

Facilitator

1. Open with Prayer
2. Welcome any newcomers
3. Read John 4:31-42 and give a five-minute review of the sermon using Peppy's sermon notes.

Facilitator: Please don't feel you have to cover every question. Try to keep your discussion to an hour and a half at the most.

CONNECT Group study questions, John 4:43-54

May 3, 2015

Title: Real Faith

Read to the group: The following is a short piece I wrote for a ministry called Music For The Soul and a songs and stories CD they produced for caregivers titled, *Dignity*. Tests and trials have a way of making us stop and think. I wrote this at a time when I stopped and thought.

It's audio version can be found at <http://www.musicforthesoul.org/resources/dignity/>. Select track 13.

This Thing Called Faith

"Have faith," they'd say, but they don't bother anymore. "Just believe God will heal her and he will." Well, he didn't, at least he hasn't yet. He promised a day when there will be no more pain, or sorrow, or sickness, or tears, and we believe that, but for the time being, it's just not happening.

The Apostle Paul found strength in weakness. If God isn't going to grant an easy out for Elizabeth and me, I need that strength, because right now I don't know how I can get much weaker. As a man, it embarrasses me to say that. I don't have to look much beyond a few seats away in church to see others who have to endure more than we. Is this test more than we can bear? Our Bible says it's not.

So what about this thing called faith? It's been 20 years since Elizabeth was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. We both can say that her right side paralysis, wheelchair confinement, and dependence on me and others for even her most basic and intimate needs, far from replacing our faith with disillusionment, has increased our faith. Every day is a struggle, but each new day has the grace we need to face the adversity of this disease. But is that all there is? Is there no sense to it all? No meaning? I've asked that question, and frankly it's replaced the other one: "Why won't you heal her?" As Jesus withholds his healing, he shows me that he too has a kind of multiple sclerosis that prevents him from doing what he wants to do. Jesus, the glorified Son of the living God, who sits at the right hand of the Father, has MS? Yes! Of course he does.

He taught us that we, those of us who are gathered in his name, are his body and he is the head. We are his arms and feet, his eyes and tongue, we hear for him and show his compassion for him. We are his touch and voice. And oh, how it must frustrate him when his body fails to work like he wants it to. I know Elizabeth's frustration when she can't lift herself from the toilet seat, and I know my own discomfort when I have to walk into a public restroom for women to help her.

I wonder. Am I the Lord's right arm and leg, so beset with a paralysis that I fail him when he wants to lift someone who can't stand? And just like I have to come alongside Elizabeth and compensate for the way her body fails her, who has to do his work when I fail? I've said that the bond that holds our marriage together has made her disease my disease. I've come to realize that the bond I have in Jesus Christ heals me and can cure the paralysis in his body. So I'm back to praying for healing, not for Elizabeth's MS, but for my own. —Dick Peterson

Question: People who track such things note that when times are good and people are prosperous, church attendance drops, but when hard times are upon us, people are more likely to turn to God. Why do you suppose that is?

Question: In chapter three of John's gospel, Jesus brings the good news to a religious leader. In the early verses of chapter four, he does the same to an outcast woman. Then at the end of chapter four, he is doing it again to a Roman government official. What does this teach us? What implications does it have for our own evangelism?

Question: Peppy offered a "timeless principle" that God uses trials and suffering to bring us closer to himself. Share with the group a time or two when God used a personal trial or a period of suffering to renew a fading or broken relationship with him. Sometimes during a personal trial or period of suffering, a person will turn away from God in a spirit of bitterness. What would cause one person to turn to God and another to turn away?

Question: Another "timeless principle" states: *"Real faith is not seeing and then believing; real faith is believing and then you'll see."* Read John 20:24-30 and see how Jesus taught his disciple Thomas this very important principle. In what way has this principle been taught to you? Have you learned it? **Facilitator:** Remind the group that we all have been the recipients of this teaching, and even though we have learned it once, it's a principle that we need to learn repeatedly.

Question: A straight line is the shortest distance from one point to another, and Proverbs 3:5-6 tells us how to walk in it. Why do we so often fail to follow the instructions and stray from the straight path God has made for us?

Meditation: Proverbs 3:5-6 tells us to *“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and he will make your paths straight.”* Although the passage plainly says *all your heart* and *all your ways*, name specific areas of your life that you need to release from your own understanding and acknowledge your total dependence on the Lord. Either with the group or privately ask God to help you in this.