogue in your town"?

Verses 6-7

4. * Compare the perception that the Jews had of the centurion (verse 4) with his perception of himself (verse 6). What is the difference and where does it stem from?
- * What does it say about Jesus that he followed the Jewish elders to a foreigner's home without any objection?
- * What may have been the reason for the centurion to feel unworthy of receiving Jesus at his home?
- * The centurion says to Jesus: "Just say the word, and let my servant be healed." (NIV) Do you believe that Jesus only needs to say one word to solve your most difficult problem?

Verse 8.

5. * What did the centurion believe to have in common with Jesus?
- * What made the centurion understand that Jesus was the Lord, commander of an invisible army?
- * Why did nobody else see Jesus as the Lord, colonel of an invisible army?
- * Apply verse 8 to the person you are worried about today. How do the prayers impact his or her life?

Verse 9

6. * The Gospels only tell us about two times when Jesus marveled at somebody's faith. Why was the faith of the centurion more admirable than that of the Israelis?
- * Do you think that the man knew he had great faith? Why or why not?
- * What were signs of the centurion's great faith?
- * What would your life be like if you had this kind of faith?

Verse 10

7. * How did the servant actually heal?
- * Jesus never met the officer during this incident. What do you think their relationship was like from now on?

GLAD TIDINGS: When he was arrested, Jesus said that he could have summoned 12 legions of angels to his aid (one legion comprises of 6000 soldiers). Why did he then let himself to be captured, tortured, and killed by only a few soldiers?

5. JESUS AND THE PROSTITUTE

Luke 7:36-50

BACKGROUND: In the Bible, virginity is valued and extramarital sex is forbidden. Verses 44-46 detail how an **honored guest** was usually received. At that time, it was normal to eat while lying down so it would spoil your appetite if the person next to you had unwashed feet. Take note that a woman was not allowed to let her hair loose if other men than her husband were present.

1. * The whole town knew that this woman sold her body. Think about different possibilities that had led to her being a prostitute.
 - * What did the woman in our passage know about real love?

2. * What things were important in the life of Simon, the pharisee?
 - * Why did Simon not have Jesus' feet washed even though he had invited him into his home (verses 36, 44-46)?
 - * For what purpose did Simon invite Jesus to his home (verse 36)?

3. * Why did the woman want to meet Jesus so dearly that she was ready to go to Simon's house to be berated and stared at?
 - * How was it possible for the woman to get past the gate guard into Simon's house and all the way to the dining hall?
 - * An alabaster bottle of perfume cost a lot of money at the time. Discuss how the woman could have obtained the bottle, or for what purpose she could have purchased it.

4. * At the time religious people wanted nothing to do with sinful people. What made the woman believe and hope that Jesus would not reject her?

5. * Why did the woman want to touch Jesus (verse 38)?
 - * What is our reaction to a rat, snake, or say, a person we loath touching us?
 - * What did it mean to the woman that Jesus did not recoil at her touch?

6. * How long could it possibly have been since the woman last cried?
 - * What made the woman cry so much as to make Jesus' feet wet?
 - * Why didn't the woman dry Jesus' feet with her hem or scarf but with her hair?
 - * The woman didn't say a word during the dinner, but what did her actions say?

7. * In verses 40-42, Jesus tells a short parable of a banker and his debtors. The banker represents God, but who are the debtors Jesus is talking about?
 - * Jesus compares sin to a debt. 500 denarii are equivalent to a year's wages and 50 denarii one and a half month's wages (around €45,000 and €3,700 respectively). How much is 10 euros in your currency? Imagine that each of your sins increases your debt by 10 euros, how much do you think you owe God? (You may also reply silently in your heart.)

8. * Why did Simon disrespect both Jesus and the woman (verse 39)?
 - * Why is it much easier for us to spot other people's sins than our own?

9. * Which did the woman do first: love Jesus or believe Jesus would forgive her sins (verses 42 to 43 and 47)? Justify your answer with the text!
 - * What happened to the iniquity that the woman owed God?
 - * What happened to the iniquity that Simon owed?
 - * What was the method of payment with which Jesus paid the iniquities of all people?

GLAD TIDINGS: Jesus knows all your sins and would still like to say to you: "All your sins are forgiven. Your faith has saved you. Go in peace." (Verses 48 and 50) Jesus can say these words because he has paid for your sins with his blood. What is your response to Him? (You may answer silently in your heart.)

6. JESUS AND THE PAGAN MOTHER

Matt. 15:21-28

BACKGROUND: Tyre and Sidon are in Phoenicia, 45 to 60 km from Galilee. Canaanites were pagans and idolaters, and the arch enemies of the Jews in the past. King David had ruled Israel 1,000 years earlier (verse 22). The woman calls Jesus Son of David, even though the lineage of the Messiah was not generally known at the time. There are only two people in the Gospels whose faith Jesus called great, both pagans. In contrast, he often reprimanded his disciples for their lack of faith.

1. * From the parallel text in the Gospel of Mark, we can conclude that the woman came to Jesus without her daughter. Think about different reasons for the woman to leave her daughter behind.
 - * Why didn't the father come with the mother?
 - * Try to imagine what this mother's everyday life had possibly been like.
 - * What kind of relationship did the family's other children possibly have with the possessed sister?
 - * What may the neighbors have thought about this family?

2. * What measures had the mother possibly taken to help her daughter before coming to Jesus?
 - * For what did she perhaps blame herself?
 - * Who are the mothers of our time carrying the same kind of pain in their hearts as this woman?

3. * The Canaanite woman knew something about Jesus that not even many Jews were aware of – that he was David's direct descendant (verse 22). How could she have learned this fact?
 - * Why did the woman first ask for mercy for herself (verse 22)?

4. Jesus usually always answered people's pleas for help. Why did he remain silent when faced by this woman's agony (verse 23)?
 - * Why didn't the woman go home after hearing what Jesus said to his disciples?

5. * How did the Canaanite woman react to Jesus' second rejection (verses 23b-24)?
 - * How would you react if Jesus treated you as he treated this woman?

6. * Jews considered dogs unclean animals and could sometimes call pagans dogs. What may Jesus have wanted to say by calling the Canaanite woman "a puppy" rather than a dog? (verse 26)
 - * Dogs were never let inside the house, but puppies could sometimes be allowed. What do you think about the woman's reply to Jesus' third rejection (27)?

7. * Why do you think Jesus remained silent for so long when faced by the woman's suffering?
 - * What would have happened had the woman immediately received what she asked of Jesus?
 - * What would have happened if Jesus had quickly provided help in a big problem in your life?
 - * Why does everyone's faith have to be tested?

8. * What do you think the disciples thought of Jesus' words in verse 28?
 - * What made the woman's faith great? Try to find as many signs of a great faith as possible (verse 28).
 - * How had this great faith come to be in the woman's heart?
 - * What made the woman believe not only in the power of Jesus but also in his love?

9. Mark reveals the end to this story: *"So she went home and found the child lying in bed, and the demon was gone."* (Mark 7:30). What do you think: did the woman believe her daughter had healed when she was still on her way home or did she doubt? Justify your answer.
 - * What changed in the family's life after this miracle?

GLAD TIDINGS: As he was hanging on the cross, Jesus had to trust in the silent God. This is what he cried out: *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish?* (Ps. 22:2). At that moment, Jesus' faith was very similar to the faith of the Canaanite woman. The difference between the two situations was that with Jesus God fell silent because of his wrath, with the Canaanite woman because of his love.

On the cross, Jesus carried the burden of God's wrath that should have been directed at us because of our unbelief. What does this fact mean to you?

7. JESUS AND THE DEAF MAN Mark 7:31-37

BACKGROUND: The man in the passage had most likely been deaf from his early childhood, since he could not talk properly. He had never been able to communicate with others since there was no common sign language at that time. 700 years earlier, Isaiah had prophesied that the Messiah would "make deaf people hear and mute people talk" (verse 37, cf. Isaiah 35:5).

1. What would be the hardest thing for you if you suddenly lost your hearing?
2. * Try to imagine what the man's childhood had been like.
 - * What means did the parents have for raising their child, protecting him from harm, teaching him an occupation etc.?
 - * What kind of relationship had the man possibly had with his peers as a child?
 - * How may he have perceived himself as a child?
3. * What was the deaf man's everyday life like compared to that of his peers?
 - * The deaf man had probably been taken to the synagogue and temple at some point – how much do you think he knew about matters of faith?
4. * What could have been the motive of the people taking him to Jesus (verse 32)? Think about different possibilities.
 - * How may they have tried to explain to him where they were taking him and why?
 - * What did the deaf man possibly feel in the middle of a crowd?
5. * At that time, healers usually laid their hands on the sick person. Why didn't Jesus heal the man the way those bringing him wanted (verses 32b and 34)?
 - * What did it reveal about the deaf man that he did not object but followed a rabbi who was unknown to him (verse 33)?
6. * Why did Jesus take the man away from the crowd (verse 33a)?
 - * Saliva was considered a remedy at the time. What did Jesus want to communicate to the deaf man by putting his fingers in the man's ears and by touching his tongue with the saliva (verse 33)?
 - * What did Jesus want to say to the man, who did not understand speech, by looking at the sky?
 - * What did Jesus want to say to the man by sighing?
7. * It usually takes a child three years to learn the main vocabulary of his or her first language. How is it possible for this man to "learn" to speak fluently in just one moment?
8. * Why would Jesus have preferred people not talk about his miracles?
 - * What "news" would Jesus rather have them tell their friends?
 - * Why did the people not care about Jesus' requests to keep silent of this and his other miracles (verse 36)?
 - * Do you think it would be beneficial for the Christian church to advertise its miracles in the media?
10. * What did the people think about Jesus now; did they believe that he was the Messiah (verse 37)? Justify your answer.

GLAD TIDINGS: The deep communication between Jesus and his Father was disconnected when Jesus was on the cross. This was the price that Jesus had to pay for us sinners to be able to speak to God and hear His voice in the Bible. What does this fact mean to you?

8. JESUS AND THE HALF-BELIEVER

Mark 9:17-27

BACKGROUND: The boy in this passage is possessed by an evil spirit. He does not suffer from epilepsy, even though the symptoms seem similar. An evil spirit cannot dwell in the heart of a baptized Christian who believes in Jesus since the Holy Ghost is already there. According to the Gospel of Luke, the boy was the only child of his parents (Luke 9:38).

1. * Try to imagine what the life of the father had been like after his son had been possessed by the evil spirit (verses 17-18, 20-22).
 - * What were the parents' relationship with each other, with their neighbors and with God possibly like?
 - * Which healing methods had the parents perhaps resorted to?
 - * What had the boy's life been like compared to that of his peers?
2. * What may have been the hardest thing for the father in a situation described in verses 14-18? What about for the son?
3. Who was Jesus referring to by the unbelieving generation that he found very hard to bear (verse 19)?
 - * Why did Jesus find people's unbelief unbearable in this situation in particular?
4. * Why did the father include himself in his plea: "Have pity on us and help us!" (Verse 22)
5. * In verse 23, it seems as if Jesus is demanding unwavering faith of the father. Why did he do this?
 - * How would you feel if somebody demanded perfect faith of you when you were already feeling bad?
6. * What did the father believe about Jesus, and what did he doubt when he cried out the words in verse 24?
 - * What do you believe and doubt when you are calling out to Jesus to help in the problems of your loved ones?
7. * Was the father's cry a sign of faith or unbelief? Justify your answer.
 - * When did the father become a believer? Discuss different possibilities.
8. * Why did Jesus help this family even though neither the father nor the son had unwavering faith?
 - * Whose faith was this miracle based on?
 - * How much faith is needed for Jesus to help you and your loved ones in your troubles?
9. * The father may have thought that his son was dead when he lay unmoving on the ground (verse 26). Why did Jesus allow the father to experience this moment of horror as well?
 - * What might not the father have learned if the help had been given the moment he asked?
 - * Why does Jesus sometimes allow us to end up on the verge of despair before he intervenes?
10. * "Jesus took his hand and helped him, and he stood up." (Verse 27) Insert here the name of the person who you are most worried about right now. What does this sentence mean to you?

GLAD TIDINGS: When Jesus was tortured by wicked people and the devil, he put his trust in the power and love of his Heavenly Father without a hint of doubt. Because of his faith, we too can receive help from God for ourselves and our loved ones, regardless of our doubts. What does this fact mean to you?

9. JESUS AND THE SUCCESSFUL MAN**Mark 10:17-27**

BACKGROUND: In the Gospel of Matthew, the man is described as a "young man" (19:22) and in the Gospel of Luke, it is revealed that the man was in high societal position, apparently a member of the Jewish Council (18:18). This young politician had done extremely well in his life. Take note that men never ran or knelt before others in Israel at that time.

1. * What made this young man behave as unusually as described in verse 17?
* Why did the man believe Jesus to have an answer to his question, even though he did not regard him as God?
2. * What does Jesus teach us about the human nature in verse 18?
* What is your opinion: are human beings inherently good or bad? Why/why not?
3. * Why didn't this man have certainty about being saved even though he had obeyed God's commands all his life?
* Why might we also be uncertain about what happens to us after death?
4. * Many politicians are tempted by money and women. How could this man have overcome all temptations without stumbling once (verses 19-20)?
* Take note that according to the Sermon of the Mount one has to obey the commands in thoughts and words, not only in actions. Do you think this man had been able to do this (verses 19-20)? Why/why not?
* Could you give the same answer to Jesus as the young politician?
5. * The man was missing one thing. Discuss different possibilities of what this one thing was (verse 21)?
6. * What kind of things do people usually consider their treasures (verse 21)?
* The man in the passage had actually two treasures on earth. What were they?
* How can you accumulate a treasure in heaven?
* Compare the treasure in heaven and treasure on earth. What differences are there between them?
7. * The man most likely had a family and old parents to provide for. What would have happened to them if he had obeyed Jesus' request in verse 21?
* If you were in a similar situation, could you believe that God will take care of your wife, children, and parents?
* Would you be able to empty your bank account and give away everything you own if it was a prerequisite of following Jesus?
8. * What would have happened if Jesus had welcomed the man into his disciples without any conditions?
* According to verse 21, Jesus looked at the young man and loved him. Why did Jesus then talk to him so harshly that he went away?
9. * What options did the man have left when he realized that he could not give his treasure up?
* How might Jesus have reacted if the man had admitted that he loves money more than God and apologized for it?
10. * Compare the answer Jesus gave to the rich man to the one he gave to Peter (verse 27).
* Discuss whether it is possible for God to save a person who is tied to their earthly treasure.

GLAD TIDINGS: Jesus gave up his heavenly treasure when he came on earth. On the cross, he took on the punishment of the person tied to their treasure and idols – in your stead. What does this fact mean to you?

10. JESUS AND THE TAX COLLECTOR

Luke 19:1-10

BACKGROUND: In Israel, tax collectors, i.e. publicans, were known for their dishonesty. They served the Roman invaders and usually also put money in their own pockets, becoming rich at the expense of their fellow countrymen. In verse 7, we can see how disliked also Zacchaeus was. As far as we know, Jesus only visited Jericho once, a week before he died. By that time, he had preached publicly for three years. Many people knew that he had chosen a tax collector as one of his disciples.

1. * Can someone be happy if people around them think they are a thief?
 * How may Zacchaeus' height have impacted his early life (verses 1-3)?
 * How can you get over being bullied in your childhood and youth?

2. * Why do you think Zacchaeus had chosen the tax collector's occupation?
 * How had tax collectors possibly justified their actions when taking the last sheep or penny of the poor?
 * Zacchaeus had eventually become the head of the tax office. List the characteristics needed for rising to that position in a large, occupied country. (Do you think that a man with a kind heart could have found success in such an occupation? Why/why not.)

3. * How had Zacchaeus perhaps reacted to being despised by all of Jericho (verse 7)?
 * By that time, Zacchaeus was likely to be nearly fifty years old, since it takes time to reach a managerial position. His children must have been quite big. What may his children have thought about their father's occupation?
 * It is common for people to re-think their values when they are in their fifties. What do you think Zacchaeus wanted most at this point in his life?

4. * Tax collectors usually wanted nothing to do with religious people, and vice versa. Think about different reasons for Zacchaeus wanting to see Jesus so badly.
 * In the Middle East, no self-respecting man runs. Why did Zacchaeus act as unconventionally as described in verses 3 and 4?
 * A sycamore tree can grow up to a 10 meters high, dense tree. What do you think: did the tax collector want to be seen or stay hidden in the tree? Why/why not?

5. * This was the first time Jesus visited Jericho. What had Zacchaeus possibly thought when hearing Jesus suddenly call his name?
 * For Jews, eating together was usually a sign of friendship. When did Jesus decide to visit Zacchaeus and become his friend (verse 5)? Think about different possibilities.

6. * How might Zacchaeus have reacted if Jesus had said to him from under the tree: "I will visit you if you abandon your dishonest ways" (verse 5)?
 * How would you react if somebody said to you: "I'll be your friend if you first become a good person"?
 * Why don't people change even if they are told to do so?

7. * Why was Jesus in such a rush (verse 5)?
 * Do you think Zacchaeus felt embarrassed when climbing down the tree in front of everybody? Why/why not (verse 6)?
 * What in Jesus' behavior annoyed the people of Jericho most (verse 7)?

7. * What suddenly changed Zacchaeus' greedy heart (verse 8)?
 * Let's say that Zacchaeus owned a million euros, of which he had cheated €100,000. How much was he left with in the end?
 * What did the people of Jericho think when the tax collector used half of his possessions to build an elderly care home, for example, and went around town paying back the townspeople fourfold? Cf. verse 7.

8. * Abraham was an ancestor of the Jews and patriarch of Christian faith. What did Jesus mean by Zacchaeus being a son of Abraham (verse 9)?
 * When did Zacchaeus become a believer (point out the verse)?
 * What happened to the punishment that God had laid down for thieves?

9. * Who was looking for whom: Zacchaeus for Jesus or Jesus for Zacchaeus (verse 10)?
 * What may Zacchaeus have thought when he heard that Jesus had died on the cross a week later? What about when he heard about his resurrection?

GLAD TIDINGS: On his way to Jerusalem to be crucified, Jesus visited Jericho particularly because of Zacchaeus. As Jesus forgave Zacchaeus his sins, he knew that he had to suffer the punishment of those sins on the cross. Zacchaeus received forgiveness for free, while it cost Jesus his life. What does this fact mean to you?

11. JESUS AND THE BLIND BEGGAR

Mark 10:46-52

BACKGROUND: As far as we know, Jesus visited Jericho only once. This happened on his last journey to Jerusalem. Jesus was a direct descendant of King David. 1,000 years before, God had promised David that his son would forever sit on the throne of Israel (2. Sam 7:12-16). Romans, who governed the land, could not stand the talk of Israeli kings. In fact, Jesus had only once before been called Son of David, and it had been outside of the borders of the country (Matt. 15:21-28).

1. * What would be the worst thing about living by begging?
 - * What things can a person learn about life, people, and the burning questions of the day by sitting by the roadside year after year (verse 46b)?
 - * Do you think that Bartimaeus had figured out by himself that Jesus was the son of David or had he heard it from others? Justify your answer.

2. Why had nobody taken Bartimaeus to be healed at the festival in Jerusalem, only 30 kms away, which Jesus visited regularly a couple of times a year?
 - * What different possibilities did the blind beggar have to talk to Jesus if he ever happened to come to Jericho?

3. * Why was Bartimaeus not afraid of the Romans when he cried out the name of Son of David at the top of his lungs (verse 47)?
 - * In what two ways did his cries change when others tried to quiet him (verse 47-48)?
 - * How did Jesus react to being called Son of David?

4. * Think about different reasons for people trying to quiet Bartimaeus' pleas for help.
 - * What should the people around Bartimaeus have done instead of telling him to hold his tongue (verse 48)?

5. * What could Bartimaeus possibly have felt when he heard that Jesus had called him to come to him (verse 49-50)?
 - * Up to that point, Bartimaeus had probably taken good care of his cloak, which was also his mattress and blanket during the night. What does the fact that he suddenly cast it aside demonstrate (verse 50)?

6. * Why did Jesus ask Bartimaeus a question the answer of which seemed obvious (verse 51)?
 - * Today, Jesus is asking you the same question: "What would you want me to do for you?" What is your reply to him? (You can answer this silently in your heart.)

7. * How did Jesus heal Bartimaeus' eyes (verse 56)?
 - * The verb used in the original text in verse 52 can be translated in two different ways: "Go. Your faith has healed you/saved you". Where could Bartimaeus' faith be seen?
 - * What may the people of Jericho have thought when Jesus praised the faith of a blind beggar this way?

8. * Bartimaeus followed Jesus down the road to Jerusalem (verse 52b). What was he going to do there?
 - * The next day, people greeted Jesus at the gates of Jerusalem as the king and Son of David (11:9-10). How much of this was influenced by Bartimaeus' shouts?
 - * What had been the purpose of Bartimaeus being blind?

GLAD TIDINGS: Only a week later, Bartimaeus had to witness with his newly healed eyes how his benefactor was nailed on the cross. I bet his faith was severely tested. But on the Easter morning, he heard that Jesus had risen from the dead and believed it immediately. I hope you believe it, too!

12. JESUS AND THE CRIMINAL SENTENCED TO DEATH

Luke 23:32-43

BACKGROUND: In the Roman Empire, people were crucified only for very serious crimes. We may therefore assume that these men were **repeat and merciless murderers**. For clarity, we shall call them ‘A’ and ‘B’. **Messiah (or Christ)** was the title of the king whom Jews awaited because of the prophecies of the Old Testament.

1. * Can anyone who beats and bullies others either with their fists or words be happy?
* Why have so many young people turned so violent these days and started bullying others?
2. Think about different reasons for these men having ended up as criminals.
* What or who might have been able to stop these men before it was too late?
* Are you able to stop behavior that is harmful to you and others?
3. * The two criminals saw the crucifixion of Jesus closer than anybody else. Which parts of his words or actions may have surprised them the most (verses 34-38)?
* Why did Jesus defend those who were torturing him in front of the Father (verse 34)?
* Could you pray this prayer for your worst enemies: *Father, forgive them. They didn't know how badly they did* (34)?
4. * Examine the passage to see what the people, the officers, Roman soldiers and one of the criminals (B) were shouting at Jesus. For which actions were they mocking (verses 34b-39)?
* Why did none of Jesus' friends stand up for him?
* What would you have said had you been standing by the cross?
5. * From where had one of the criminals (A) got the idea that the crucified Jesus was a king with a kingdom (verses 37-38)?
* Compare Jesus hanging on the cross to the kings of this world. What is the biggest difference between them?
* How did the criminal (A) conclude that Jesus was not only a king but also God?
6. * Criminals don't usually admit that they are guilty, not even in prison. What made the criminal (A) admit that the death sentence was a just punishment for him (verse 41)?
* Why did the other criminal (B) still not repent?
* Which of the criminals do you understand better: the one who admitted having sinned or the one who denied it?
7. Verse 42 includes a small prayer: “Remember me!” Why is it so important to us that somebody close to us remembers us when we are suffering?
* Why didn't the criminal (A) ask right away to be accepted into the kingdom of King Jesus?
8. * What may the criminal (A) have felt when he heard Jesus' reply in verse 43?
* How can Jesus let a murderer enter Paradise, i.e. heaven?
* Which verse marks the moment this man (A) became a believer?
9. * Try to imagine what the last hours of the criminal (A) were like – was he happy or unhappy?
* The mother, wife, or children of the criminal (A) may have been standing by the cross. What kind of memory of the man was his family left with?
* What kind of legacy did the converted criminal (A) leave for the new generations that can read about him from the Bible?

GLAD TIDINGS: The gates of Paradise were opened for a murderer because Jesus walked through the gates of hell in his stead – and in our stead as well! Do you want to pray the same prayer as the criminal on the cross: “Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom!” You can pray it quietly in your heart.