

JESUS AND YOU

Close Encounters

*Bible stories
about
people Jesus helped*

by Pete and Anne Woodcock

Leader's Guide



Introduction

Welcome to the leader's guide for ***Close Encounters***.

Close Encounters introduces people to Jesus Christ and his teaching, by looking carefully at four true stories of people who met Jesus, recorded in Mark's and Luke's Gospels, in the New Testament part of the Bible. In just four sessions, we aim to present the Christian message in a non-threatening way, either in a small group or one-to-one, to people who may know little or nothing about the Christian faith and Jesus Christ.

Close Encounters is part of the *Jesus and You* series of four-session introductions to Jesus Christ. To get started, you will need *Close Encounters* booklets for each person who joins the group, the DVD and this leader's guide.

Note: You can find plenty of helpful information and ideas about setting up and running a *Jesus and You* group in ***How to run a Jesus and You group***. It's worth reading if you are new to doing this, or are introducing the Christian faith to people who may not be familiar with one or more of the following:

- the English language
- church or any "religious activity"
- reading, studying and discussing a text, like the Bible

How to run a Jesus and You group is available as a free download from The Good Book Company websites:

UK: www.thegoodbook.co.uk

USA & Canada: www.thegoodbook.com

Australia: www.thegoodbook.co.au

New Zealand: www.thegoodbook.co.nz

This leader's guide gives target answers to the questions in the booklet. These are what you should be aiming at in your group discussions. ***How to run a Jesus and You group*** (see above) includes useful advice about how you can best help your group get the most from discussing the questions.

At the end of the leader's guide you will find scripts for the "Downloads" (DVD talks). If you cannot use the DVD in the sessions, you will need to present the "Downloads" yourself.

1 The man who came through the roof

Luke 5 v 17-26

TARGET ANSWERS

Think about...

If people could meet the paralysed man who appears in this story, most would probably think that his greatest need was to be healed of his paralysis. But, as this session will show, Jesus has a very different view of what his greatest need is. This question should draw out a variety of things that people believe are their greatest need—health, money, security, strong relationships, a decent job/home, opportunities, freedom etc. But in all likelihood they won't come up with Jesus' answer. Don't worry about correcting answers at this stage. Later in the session, when Jesus' view of our greatest need becomes clear, you can get people to think again about their answers to this question.

Test yourself: how much can you remember?

(**Note:** The purpose of this activity is to help people who are new to the Bible familiarise themselves with the Bible passage. It's **optional**—use it if you think it will be helpful for your group. It doesn't have to be done as a strict memory test—let people refer to the printed Bible passage if that is helpful for them. Be guided by your knowledge of the group and their preferences.)

- They had heard that Jesus had power from God to heal the sick.
- The men carrying the paralysed man couldn't get to Jesus because of the crowd.
- He was carried on a mat by his friends.
- They went up on the roof (explain that houses at that time had flat roofs with steps leading up to them) and lowered the man through an opening in the roof tiles. (Though not mentioned in this passage from Luke's Gospel, Mark 4 v 2 tells us that they dug through the roof.)
- Jesus forgave his sins (v 20).
- As well as the crowd, the Pharisees and teachers of the law were there (v 21). (Explain that the "Pharisees" were religious leaders who were very strict about keeping Jewish religious law.)
- They thought that Jesus must be evil—that when Jesus said: "*Your sins are forgiven*", he was wrongly claiming to be God (v 21).
- They believed that only God can forgive sins.
- He healed the paralysed man.

DESPERATE NEED

- 1. What do you think most people would ask Jesus to do for them?**
Perhaps people have heard friends or family make statements like: “Why doesn’t God do ‘ABC’?” or “I’m praying that ‘XYZ’ will happen.” Answers might be frivolous or serious.
- 2. What is surprising and disappointing?**
Jesus doesn’t heal the paralysed man. Instead he says: “Your sins are forgiven.”
- 3. What does Jesus think this man’s biggest need is?**
His sins need to be forgiven. (“Sins” is explained in the next part of the session—Download 1:1 and the questions that follow.)

DOWNLOAD 1:1

Approximate length: Pete—10.20 minutes; Lizzy—7.35 minutes. **Note:** This opening “download” is considerably longer than the others in this course.)

(**Note:** This summary is printed on p42 of the booklet.)

- *The paralysed man had a desperate need. He was a helpless, hopeless outcast.*
- *His friends believed that only Jesus could help him. You can see their faith in Jesus—they broke through the roof to reach Jesus.*
- *Instead of healing the paralysed man, Jesus told him: “Friend, your sins are forgiven”.*
- *We think that the man’s greatest need was to be healed. But Jesus saw that the man’s greatest need was to have his sins forgiven.*
- *The word “sin” means “missing the mark” (like an arrow that misses the target).*
- *Sin is missing the mark of trusting and loving God. All of us fail to love God and his ways—good ways which he designed us to follow. So all of us are sinners. We all need to have our sins forgiven.*

- 4. When people hear the word “sin”, what do they usually think?**
Some people believe that only very bad things like child abuse or murder constitute sin. Others equate sin with sex, wrongly believing that this was the sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Sometimes people say: “It’s sinful” when they see a lot of food or money going to waste. Your group may come up with many other answers.
- 5. What do you think the word “sin” means?**

Listen to people’s ideas, which may or may not agree with the popular answers you have just discussed, before looking at the descriptions of sin in the booklet.

- ***Are the descriptions of sin in the booklet good or bad descriptions?***
 - a. is correct (murder and child abuse are sins) but far too narrow—sin is much more than this.
 - b. is incorrect. Sex is a good gift of God. It was given to Adam and Eve before they disobeyed God (Genesis 2 v 21-25) to be enjoyed in the context of marriage. It is misuse of sex that is sinful.
 - c. is correct (perhaps surprisingly for many), but doesn’t give a good enough explanation—doing what we want is sinful when it involves going against what God wants (as it usually does).
 - d. is the best description—this is the Bible’s view of sin.

6. *Why is forgiveness of our sins the most important thing we need?*

Our sins make each of us a helpless, hopeless outcast from God. Our relationship with God is the most important relationship we can have with anyone, so to be outcast from God is our biggest problem.

Ask yourself

- *Do I know that I am a sinner—a helpless, hopeless outcast from God?*
- *Do I see that my biggest need is to have my sin forgiven?*
- *Do I understand that only Jesus can help me?*

Read out the “Ask yourself” questions and give your group a few moments to think about them. You could ask them to share answers if they want to, and if that is right for your group. Or you could get them to think about their answers by themselves. Or you could ask them to go home and think about their answers, or write them down, or talk about them with someone.

SHOCKING WORDS

1. *What do the Pharisees and teachers of the law believe about forgiveness?*

They believe that only God can forgive sins: “*Who can forgive sins but God alone?*” (v 21).

Sentences a. – d. all assume that forgiveness comes (or doesn’t come) from other people that we have wronged, or from ourselves. Usually today, people’s view of sins and how to be forgiven is very different to that of the religious leaders in this story. That’s because people today don’t take into

account God, and the fact that sin = not loving God and his ways. The question of why **only** God can forgive sins is answered in Download 1:2.

DOWNLOAD 1:2

Approximate length: Pete—3.15 minutes; Lizzy—3.15 minutes.

(**Note:** This summary is printed on p42 of the booklet.)

- *The religious leaders were right to say that only God can forgive sins. That is because sin is “not loving God and his ways”.*
- *They were also right to question whether Jesus was evil. That is because it is a terrible crime for humans to make themselves out to be God, or to take God’s place.*
- *The big question is: who is Jesus? Is he lying or crazy when he says he can forgive sins? Or is he God, who truly can forgive sins?*
- *When we listen to what Jesus says, we have to decide who he is.*
- *We need to check out the evidence about who Jesus is.*

2. What sort of evidence shows us that Jesus is God (the one who can forgive sins)?

Download 1:2 ended with a challenge to consider who Jesus is. This story shows that there are only three options: (1) Jesus was lying when he said he could exercise God’s right to forgive sins; (2) he was crazy, sincerely but wrongly believing he could act like God; (3) he is God. Note: This question is not asking people to show how Jesus **has** proved that he is God but rather, what proof they would expect of anyone who claimed they were God. Even people who know nothing about the miracles and teaching of Jesus are likely to come up with answers similar to the things that Jesus said and did. Eg: power over creation (stilling the storm); power to create (feeding the 5000); power over evil (numerous examples of driving out evil spirits, eg: as we will see in Session 2); knowing what people are thinking (as in this story—v 22), etc. Encourage people to read or to listen to an audio format of one of the Gospels and as they do so, to ask themselves: *Is this what I would expect of someone who claims to be God?*

Ask yourself

- *Who do I think Jesus is?*
- *Why do I think that?*
- *How can I check out the evidence?*

SURE PROOF

1. How did Jesus show that he is the one who can forgive sins?

He healed the paralysed man instantly and completely.

- The people watching Jesus recognised that his power came from God. *“Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God”* (v 26).

2. How was this man’s whole life immediately changed by Jesus?

Get your group to review what they have learned about the paralysed man. In Download 1:1 we saw that he was **helpless**—totally dependent on other people for all his physical needs; he was **hopeless** since there was no known cure for paralysis; and he was **an outcast**—most importantly from God because as a “cripple” he wasn’t allowed to worship God at the temple. All of this became history for the man at the moment when Jesus healed him.

DOWNLOAD 1:3

Approximate length: Pete—2.45 minutes; Lizzy—2.35 minutes.

(Note: This summary is printed on p42 of the booklet.)

- *When Jesus healed this man he was instantly no longer a helpless, hopeless outcast.*
- *When Jesus forgave this man’s sins he was instantly no longer a helpless, hopeless outcast from God.*
- *The man’s healing is a picture of the difference that it makes when God forgives our sin.*
- *The friends’ faith in Jesus meant that nothing could stop them coming to him.*
- *If we are to have our sins forgiven by Jesus, we must make sure that nothing stops us from coming to him.*

(Note: The DVD includes a choice of two real-life stories of Christians, Chris and Heather, each of whom has found God’s forgiveness for themselves. Choose the one that’s best for your group and play it after Download 1:3.)

THE BIG QUESTION

Take your group through the summary paragraph and the questions in the booklet and let them think about how they will answer these.

End the session by reading out the verse printed in the booklet (Acts 10 v 43).

Briefly explain what it means:

Believing in Jesus means trusting that he is exactly who he says he is, and that he has authority to forgive our sins. When we believe in Jesus like this, we can know that our sins have been forgiven and that we are no longer outcasts from God.

You could finish the session with a short, simple prayer. (This is optional—see ***How to run a Jesus and You group.***)

2 The man silenced by a demon

Luke 11 v 14-26

Begin the session by reading out the summary so far. You could check if people have any questions, comments or problems from last session. Deal with these briefly, or arrange another time when you can do this eg: during refreshments or at the end of the session.

TARGET ANSWERS

Think about...

The question posed in this opening discussion aims to get people to think about how they would decide between the only three options available in answering the question: *Who is Jesus?* In “Think about amazing claims”, although people may have a gut first instinct which favours one of these options, hopefully they will come to see that their final conclusion depends on how the person in question behaves. Do they act irrationally and in a way that’s inconsistent with reality (ie: they’re crazy), or deceptively, selfishly, exploitatively etc (ie: they’re evil), or truthfully, selflessly, with self-control etc (ie: they’re truthful)?

Test yourself: how much can you remember?

(**Note:** The purpose of this activity is to help people who are new to the Bible familiarise themselves with the Bible passage. It’s **optional**—use it if you think it will be helpful for your group. It doesn’t have to be done as a strict memory test—let people refer to the printed Bible passage if that is helpful for them. Be guided by your knowledge of the group and their preferences.)

- a. False (Explain that Beelzebub was a demon who was worshipped as a false god.)
- b. True (v 17)
- c. True (v 17)
- d. False (He said that a stronger man can overpower him, v 22).
- e. True (v 22)
- f. False (v 25-26)

GOOD OR EVIL?

1. What were some people accusing Jesus of?

They were accusing Jesus of using the power of Beelzebub (a demon who was worshipped as a false god) to drive out demons from people.

2. Why did they come to such a strong opinion about Jesus?

- **What had they just seen Jesus do?** They had just seen him drive a demon out of a man who could not speak. When the demon had gone, the man was able to speak.

- **What did this miracle show them about Jesus?** It showed them that Jesus had great power over evil. This was something that ordinary humans could not do. When people in the story from last session saw Jesus heal the sick, they recognised that his power came from God. This is the obvious conclusion that the people in this story should have come to.

- **How could they show that Jesus was bad, giving them a reason to ignore him?** Make sure people understand that if Jesus has come from God, then there is no one more important. It means we are crazy if we don't listen to him and follow what he says. But these people didn't want to do that—they wanted to ignore him. Instead, they decided to say that his power came from a demon, not God.

- **Was this a sensible opinion?** No, it was a ridiculous opinion to come to. They decided on this opinion because they didn't want to listen to Jesus and follow what he said.

3. Why is the response to Jesus in verse 16 also ridiculous?

Jesus has just driven a demon out of a man. Before, the man was silent, but now he can speak. There's no doubt about what has happened and no doubt about Jesus' power over evil. The obvious conclusion is that Jesus has used power from God to do this miracle—it is "a miraculous sign from heaven". So the people in verse 16 are asking for the very thing that Jesus has just done.

- **Why do they ask for a miraculous sign?** These people seem to be saying that they need more proof before they can accept that Jesus comes from God. Their response is also a reason to ignore Jesus. Like the people in verse 15, they don't want to conclude that Jesus comes from God because then they would have to listen to him and follow what he says.

DOWNLOAD 2:1

Approximate length: Pete—4.20 minutes; Lizzy—3.50 minutes.

(Note: This summary is printed on p43 of the booklet.)

- *There is something worse in our world than just people making mistakes.*

- *The Bible tells us about a prince of evil called Satan or the devil or Beelzebub. His goal is to ruin and destroy everything that God has made.*
- *Amazingly, some people said Jesus was using the power of Beelzebub (or Satan) when he healed the man who couldn't speak.*
- *Beelzebub, "lord of the flies", brings death and decay. How could Jesus be using the power of death and decay when in fact he was healing the man?*
- *Jesus showed that these people were wrong. Jesus didn't work for Satan. Instead, he destroyed Satan's work.*
- *No one else could do what Jesus did. Jesus drove out demons with God's power.*

4. What is Jesus saying about himself in verse 20?

- **Whose power does Jesus have?** Jesus has God's power— *"the help of God's powerful finger"*.
- **What can his power do?** He drives out demons by God's power.
- **What does Jesus say has come to these people?** He says that when this happens, God's kingdom has come to these people.
- **Jesus is bringing God's kingdom. So who is Jesus?** God's kingdom comes when Jesus drives out demons by God's power. That means Jesus is bringing God's kingdom. That also means Jesus must be the king of God's kingdom.

Ask yourself

- *Have I realised that there is an evil power in this world who is trying to ruin and destroy everything God has made?*
- *Where do I think Jesus' power comes from?*

Read out the "Ask yourself" questions and give your group a few moments to think about them. You could ask them to share answers if they want to, and if that is right for your group. Or you could get them to think about their answers by themselves. Or you could ask them to go home and think about their answers, or write them down, or talk about them with someone.

STRONG VS STRONGER

1. **Look at verse 14 and write the missing information in the chart.**
The purpose of this question is to help people see that the story about the strong man and the stronger man (v 21-22) explains the miracle in verse

14, when Jesus drove out the demon from the man who couldn't speak. By completing the chart, hopefully people will see that Beelzebub/Satan is the strong man and people are his possessions ie: under his control. But Jesus is the stronger man, who only one can free us from the power of Satan.

	Jesus' story (v 21-23)	Jesus and the demon (v 14)
Who is the winner?	The stronger man	Jesus—He drives the demon out of the man
Who is the loser?	The strong man	The demon, who is overpowered by Jesus
What does the loser lose?	His possessions ("what he owns", v 21)	The demon loses control of the man. When the man was under the demon's control, he was like a possession belonging to the demon.
What does the winner take control of?	The strong man's possessions (v 22)	The demon's possession was the man who couldn't speak. When Jesus drives out the demon, the man begins to speak, showing that he is no longer under the control of the demon but of Jesus.

DOWNLOAD 2:2

Approximate length: Pete—3.25 minutes; Lizzy—3.10 minutes.

(Note: This summary is printed on p43 of the booklet.)

- *Jesus explains that Satan is like a strong man who has many weapons to keep his possessions safe.*
- *We are like the possessions of the strong man. Satan uses lies and deceit to keep all of us out of God's kingdom. We can't escape from Satan's influence and lies.*
- *Jesus tells us that we need a rescuer—a stronger man who can defeat Satan and his lies.*

- *Jesus is the stronger man. He defeated the powers of evil when he died on the cross. Because of what Jesus has done, we can be set free from Satan's kingdom and join God's kingdom.*
- *Jesus sacrificed himself so we can be rescued.*
- *We can't do anything to help ourselves by our own effort. We need Jesus to rescue us.*

Ask yourself

- *How might Satan be trying to keep me out of God's kingdom?*

CLEAN UP OR GET RESCUED?

1. ***What happened to the evil spirit (the strong man in the first story)?***
The evil spirit is driven out by Jesus, just as the strong man is overpowered by the stronger man in Jesus' first story.
2. ***Now compare the second story told by Jesus, in verses 24-26.***
 - ***What can the evil spirit do in the second story (v 24)?*** The evil spirit can move out of and back into houses. It can live wherever it chooses to.
 - ***What can't the person pictured as a house do?*** They can't stop the evil spirit from moving in.
 - ***What does this person need?*** They need someone more powerful than the evil spirit, who will drive it out.
 - ***Who is missing from the second story?*** The stronger man is missing from the second story.

DOWNLOAD 2:3

Approximate length: Pete—3.45 minutes; Lizzy—3.10 minutes.

(Note: This summary is printed on p43-44 of the booklet.)

- *Jesus tells a second story about people who try to live a better life instead of asking Jesus to rescue them.*
- *When someone realises they are living wrongly they may decide to change, give up those wrong things and even start following a religion. They are like a house which has been swept clean and made neat.*
- *People who do this come to believe that God is pleased with them, because of the new way in which they now live.*

- *This is a big lie of Satan. God can never be pleased with us until our sin has been forgiven and Jesus is our king.*
- *People who think they are good enough for God don't come to Jesus for forgiveness and rescue. So they cannot be forgiven and rescued from Satan's power. They are like the clean house, where more evil spirits come to live at the end than in the beginning.*
- *The religious leaders thought they were good enough for God. Jesus was the rescuer they didn't want. That's why they tried to say that Jesus was evil.*
- *If you are not "with Jesus, then you are against him. It doesn't matter how good or religious you are. What matters is whether Jesus is your rescuer.*

(Note: The DVD includes a choice of two real-life stories of Christians, George and Anne, each of whom were once under the power of Satan. Choose the one that's best for your group and play it after Download 2:3.)

THE BIG QUESTIONS

Take your group through the summary sentence and the questions in the booklet and let them think about how they will answer these.

End the session by reading out the verse printed in the booklet (Colossians 2 v 15: NIRV).

Briefly explain what it means:

When Jesus died on the cross, it wasn't the tragic end of a good life. Rather, by sacrificing his own life, Jesus defeated Satan and his army of demons. He took away their power to keep people out of God's kingdom. Like a Roman emperor parading prisoners of war through the streets of Rome, Jesus' death and resurrection shows that he has complete power over Satan and all evil spirits. That's why we need to trust and follow Jesus.

You could finish the session with a short, simple prayer. (This is optional—see ***How to run a Jesus and You group.***)

3 The sick woman and the dying girl

Mark 5 v 21-43

Begin the session by reading out the summary so far. You could check if people have any questions, comments or problems from last session. Deal with these briefly, or arrange another time when you can do this eg: during refreshments or at the end of the session.

TARGET ANSWERS

Think about...

Although it may seem obvious how death ruins and destroys each of the hopes listed in the booklet, there is value in getting people to talk out loud about the way in which death is an enemy of all our hopes.

- **A happy life:** Sooner or later we all experience unhappiness because of the death of someone we love.
- **Good health:** As we get older and death approaches, our bodies begin to show many signs of decay.
- **Success for our children:** However successful we help our children to become, they will never successfully overcome death. Death will take away all their success and in the end no one will remember any of it.
- **Plenty of money:** We have to leave it all behind when we die.
- **Early retirement:** Death is always a threat to our plans, and increasingly so as we get older. The next thing that awaits us after retirement must be death.
- **Doing something that people will remember us for:** The people who remember us and our achievements will also one day die. When they go, no one will remember us any longer.

Ways in which people try to comfort themselves when death comes include: believing that they will live on in the memory of others; believing that they are part of the “circle of life”; believing that they can “rest in peace” when they die; believing that they can return to this world (re-incarnation); living for the moment and refusing to think about death; believing that they will go to “heaven” (although ideas of what heaven is like and how we get there are usually vague, and don’t seem to bring much comfort when we are facing death).

Test yourself: how much can you remember?

(Note: The purpose of this activity is to help people who are new to the Bible familiarise themselves with the Bible passage. It’s **optional**—use it if you think it will be helpful for your group. It doesn’t have to be done as a strict memory test—

let people refer to the printed Bible passage if that is helpful for them. Be guided by your knowledge of the group and their preferences.)

A—b (v 24)

B—c (v 28)

C—a (v 25 and end of v 26)

D—c (v 28-29)

E—b (v 34) This doesn't mean that Jesus' power didn't heal the woman. Clearly that's not the case because when the woman was healed, Jesus felt power go out from him (v 29-30). However, Jesus wanted people to know that it's when people put their trust in him that his power will do amazing good in their lives.

F—a

“DON'T BOTHER JESUS”

1. How does the story show the hopelessness of the woman's situation?

Verse 26: For the last 12 years she had gone to many doctors and had spent all her money, but she was getting worse, not better.

2. Which thought best fits the woman's story?

b. Verse 28: The woman knew that Jesus was different to the doctors she had consulted, but perhaps because she was unclean (this is explained in Download 3:1), she seems to be unwilling to approach him directly.

3. How would you expect the woman to feel when she knew she was healed?

You would expect her to be overjoyed that her suffering was over.

• **How did she feel when Jesus asked who had touched him (v 33)?**

She was terrified—she was shaking with fear.

4. Why do you think Jesus called her out of the crowd?

This question is answered in Download 3:1, but get people to share their thoughts and don't worry about correcting them at this stage.

DOWNLOAD 3:1

Approximate length: Pete—6.40 minutes; Lizzy—5.25 minutes.

(Note: This summary is printed on p44 of the booklet.)

- *The woman's medical problem was a hopeless case. Nothing could help her to get better.*

- *The woman's illness made her "unclean". The religious rules of that time said that she couldn't go to the temple to worship God. Anyone who touched her would become unclean too.*
- *When the woman touched Jesus' clothes, an exchange or swap took place. She received amazing health and cleanness, but Jesus became unclean.*
- *Jesus made the woman come and meet him. He wanted to know her, and he wanted her to know him.*
- * *Jesus spoke lovingly to her. He was happy to become unclean so that she could become clean.*
- *Even though the woman knew she was unclean, that didn't stop her coming to Jesus. She had faith in him.*

5. *How do people treat Jesus today?*

Get people to share from their own experience, using the imaginary quotes listed in the booklet, and be ready with to share some examples of your own to get the ball rolling.

6. *How should we treat Jesus?*

Note that this question is not asking people how they *do* treat Jesus but how they *should* treat him.

Ask yourself

- *How do I treat Jesus?*

"HURRY UP, JESUS"

1. *Compare Jairus with the woman who has just been healed.*

Difference: The woman was unclean and a religious outcast because of her bleeding, whereas Jairus was a respected religious leader—the synagogue ruler (v 22).

Similarity: Both of them were in desperate need of help and had no one else to turn to except Jesus.

2. *How would you decide which person to help first?*

• ***How quickly did Jairus need help?*** Jairus' daughter was dying so he needed help as urgently as possible.

• ***How quickly did the woman need help?*** The woman had already suffered for 12 years from this illness and it hadn't killed her yet. A few more minutes or hours of waiting for help would surely not make much difference.

- ***So who would you choose to help first?*** We would have done the opposite of what Jesus did—we would have ignored the woman and rushed to help Jairus' daughter. The aim of this question is to show how Jesus' behaviour in taking time to speak to the woman while Jairus' daughter was dying—behaviour which seems bizarre and even callous to us—was based on Jesus' confidence that he has complete power over death. It didn't matter that Jairus' daughter had died because for Jesus bringing her back to life was as easy as waking her.

3. *How would you have felt if you were Jairus...*

a. *while Jesus was talking to the woman?* He must have felt anxious and impatient, wondering why Jesus was taking so much time with this woman when the life of his daughter was in the balance.

b. *when the news of his daughter's death came?* He must have felt tempted to despair and give up. Look at the advice of the messengers (v 35) and also at Jesus' words to Jairus at that moment (v 36).

4. *How could it help Jairus to see the sick woman healed?*

The amazing power of Jesus was at work right in front of Jairus' eyes. Jesus had not spoken to or even seen the woman up to the point at which she was healed. It seemed that healing power could not help but flow out of him, whether or not he was directly engaged with the person seeking his help. This miracle must have shown Jairus that there was surely no one like Jesus. It would have encouraged him to keep trusting this man who has the power of God for help.

5. *How is Jesus different from us?*

v 36: He believes that death is something we don't need to fear when we trust in him.

v 39: Jesus sees death as nothing more than sleep for those who turn to him for help.

6. *What did the people at Jairus' house think of Jesus?*

They laughed at him—they thought he was crazy to say that Jairus' daughter was just sleeping.

- Yes and no. Yes, because for us death is clearly something very different to sleep—permanent and irrevocable, instead of temporary and something we can rouse people from. No, because Jesus' power means it's no more difficult for him to raise someone from death to life than it is to wake someone who is asleep.

DOWNLOAD 3:2

Approximate length: Pete—3.02 minutes; Lizzy—4.00 minutes.

(**Note:** This summary is printed on p44 of the booklet.)

- *Although Jairus' daughter was dying, Jesus stopped to speak to the sick woman, who wasn't dying at that moment.*
- *But Jesus didn't have to rush like an ambulance, for he has power over life and death.*
- *Jesus showed this power when he gave up his life and died on a cross, but rose to life again three days later.*
- *Jesus uses this power for his followers too. He promises that whoever believes in him will live even though they die.*
- *Jesus showed that he can keep this promise by raising the dead girl to life. He brought her back to life as easily as waking someone who is asleep.*
- *If we believe in Jesus, when we die Jesus will raise us to new life.*

Ask yourself

- *Am I trusting Jesus to change my death into life?*

WHY BOTHER WITH JESUS?

1. What do the messengers say to Jairus?

They tell Jairus that his daughter is dead and they also urge him not to bother Jesus any longer.

- It sounds like good advice—normally we would expect that no one can do anything about death.
- It is in fact bad advice because it doesn't take into account the fact that Jesus has the power of God.

2. Review the questions discussed at the beginning of the session. How could you now answer these questions differently?

Jesus has the cure for death—he can raise dead people back to life. The only true comfort we can have when death comes is to trust in Jesus and his power to raise us to new life.

3. Why should we “bother” Jesus (see verse 36)? And why should we bother with him?

These two questions connect the attitude of Jairus' friends—“Why bother the teacher anymore?”—with a similar, common (though often unspoken) attitude around today—“Why bother with Jesus?” The first suggests that we are wasting Jesus' time to turn to him for help. The second suggests we are wasting our own time to turn to Jesus for help. **We should**

“**bother**” **Jesus** (ie: like Jairus, turn to him for help when death comes) because Jesus himself wants us to do that; he is willing to help those who turn to and trust him. We can see that from the way in which he encourages Jairus to ignore the bad advice of his friends, and instead tells him: “Don’t be afraid; just believe”. **And we should bother with Jesus** because, as we have discussed at the beginning of this session, there really is nothing and no one else that can help us when death comes.

Ask yourself

- *Death is coming to me. Have I “bothered” Jesus?*

DOWNLOAD 3:3

Approximate length: Pete—3.15 minutes; Lizzy—2.50 minutes.

(**Note:** This summary is printed on p44-45 of the booklet.)

- *So far, we’ve seen that we need a sin-forgiver, a rescuer from the power of Satan, and a life-giver because we are under the power of death.*
- *We are all going to die because we have earned the wages of sin. We are separated from God, the life-giver, because we don’t love God and his ways.*
- *But the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ— a free gift for us, but costly for Jesus.*
- *On the cross there was an exchange or swap. When Jesus died, he took the wages of sin, that he didn’t earn. He did this to give us life, the gift that we couldn’t earn.*
- *Like Jairus and the woman, we need to trust in Jesus and what he did on the cross.*

(**Note:** The DVD includes a choice of two real-life stories of Christians, Trevor and Sue, each of whom discovered how Jesus can bring hope when we are facing death. Choose the one that’s best for your group and play it after Download 3:3.)

THE BIG QUESTIONS

Take your group through the questions in the booklet and let them think about how they will answer these.

End the session by reading out the verse printed in the booklet (Romans 6 v 23: NIV).

Briefly explain what it means:

The reason we’re all going to die is because we have earned the wages of sin. We don’t love God and his ways. Because of this, we are separated

from God, the Life-giver. But the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ. Jesus has come into this world to give God's gift—a free gift to us, but costly to him. When Jesus died on the cross there was an exchange—a swap. God treated Jesus as a sinner, even though he had never failed to always love God and his ways. The wages that Jesus didn't earn, he took—death—in order to give us the gift that we couldn't earn—life. To receive this gift we need to trust in Jesus and follow him.

You could finish the session with a short, simple prayer. (This is optional—see ***How to run a Jesus and You group.***)

4 The blind beggar

Mark 10 v 32-34 and 45-52

Begin the session by reading out the summary so far. You could check if people have any questions, comments or problems from last session. Deal with these briefly, or arrange another time when you can do this eg: during refreshments or at the end of the session.

TARGET ANSWERS

Think about...

This question sets the scene for this story about Jesus passing through Jericho on his way to Jerusalem. The people treat Jesus like a VIP—they are annoyed that a lowly beggar is intruding on the situation and are anxious to keep him quiet, wrongly thinking that an important person like Jesus will not want to be bothered by someone like the blind beggar. They fail to understand that although Jesus is a king, he is very different from a merely human king in this world. He is the Servant-King.

Test yourself: how much can you remember?

(**Note:** The purpose of this activity is to help people who are new to the Bible familiarise themselves with the Bible passage. It's **optional**—use it if you think it will be helpful for your group. It doesn't have to be done as a strict memory test—let people refer to the printed Bible passage if that is helpful for them. Be guided by your knowledge of the group and their preferences.)

- 1—Jerusalem (v 32)
- 2—afraid (v 32)
- 3—Man (v 33)
- 4—death (v 33)
- 5—rise from the dead (v 34)
- 6—his life (v 45)
- 7—Jericho (v 46)
- 8—blind (v 46)
- 9—Son (v 46)
- 10—David (v 47-48)
- 11—mercy (v 47-48)
- 12—quiet (v 48)
- 13—coat (v 50)
- 14—do you want me to do for you? (v 51)
- 15—followed Jesus (v 52)

THE SERVANT KING

1. What will happen in Jerusalem?

Jesus will be killed and three days later he will rise from the dead.

2. Why is Jesus going there?

Jesus is in complete control of the situation. He knows what will happen in Jerusalem but he is determined to go there. This is his plan—to suffer and die. In verse 45 Jesus tells us that he will serve others by dying, because his life is the price for setting people free. (Refer your group back to previous sessions to identify the things Jesus sets his people free from: sin, Satan, uncleanness—which cuts us off from God—and death.)

3. What kind of king is Jesus?

Jesus came to serve his people by dying to set them free. He is completely different from kings in this world, who expect to be served. Jesus is the Servant-King.

DOWNLOAD 4:1

Approximate length: Pete—3.45 minutes; Lizzy—2.45 minutes.

(Note: This summary is printed on p45 of the booklet.)

- *Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem, knowing that he was going to die a slow and terrible death there.*
- *Jesus called himself the Son of Man, which means “God’s chosen king”. He is the king of the universe.*
- *Jesus is also called the Son of David. This means that he is the one from the family of Israel’s greatest king, David, who God has promised will be king for ever.*
- *As you would expect from the Son of Man, Jesus not only knew what would happen in Jerusalem; he planned that it would happen.*
- *In Mark 10 v 45 Jesus tells us what kind of king he is—a Servant King.*

4. What’s wrong with the two popular views about Jesus mentioned in the booklet?

a. Baby Jesus: Jesus is God’s chosen king. That means we should obey him. This is completely different to the kind of relationship we would have with a baby.

b. Distant “stained-glass window” Jesus: Jesus is the Servant-King. He gave up his life to serve people like you. He is utterly committed to helping us in our desperate need.

Ask yourself

- *Do I understand that Jesus is God’s king?*
- *Do I understand how Jesus came to serve others?*
- *How should I respond to Jesus?*

WHO’S REALLY BLIND?

1. What truth about Jesus could the beggar see?

The beggar understood that Jesus was God’s chosen king—he calls Jesus “Son of David”. But he also understood that Jesus is the Servant-King—he came to help people. That’s why he kept calling on Jesus for mercy.

2. How did the beggar show his faith in Jesus?

“Many people commanded him to stop” shouting to Jesus, but he didn’t give up. He believed that Jesus could and would help him.

3. What was the crowd’s view of Jesus?

They seemed to believe that he was an important person, and therefore he shouldn’t be bothered by people like the beggar.

What’s the truth about Jesus?

Jesus is the Servant-King. He came to help people, whoever they were, even the despised and rejected.

DOWNLOAD 4:2

Approximate length: Pete—5.15 minutes; Lizzy—4.30 minutes.

(Note: This summary is printed on p45 of the booklet.)

- *Jesus, the king of the universe, is on his way to Jerusalem, where he will be killed. But in Jericho people welcome him like a king.*
- *A blind beggar understands that Jesus is God’s chosen king, and calls out to him for mercy.*
- *The crowd tell the beggar to be silent. They are treating Jesus like a king but they don’t understand that he is the Servant King.*
- *Although the beggar is blind, only he can see that he desperately needs mercy. He also sees that only Jesus the king can give him mercy.*

- *Jesus responds to the beggar's call by calling him.*
4. You may find that some of the following questions are more relevant to your group than others, in which case focus on those questions.
- ***How do people bargain with God?***
Typically, people promise to do something for God if he will help them in some way.
 - ***What things make us give up calling to Jesus/God for mercy?***
Often this comes down to listening to other people rather than following and believing the truth about Jesus. People may tell us that we are becoming “weird”; that “religion” or “faith” is a waste of time because God can’t help us or isn’t interested in us; that there are more important things in life that we should put first eg: family, making money, having fun etc.
 - ***How do people treat Jesus only as a servant?***
People never turn to Jesus except when they are in trouble and need his help. They complain if Jesus doesn’t answer their prayers exactly as they want him to.
 - ***How do people feel about Jesus when they only hear that he is king?***
This may be a problem for people who come from a very hard-line, legalistic religious upbringing, or those from a very “high” church background, where the emphasis is on majestic ceremony and ritual.

Ask yourself

- *Is there anyone trying to stop me from coming to Jesus?*
- *What should I do about that?*

SAVIOUR

1. ***What's strange about Jesus' question?***
You would expect the answer to be obvious to Jesus. And of course it was. Jesus asks this question not for his own benefit, but for the benefit of the blind man, and the on-lookers. Jesus' question forces the beggar to proclaim his faith out loud—he is telling everyone that he believes that Jesus can make him see.
2. ***At the end of the story...
what happens to the beggar?
where does he go?***
As soon as Jesus speaks he is able to see (v 52).

The beggar follows Jesus along the road. Remember that the road leads to Jerusalem where Jesus will die and later where his followers will be persecuted. Now that he has been healed, Bartimaeus is ready to follow Jesus the Servant King to death.

DOWNLOAD 4:3

Approximate length: Pete—5.40 minutes; Lizzy—4.45 minutes.

(Note: This summary is printed on p45 of the booklet.)

- *Jesus asks the beggar: "What do you want me to do for you?"*
- *It's an important question because the beggar's whole life must change if Jesus heals him. And the change might not be comfortable.*
- *The beggar wants this new life. When Jesus heals him, he follows Jesus along the road. He is following Jesus to Jerusalem, where Jesus will die.*
- *Jesus tells the beggar that his faith in Jesus has healed (or "saved") him.*
- *Jesus the Servant King died on the cross to save us from our sins, the power of Satan and the power of death. Faith (trust) in Jesus saves us from all these enemies.*
- *Jesus is calling us to follow him. Will you put your trust in him and do that?*

(Note: The DVD includes a choice of two real-life stories of Christians, Tim N and Tim T, each of whom heard the call of Jesus and followed him. Choose the one that's best for your group and play it after Download 4:3.)

THE BIG QUESTION: Where am I in the chart?

Take your group through the chart in the booklet. Then get them to think about the last two columns and decide which option best fits them.

End the session by reading out the verse printed in the booklet (Mark 10 v 45).

Briefly explain what it means:

Jesus, God's chosen King, is the Servant King. By dying on the cross, Jesus has taken the wages of our sin. Jesus has died the death that we deserve for not loving God and his ways. Because Jesus has suffered that death, we can be free from our sins, free from the power of Satan, free from death and free from uncleanness (which makes each of us an outcast from God). Many people from all around the world and all through history have trusted in Jesus and have become his followers. They have been made free from all these things. Jesus is the only one who can do this. Will *you* put your trust in him and become his follower?

At the end of *Close Encounters* explain the three ways in which people can respond:

1. You understand and accept what you have learned about Jesus.

Then it is time to decide to trust in Jesus. This means you will have your sins forgiven, you will be freed from the power of Satan and the fear of death, and in response to Jesus' mercy you will follow him.

(Explain what is available for people like this. See *How to run a Jesus and You group: What next?*)

2. You can't yet decide and you want more time to think about things.

Then you need to keep learning about Jesus and about what God says in the Bible. This is good, but you need to realise that you can't sit on the fence forever.

(Explain what is available for people like this and encourage them to join in. Options could include: another *Jesus and You* group, inviting them to suitable church meetings or events, meeting one-to-one to read the Bible etc.)

3. You have decided not to trust in Jesus.

Then you need to know that the Bible says you are a hopeless, helpless outcast from God because of your sin. You are still under the power of Satan—the “destroyer” and “father of lies” You are facing death. You can only be made free from these things through Jesus and his death on the cross.

(It may still be very early days for people like this. Although they are clear about not wanting to commit themselves to following Christ at the moment, it is still worth keeping up friendly contact and, if possible, getting them to continue learning from the Bible. Explain what is available for people like this and encourage them to join in. See suggestions for 2 above.)

You could finish the session with a short, simple prayer. (This is optional—see *How to run a Jesus and You group*.)

DOWNLOAD SCRIPTS

In this section you will find all the scripts for the Downloads (the DVD talks) used in *Close Encounters*. If you are unable to use the DVD in the sessions, you can use these scripts to present the Downloads yourself.

We recommend that you watch the DVDs first to see how the Downloads are presented. If possible, try to “talk” the Downloads to your group rather than simply reading them aloud. This will make it far easier for your group to listen to. It will mean getting to know the scripts well enough so that you can present the Downloads without having to read from the scripts most of the time.

Please note:

1. Some of the illustrations are personal to the author. You will need to think about how to present these to the group.
2. The wording used in the scripts often ties in closely with the NIRV translation of the Bible and the questions in the booklet, so it’s best to stick as closely as possible to the original wording.
3. The DVD also contains the real-life stories of people who have become Christians and whose lives reflect those of some of the people in these true stories about Jesus. These can only be presented to your group by showing the DVD.

Close Encounters: Download Scripts

Session 1: The man who came through the roof

Download 1:1

It's not unusual to hear stories of people who do extraordinary things to get medical treatment for a friend or family member. They do a sponsored cycle ride the length of the country, or sell their houses, just to raise the money for an operation, or a special drug. Well, here's one of those stories from the time of Jesus, 2000 years ago in Israel. It's the first of four fascinating stories from the Bible that we'll look at in *Close Encounters*. It's about a man who had a desperate need—he couldn't walk. Actually, it was more than that—Luke's Gospel tells us he was *paralysed*.

That's bad enough today, with all our wheelchairs, and home-helps, and electrical equipment. But it was even worse for this man.

- **He was helpless**—he had to be carried around by his friends and he needed the help of other people for all of his physical needs.
- **He was hopeless**—because there was no known cure for paralysis. Even today it usually can't be cured.
- **And he was an outcast**—he could not earn money, or do business. But even worse than that—he couldn't go into the Jerusalem temple. In those days, the temple was the only place where you could be made right with God. God's law commanded people to bring a sacrifice (or a gift) to the Jerusalem temple, so they could be in a right relationship with God. But the paralysed man couldn't go there because “cripples” like him weren't allowed in. He had no chance of bringing a sacrifice or gift to God. In first-century Jewish thinking he was a hopeless case.

Thankfully, he seemed to have some good friends, and they had heard that Jesus could do what no one else could do. They couldn't carry him into the temple, but they could carry him to Jesus.

That is really what's going on here. All these men could do was to bring their friend to the one place of help.

- He couldn't help himself.
- Clearly, the doctors couldn't do anything for him.
- The religious leaders had nothing to offer, except to ban him from the place of God.
- And certainly, the friends themselves had no way of healing him.

They truly believed that the only help this man could get was from Jesus. And you can see that in their determination.

I love this story. These friends, carrying a paralysed man on a bed, try to get into the house where Jesus is, but the crowds are too big. I mean, what a

disappointment! You can imagine a few people moving away from the doorway to let them in, but halfway along they realise there's no way they are going to get through this crowd. Anyway, the crowd would see this paralysed man as an outcast—someone who isn't allowed into the temple, and therefore shouldn't be allowed to see a holy man, like Jesus. You can imagine the friends going round to look through the windows, trying to see if there was a way they could push in there.

And then one of them has the bright idea, "Let's go through the roof!" Now roofs in that area were flat and had steps going up onto them, but it still couldn't have been easy, carrying a paralysed bloke on a bed. Then they had to work out where Jesus was, take the roof tiles off, get some rope and somehow lower the bloke down.

Now, we don't know what the man was thinking about this, but he didn't seem to have much choice. It must have been a bit frightening and embarrassing for him, as the crowd below looked up at him, perhaps getting bits of roof in their eyes. In particular, he knew that people thought he was an outcast. Would Jesus receive him? Was he going to be humiliated by the holy man of God—rejected yet again but unable to run away from this situation? Some of them would be thinking this was outrageous, and others would be laughing their heads off. But all of this shows that these friends knew that only Jesus could help this hopeless outcast.

So what a disappointment when Jesus says (in verse 20) "Friend, your sins are forgiven". Look, imagine going through all the preparation needed for major surgery—no food for 12 hours, no water, no smoking, all the forms filled out etc. Then you're wheeled into the operating theatre. The surgeon puts down his scalpel, takes off his gloves, and says what Jesus says—"Friend, your sins are forgiven". How would you feel? How did the friends feel, do you think?

See, what all this shows is that Jesus has very different priorities to us. We think the man's greatest need was physical healing, because that's what made him a helpless, hopeless outcast. But Jesus is truly an expert doctor. He sees a desperate need that is more than physical. He talks about sins. That is the paralysed man's biggest problem, and the most important thing that needs sorting out—because sin is what makes him a helpless, hopeless outcast from God, and that is the most important relationship we have with anyone. So to be outcast from God is the man's biggest problem.

The word Jesus uses for "sins" means "missing the mark". It's interesting that years ago in Britain, when an archer missed the target with his arrow, he called that arrow a "sinner". The arrow was designed and fired to hit the bulls-eye, but the "sinner" arrow misses the mark of what it was designed to do. And that's what sin is—it's **not** being where we should be.

This is the same with us. We were designed to live under God's rule and within a loving, obedient relationship with him—loving God and his ways—good ways which he designed us to follow. But we've not loved him or obeyed him—we let people down, we lie, we hurt people—we've missed the mark. We've missed the mark of living the good way that God wants for us and so we've missed the mark of relationship with God that we were designed for. We are sinners.

So this whole story is a picture of all of us. When it comes to relationship with God, because of sin we are helpless, hopeless outcasts. We can't pick ourselves up and go to God. We need God to come to us, pick us up and put us where we were designed to be. And that means him doing something about our sin.

So this is why forgiveness of sins is this man's greatest need. If he's just healed physically and given new legs, it won't be long before those legs are again paralysed, along with the rest of his body, because he will die. And when he dies, he will still be outcast from God. But if his sins are forgiven, he will live in friendship with God for ever. Only Jesus could help this man. In the same way, only Jesus can help us.

Close Encounters: Download Scripts

Session 1: The man who came through the roof

Download 1:2

Guess what? The religious leaders (the Pharisees and teachers of the law) are right when they say that only God can forgive sins. But only God? Can't we forgive ourselves? Don't other people sometimes forgive us? Or we forgive them? What does it mean to say: "Only God can forgive sins"?

We've already seen that the best description of sin is "not loving God and his ways". So for instance, the Bible tells us that God loves a generous person. God is about giving and therefore he says: "Do not steal", which is a selfish act of taking. So, if I steal from you, I'm not loving God and his ways. So stealing from you is not just against you, but against God. If you forgive me, that only sorts out my relationship with you. But what about my relationship with God? I need God to forgive me for the sin of not trusting him enough, and for believing that the thing that you've got, that I want, is more important than listening to him.

If I look for forgiveness from you, but not from God, then even though my relationship with you is repaired, my relationship with God is not. In fact, I'm really rebelling against what he has asked me to do. However, if God forgives me, I'm accepted by him and I'm no longer an outcast.

So the religious leaders were right to say that only God can forgive sins. They were also right to question whether Jesus was evil. Was he guilty of the terrible crime of making himself out to be God, or taking the place of God? The answer must be yes—unless, of course, he is God.

All the time, Jesus wants people to answer this crucial question—who is he? A good teacher? A special person? Something more? When we listen to what Jesus says, he often makes us feel uncomfortable, because he forces us to "come off the fence" and make a decision about who he is.

Who do you think Jesus is? Is he the forgiver of your sins, and therefore God? If not, are you really saying that he is wrong—that he is either lying or crazy? You may need more time to check out the evidence about who Jesus is. But you can't keep saying that he is just a good teacher or a special bloke.

Close Encounters: Download Scripts

Session 1: The man who came through the roof

Download 1:3

Jesus says to the Pharisees and the teachers of the law: “*‘I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.’ So he spoke to the man who could not walk. ‘I tell you,’ he said, ‘get up. Take your mat and go home.’ Right away, the man stood up in front of them. He took his mat and went home praising God.*”

Wow! Jesus is the true helper—a real doctor. He deals with the man’s biggest problem, his sin—and then, to prove that he’s done that, he heals the man.

This man had a radically changed life. I mean, everything was different. He could even go up on the roof and help repair the hole! But more than that, he was able to go into the temple of God and talk to God. He was no longer an outcast from the place where God chose to meet with people.

And what was true physically was absolutely true spiritually. The thing that had made him an outcast from God—sin—had been wiped away. Forgiveness can be the same for us. This man’s healing is a picture of the difference that it makes when God forgives our sin.

Jesus says that the friends who brought the paralysed man had “faith”. That simply means that they trusted that Jesus could do what no one else could. These men didn’t let the crowd or the roof get in the way of coming to Jesus.

If you were dying of cancer or liver failure, you would make every effort to get to the best doctor who could heal you. You might even sell your house or your car to pay your way. But, as we have seen, Jesus says that there is a much greater need than to get your body sorted out—and that is to know God’s forgiveness. Surely that’s worth taking time and effort to get hold of.

That’s why I’d encourage you to keep coming along and learning about Jesus—the only one who can say to you “Your sins are forgiven”.

Let me introduce you to someone who found God’s forgiveness for themselves...

Close Encounters: Download Scripts

Session 2: The man silenced by a demon

Download 2:1

I don't know what you think of when you hear about people like Hitler or Saddam Hussein. Many would call them "demon-possessed psychopaths". Whether they were or not, we know that they were very evil, and therefore, we know that there is something worse in our world than just people making mistakes.

The Bible makes this very clear—that there is, in fact, a prince of evil called Satan or the devil. Or, as we have seen in this story, Beelzebub. We're not told too much about Satan, but in the Bible he is called, among other things, "the father of lies" and "destroyer". And his goal is to ruin and destroy everything that God has made. We see something of the destroyer in this story. The man with the demon in verse 1 is not what he should be. He can't speak—he's mute—because of an evil demon.

Jesus also has a goal, and that is to put people right. Verse 14 tells us that he drives out the demon, giving the man his voice again, to the amazement of the crowd. But even more amazingly, not everyone is amazed! Some of the crowd accuse Jesus of getting his power from Beelzebub, the prince of demons.

Beelzebub is another name for Satan, and means "Lord of the flies". Where do you find flies? Round death and stuff that's rotting and filthy. These people suggest that Jesus is using the power of death and decay when, in fact, he's having the opposite effect—he's bringing life and health to people. We know the effect of the Hitlers of this world. But think how different the effect of Jesus is—we can see it clearly in what happens to the man in this story.

So to accuse Jesus of using the power of Satan seems crazy. And Jesus shows how stupid it is. If he was working for Satan, why would he be undoing Satan's destruction by healing the man?

You know, when a country has civil war, it destroys itself and the result is poverty. When a family starts to argue, it can lead to separation—it becomes a non-family. Surely it's the same with Satan's kingdom, Jesus is saying. If Jesus was working for Satan, he would be doing Satan's work—bringing lies and destruction. But in this story Jesus drives out the thing that is destroying this man's life. Jesus certainly has power, but it surely isn't the power of Beelzebub.

The religious leaders had followers who were claiming to drive out demons. So Jesus asks by what power were they doing that? Why weren't they also accused of using the power of Beelzebub? In fact, these people clearly couldn't do what Jesus had done—that's why, in verse 14, everyone was so amazed by him. Jesus says, in verse 20, "But suppose I drive out demons with the help of God's powerful finger." That makes much more sense.

It's not surprising that the crowd were amazed, for they were seeing the power of God. But it is surprising that some would call this the power of Satan, and others would ask for a sign from heaven! Why do these people respond to Jesus like that? We'll answer that question later.

Close Encounters: Download Scripts

Session 2: The man silenced by a demon

Download 2:2

OK. You've just seen that Jesus is the stronger man, and he brings in God's new kingdom by driving out the strong man—Satan. That means that Jesus is God's king, driving out the enemies of God and bringing the good rule of God into people's lives—just as the stronger man ties up the strong man and takes away his possessions. That's what we saw when Jesus drove out the demon and gave the man the ability to speak.

I have to tell you that this is a picture of us. We are in a very, very, seriously dangerous position, according to Jesus. In the story of the man who couldn't speak, it's fairly easy to understand that he is under the power of a demon. But what about us? Is this telling us that we all have an evil demon controlling us? Well, the Bible says that's possible for some, but all of us are under the influence of Satan, "the father of lies".

In fact, Satan uses lies and deceit to keep us out of the kingdom of God. For the whole of our lives Satan lies to us about...

- how the world got here
- what is important in life
- what God is like (or even if he exists)
- what God has said
- what happens after death.

These are the weapons of the strong man who guards his house so safely that there's no way of escaping.

You see, what Jesus is telling us here is that we need a rescuer—a stronger man—who can cut through the lies that hold us in Satan's power.

Have a listen to these words from another part of the Bible, describing what has happened to those who have been rescued by Jesus.

*[God] has saved us from the kingdom of darkness. He has brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves. Because of what the Son has done, we have been set free. Because of him, all of our sins have been forgiven ... [Jesus] took away the weapons of the powers and authorities [that's Satan and his demons]. He made a public show of them. He won the battle over them by dying on the cross. (**Colossians 1 v 13-14 and 2 v 15**)*

See the stronger man overcoming the strong man? Do you see how Jesus did this? It was by dying on the cross. He sacrificed himself to rescue us. So it takes

the very power of God to rescue people, and that's what Jesus came to do.

And that's why he tells the next story in verse 24, to show us that we can't do anything to help ourselves. We need him to rescue us.

Close Encounters: Download Scripts

Session 2: The man silenced by a demon

Download 2:3

In the second story Jesus told, the house that has been swept clean and made neat is like a person who decides to live a better life. Imagine a person who realises they are living wrongly. They decide to change. They may give up many wrong things. They may start following a religion—even Christianity. They are like the house which has been swept clean and made neat.

But what happens next? This person comes to believe that God is pleased with them, because of the new way in which they now live. BUT this is a big lie of Satan. God can never be pleased with us until all our sin has been forgiven, and Jesus, the stronger man, has become our king, bringing in his new rule.

Without Jesus as their king, people will believe that if they try to be good, they can please God. They believe that they can rescue themselves from the power of Satan, so in fact they become more opposed to Jesus and what he came to do. They don't come to Jesus for forgiveness, so they cannot be forgiven. They are further away from God and more under Satan's power than they were to start with. They are like the clean house, where more evil spirits come to live at the end than in the beginning.

Now this is what we see in the religious leaders. Remember one of the questions we discussed earlier—why did the leaders in the crowd respond to Jesus' amazing power by accusing him of working for Beelzebub? Why did they give such a ridiculous response? Because they thought they could sweep their house clean and be stronger than the strong man.

These leaders were known as Pharisees, which means “separate”, because they had separated themselves for God, so they thought, and believed they were different from ordinary people. And they were always going on about rules and laws to make themselves better in God's sight. And therefore, they didn't think they needed a rescuer—they could do it themselves. So their reaction to Jesus, the stronger man and the rescuer that they didn't want, was to accuse him of working for Beelzebub.

Jesus shows very clearly that there are only two groups that we can belong to. In verse 23 he says: “Anyone who is not with me is against me.” It doesn't matter how religious you are, or how much you've tried to sweep your house clean. What matters is whether Jesus is your rescuer, your

stronger man. Satan is happy for us to be as religious as we want, as long as it keeps us away from Jesus and what he came to do.

Let me introduce you to someone who was once under the power of Satan...

Close Encounters: Download Scripts

Session 3: The sick woman and the dying girl

Download 3:1

The last twelve years of this woman's life had surely brought her to the point of hopelessness. Her bleeding hadn't stopped. Despite spending all her money on doctors, she hadn't got better, but worse! It must have felt as if her very life was flowing from her, as she was slowly bleeding to death.

All this would have made her weak and penniless. But also unclean. Now this seems strange to us today. But back then people who had this woman's problem should not have been out in public places—just like the paralysed man from the first story, or the man with a demon from the second story. These were all unclean people. This woman would have been treated like a leper. Because, if people touched her, the religious rules said that they too would become unclean, like her. That meant they couldn't go to the temple to worship God until they had done all kinds of religious stuff to be made clean. But she could never be made clean because she was constantly bleeding.

So get the picture of this woman? Weak, poor, isolated, not welcome, hopeless.

Now, she had heard about Jesus. But the way she thought was that he didn't know about her. He was very unlikely to be knocking on her door to come and heal her. So what does she do? If there's any hope, it's in Jesus. But how could she come to him in her uncleanness?

"Well", she thinks, "I just need to touch his clothes. I don't need to touch him!" She clearly understands the power of Jesus. So that's what she does. She mingles with a crowd that she shouldn't be in. She comes up behind Jesus and touches his clothes. Immediately, the bleeding stops. The suffering is over. She's clean!

This must almost have taken her breath away. The rush of life in her body must almost have made her faint.

And the picture here is that life-power goes out from Jesus into her. "Who touched me?" asks Jesus. Oh no! She now has this amazing health and cleanness but... she has made Jesus unclean! An exchange has taken place, a swap. She has become clean and, according to the religious rules, Jesus has become unclean. And here he is, looking around, asking who has done this. How does she feel now?

Here is Jesus, who has total authority and power over life-blood, calling out “Who touched me?” Now she feels weaker than she’s ever felt—shaking with fear, she falls at his feet.

I don’t know whether you know the book *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and the rest of the “Narnia” series—the children’s stories that CS Lewis wrote. But in them, he pictures Jesus as a great lion, who on the one hand is dangerous and whose roar is so powerful that trees bend like grass when it is heard—a lion who is truly king over all, a lion to be feared. On the other hand, children play with him, and ride on his back, and snuggle into his fur—a lion who loves. And this is what you see here in Jesus.

The woman comes to Jesus, knowing his power. It’s overwhelmingly frightening and she falls at his feet, shaking with fear. But he lovingly says to her, “Dear woman, your faith has healed you. Go in peace. You are free from your suffering.” He clearly was happy to become unclean so that she could become clean, and for his power to be used for her healing.

But this isn’t some impersonal zap of power. This is Jesus giving himself to her. That’s why he calls her out of the crowd, so that he could know her and she could know him face to face.

We’ve seen that this woman knew that she was unclean—but that didn’t stop her coming to Jesus. I’ve met many people who feel unclean, but they haven’t taken the step she took because they thought that Jesus would turn them away. How wrong can we be!

We’ve also seen that this woman first of all felt hopeless. I wonder if any of you feel like this. If you do, I really hope you get who Jesus is and what he can do for you. It may not be comfortable to come to Jesus—as it wasn’t for this woman—but it’s always the best place to be. In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* a little girl called Lucy asks about the Lion: “Is he a safe lion?” The answer she is given is: “Oh no! He’s not a safe lion. But he’s good.” Jesus is never “safe”—he is so powerful. But he uses his power for good.

You may not feel hopeless like this woman, but we shall see later in this story that in fact this is true of all of us. We are all in a situation just as hopeless as hers.

Close Encounters: Download Scripts

Session 3: The sick woman and the dying girl

Download 3:2

You've just dialled 999. Your twelve-year-old daughter is dying. This is a medical emergency. The ambulance puts on its siren and rushes to the scene. But on the way to the hospital the driver stops to help a woman. She's had a serious illness for twelve years, but she's not likely to die in the next twelve minutes. The paramedics leave your daughter dying in the ambulance to go and help this woman out. Surely she could wait for a little longer! It seems crazy and wrong, and you would be upset and furious about it.

It feels like that's the sort of thing that is happening in this story. Jairus has pleaded with Jesus to come urgently. But on his way, Jesus has stopped to speak to the woman. And in the meantime, Jairus' daughter has died.

But Jesus isn't like an ordinary paramedic. Nor is Jesus just a healer. He is the life-giver. It is easier for Jesus to raise the dead to life again than for you to wake up a sleeping teenager. So he doesn't have to rush like an ambulance, for he has power over life and death.

For instance, Jesus showed later on that he had power over his own life and death. Jesus said of himself: "I lay down my life only to take it up again..." (John 10 v 17). And that's what we see in the Easter story. When Jesus died on a cross, he laid down his own life, but three days later rose to life again.

And Jesus doesn't just use this power for himself—it's for his followers too. He says: *"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live even though he dies, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die"* (John 11 v 25-26).

That sounds a bit confusing, when he says that his followers will live even though they die and yet they will never die. But that's exactly what we see with this twelve-year-old girl. Jesus treats death like sleep. This girl has truly died—everybody knows that she is dead. That's why they laugh at Jesus when he says that she is only sleeping. But Jesus wakes her up and brings her back to life as if she had never died. "He who believes in me will live even though he dies," says Jesus.

Close Encounters: Download Scripts

Session 3: The sick woman and the dying girl

Download 3:3

So far in this series we have seen that we are under the influence and power of three enemies.

- In Session 1—we saw that we are controlled by the power of sin and need to be forgiven.
- In Session 2—we saw that we are under the power of the devil and need to be rescued.
- In this session—we see that we are under the power of death and we need a life-giver.

We said earlier that some of us may not feel hopeless like the sick woman. But death comes to all of us—we're all hopeless in the face of death.

There's a wonderful verse in the Bible that describes something of this: *"The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."* (Romans 6 v 23) The reason we're all going to die is that we have earned the wages of sin. We saw in Session 1 that we don't love God and his ways. Because of this, we are separated from God, the life-giver.

But the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ. Jesus has come into this world to give God's gift—a free gift to us, but costly to him. And, as we've seen in this story, there is an exchange, a swap. Like the sick woman, we can become clean because Jesus became unclean for us.

And that's what Jesus was doing on the cross. The Bible says that he who had no sin became sin for us—that means God treated Jesus as a sinner, even though he had never failed to always love God and his ways. The wages that he didn't earn, he took—death—in order to give us the gift that we couldn't earn—life.

And in these stories we see hints and suggestions of what Jesus would do on the cross, and what can now be true for each one of us. So Jesus calls Jairus to "just believe", and commends the woman for her faith.

Have you seen (or are you beginning to see) that Jesus has the authority to forgive you, the power to rescue you, and the love to take your wages of sin? Have you seen enough in Jesus for you to trust him with your uncleanness, and to believe that he will turn your death into life?

Let me introduce you to someone who came to the point of believing in Jesus and in his power to rescue them from death...

Close Encounters: Download Scripts

Session 4: The blind beggar

Download 4:1

We couldn't come to any more serious subject in the life of Jesus than the events that would happen in Jerusalem. You get the sense of importance in verse 32, where it says the disciples were amazed and those who followed Jesus were afraid. The atmosphere was charged with tension. And Jesus spells out exactly what's going to happen. He knows that in Jerusalem he will be handed over to the religious leaders and they will sentence him to death. And they will hand him over to the Roman authorities, who have power to kill him. He knows his death will not be quick—he will be made fun of, spat on, whipped, and finally nailed on a wooden cross and left to die. The most terrible way to die.

And yet, as you've already seen, Jesus calls himself the "Son of Man". An Old Testament prophet of Israel, called Daniel, described the Son of Man like this:

"He was given authority, glory and a kingdom. People from every nation and language worshipped him. His authority will last forever. It will not pass away. His kingdom will never be destroyed." (Daniel 7 v 14, NIRV)

In the next part of the story, we'll see that Jesus is also called the "Son of David". This again comes from the Old Testament part of the Bible (2 Samuel 7 v 12-13). God promised to David (Israel's greatest king) that one of his descendants would be king for ever.

You couldn't get a bigger contrast between the Son of Man, God's chosen king, and what is going to happen to him. And yet, as you would expect from the Son of Man, the king of the universe, he does seem to be completely in control of the situation. He not only knows what will happen, he is taking it on. He's not asking his disciples to help him out. He's not organising a way of fighting his enemies. This is his plan—to suffer and die.

The question is: *what is this all about?* And in verse 45 Jesus tells us:

"Even the Son of Man did not come to be served. Instead, he came to serve others. He came to give his life as the price for setting many people free."

Jesus is a Servant-King. So in the next part of the story we're going to see Jesus being an amazing servant. He's tender and kind, and concerned for a blind beggar, even in the middle of the most difficult and important journey of his life.

Close Encounters: Download Scripts

Session 4: The blind beggar

Download 4:2

We have been thinking about some serious truths here. Basically, what this passage has been telling us about is “God—your servant”! It sounds ridiculous putting these two things together, but that’s the truth of it.

So, let’s pick up the story. Here is Jesus, the great king, walking towards Jerusalem—but passing through the town of Jericho on the way to the most important business in the universe.

And Jesus is surrounded by crowds of people following him. Soon after this story, the crowds are going to parade him like a king into Jerusalem, even laying their coats down on the ground—like a red carpet—for him to walk on. So get the picture—the Son of Man, this king, surrounded by a great praising crowd, on the most important journey of his life. And Mark, the writer, brings our attention to one man on the outskirts of the crowd. He’s a nobody. He’s a beggar, sitting on the side of the road, hoping to get a few pennies from passers-by.

But this beggar, Bartimaeus, is like a fly in the ointment, or a buzzing wasp around your head that you just want to flick away—because of his constant crying out. So, first of all, let’s look at the call of Bartimaeus.

“He heard that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by. So he began to shout, ‘Jesus! Son of David! Have mercy on me!’” (Verse 47)

He’s shouting out at the top of his lungs. He’s got to be heard through the crowds. But notice what he shouts:

“Jesus! Son of David! Have *mercy* on me!”

He’s crying out and begging for mercy. He’s doing what beggars do. He doesn’t want money—he wants mercy. He’s not satisfied with a few pennies in his bowl. He shouts out for mercy.

Before this story, Jesus told the crowd (in Mark 10 v 15):

“Anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will not enter it.”

Bartimaeus is showing child-like desperation to get what he needs. Babies cry out for their mother’s milk. But, as I said, to the crowd he’s like an irritating wasp.

"Many people commanded him to stop. They told him to be quiet. But he shouted even louder, 'Son of David! Have mercy on me!'" (Verse 48)

"Shush! You're making a scene. Don't you know who he is? Shut up, beggar! Will someone just shut him up?" But like a child who wants his mother's milk, he shouts all the louder.

Although Bartimaeus is blind, it's as if he sees right the way through the crowd, and his sights are fixed on the one thing he needs—mercy from Jesus. And he won't shut up because he really does know who Jesus is—the "Son of David", God's chosen king. Listen to his shout again:

"Jesus! Son of David! Have mercy on me!" (Verse 47)

"Son of David! Have mercy on me!" (Verse 48)

So in the call of Bartimaeus, there are a lot of things we can learn.

- He understands his desperate need.
- He understands that Jesus is the king who can meet that need. "*Son of David! Have mercy on me!*"
- He understands that Jesus is leaving Jericho. He doesn't take it for granted that he'll get another opportunity, and so he desperately, persistently, loudly shouts.

There's a lovely sentence in the Old Testament part of the Bible (Joel 2 v 32) that Bartimaeus seemed to know. "*Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.*" That's the call of Bartimaeus.

Now look at the call of Jesus. Bartimaeus calls out: "Jesus! Son of David! Have mercy on me!" And in verse 49 it says: "*Jesus stopped and said, 'Call for him.' So they called out to the blind man, 'Cheer up! Get up on your feet! Jesus is calling for you.'*"

This is the Servant-King in action. This "nobody" beggar calls to Jesus, and Jesus the *Servant-King* stops and responds. But notice—Jesus the *King* calls, and Bartimaeus responds.

And what a response! He's up in a flash—so much so that this beggar leaves behind the one possession of his that we know about—his coat. He's a 100m sprinter with his eyes fixed on the finishing line.

Close Encounters: Download Scripts

Session 4: The blind beggar

Download 4:3

"What do you want me to do for you?' Jesus asked [Bartimaeus]. The blind man said, 'Rabbi, I want to be able to see.'" (Verse 51)

What a question! Couldn't Jesus see that Bartimaeus was blind? Well, of course he could.

But, you see, it's an important question—"What do you want me to do for you?" I mean, does the man just want money, so he can go back to a more comfortable life? Instead of sitting on a road outside Jericho, he could be sitting in a house inside Jericho. Does he really want to see? Because it's going to be totally life-changing for him. He can't be a beggar anymore. He'll have to get a job. He might have to learn a trade. He'll have to be more independent. He's got to learn to live by sight. There's a whole new learning process needed—what people look like, how to find his own way around and so on. Everything changes.

Bartimaeus doesn't want Jesus simply to help him with his old life. He wants something altogether new.

Lots of people want Jesus to sort out some aspect of their life that will help them to do the same things more comfortably—a bit of money in the bowl.

But "Rabbi, I want to be able to see," he answered. "Go," said Jesus. "Your faith has healed you." (Verse 52) And as these words were being said, his eyes were opened. And who was the first person he saw? It was the Son of David, God's chosen king. And that sight showed him what he really wanted—not for Jesus to heal him so he could go on his way with his new eyes (like putting money in a beggar's bowl), but to be a follower of God's king. Verse 52 ends this whole story. It says: "He followed Jesus along the road."

We've seen in this series that faith in Jesus changes hopeless situations.

- The story of the paralysed man—Jesus forgives sins.
- The story of the man silenced by the demon—Jesus rescues him from the power of Satan.
- The story of the sick woman—Jesus does what no one else can do and heals her.
- The story of Jairus' daughter—Jesus raises her from death.

Jesus deals with all our great enemies—sickness, death, sin and Satan.

I wonder whether you have come to see your hopeless situation and your need for a saviour. It's interesting that in the original Greek language, which Mark used

to write this story, the word for “heal”—when Jesus says to Bartimaeus “Your faith has healed you”—means “saved”. Faith (or trust) in Jesus saves us.

Helen Keller became blind and deaf at the age of 19 months. She was once asked: “Isn’t it terrible to be blind?” She responded by saying: “Better to be blind and see with your heart than have two eyes and see nothing.” I hope you “see” these truths in your heart.

Jesus came as the Servant-King. He was going to die on a cross in Jerusalem—and in doing so, as verse 45 says, serve others. *“He came to give his life as the price for setting many free.”*

- To set us free from the power of Satan, Jesus had to die on the cross.
- To set us free from our sins, Jesus had to pay the price for our sins on the cross. We’ve already seen that the wages of sin is death—Jesus took those wages.
- To set us free from the power of death and bring us eternal life, Jesus had to go to the cross.
- To make us clean and acceptable to God, the King had to become the Servant, who became dirty, who died the death of a sinner.

I wonder if, like Bartimaeus, you have come to see this. It’s my privilege to say to you the words that were said to Bartimaeus when Jesus called him: “Cheer up! Get up on your feet! Jesus is calling for you.”

They’re wonderful words. You, in a world of lies, can hear this truth. You, who are a hopeless outcast from God, a beggar, a sinner, facing death, someone Satan has lied to... “Cheer up! Jesus is calling you!”

Let me introduce you to someone who heard the call of Jesus and followed him...