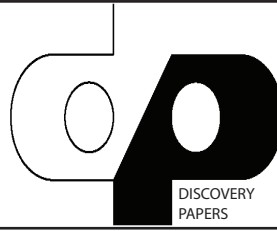


LIFE FROM THE FRINGE

**SERIES: INVITED: STORIES OF
WELCOME IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE.**



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Luke 8:40-569
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Luke 8:40-56

The Infamous Hitchhikers

Winslow, Arizona is a tiny, inconsequential town in the middle of nowhere that was made famous by the Eagles (the band, not the football team). Winslow was the backdrop for a verse in the Eagle's very first single "Take it Easy". Do you know it? "Standing on a corner in Winslow, Arizona, such a fine sight to see. It's a girl, my Lord, in a flat-bed Ford slowing down to take a look at me."¹ This song has made Winslow a popular tourist stop for the last 45 years. I think the town is only alive today because of this connection. So it's a famous town to some, but to me, it's infamous.

In 2011 I stayed in one of the two hotels in Winslow when I was traveling for work. From that hotel I picked up some hitchhikers, the world's worst kind of hitchhikers—bed bugs. I didn't know what had bit me at the time, but the next day I had a line of red bites up one leg and down one arm, and they itched like mosquitos had made a nest in my skin. Apparently, a few of those suckers crawled into my suitcase and came home with me, where they made a lovely colony out of my box spring. For months I was covered in little red bites, but I had no idea what was causing them. Eventually, I smashed one in my sleep and figured it out.

It took me five months, a lot of research, and about a thousand dollars in products and treatments to completely rid my bedroom of the bugs. It was hard to sleep at night knowing that bugs would be eating at me while I slept, but if I moved to the spare bedroom they would travel through the walls, attracted to the carbon dioxide that I exhaled.

But far worse than the bites, the anxiety, and the insomnia, was the way people treated me. I told my friends that I had bedbugs, not thinking that it would negatively impact my relationships. After all, it wasn't my fault that I had bed bugs; you don't get them or have trouble getting rid of them because you, or your home, are dirty or unhygienic. Regardless of these facts and the many precautions I took not to spread them outside

my home, some of my friends were very worried that I would give them bedbugs. People stopped inviting me to parties or over for dinner. Some people stopped hugging me. One friend even asked me cancel a trip to visit his family because he didn't want to risk an infestation.

I was helpless and hurting, cut off from much of the fellowship that was so life-giving to me. Those stupid little bugs from Winslow, Arizona diminished my life for an entire year. It was a terrible thing to be out and about, living my life, but to be held at a distance by others. It was like I was living on the fringes of my own life. Today, we'll encounter a woman who lived like this for more than a decade!

Meeting the People of Luke 8:40-56

Like last week's story of the demoniac-turned-disciple, today's passage is another dramatic story of healing.

Luke 8:40-56:

Now when Jesus returned, the crowd welcomed him, for they were all waiting for him. 41 And there came a man named Jairus, who was a ruler of the synagogue. And falling at Jesus' feet, he implored him to come to his house, 42 for he had an only daughter, about twelve years of age, and she was dying.

As Jesus went, the people pressed around him. 43 And there was a woman who had had a discharge of blood for twelve years, and though she had spent all her living on physicians, she could not be healed by anyone. 44 She came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment, and immediately her discharge of blood ceased. 45 And Jesus said, "Who was it that touched me?" When all denied it, Peter said, "Master, the crowds surround you and are pressing in on you!" 46 But Jesus said, "Someone touched me, for I perceive that power has gone out from me." 47 And when the woman saw that she was not hidden, she came trembling, and falling down before him

declared in the presence of all the people why she had touched him, and how she had been immediately healed. 48 And he said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace.”

49 While he was still speaking, someone from the ruler’s house came and said, “Your daughter is dead; do not trouble the Teacher any more.” 50 But Jesus on hearing this answered him, “Do not fear; only believe, and she will be well.” 51 And when he came to the house, he allowed no one to enter with him, except Peter and John and James, and the father and mother of the child. 52 And all were weeping and mourning for her, but he said, “Do not weep, for she is not dead but sleeping.” 53 And they laughed at him, knowing that she was dead. 54 But taking her by the hand he called, saying, “Child, arise.” 55 And her spirit returned, and she got up at once. And he directed that something should be given her to eat. 56 And her parents were amazed, but he charged them to tell no one what had happened.

In this story Jesus encounters a young girl and a woman. Both are living on the fringe—the girl on the thin thread between life and death, the woman on the outskirts of society looking in because of a physical condition. Jesus wouldn’t have been expected to associate with these two females, and his physical contact with them would have been surprising, even scandalous to some. But as we’ll see throughout our summer series, Jesus often disregarded conventional boundaries because he was on a mission of good news. His actions tell us something about the hospitality of God, about who God wants to welcome into his Kingdom.

This passage is a bit disjointed because Jesus’ and Jairus are interrupted by the bleeding woman. For the sake of tracking with one plotline at a time, I’d like to look at the healing of Jairus’ daughter first, and then the healing of the bleeding woman. We’ll draw conclusions about Jesus’ welcome along the way.

A Dying Girl and her Desperate Father

This story comes immediately after Jesus returns from healing the demoniac. Word has been spreading about Jesus’ ability to heal and about the authority with which he teaches, so a crowd of people waits for his return. The story reads as if the minute Jesus steps off the boat the people swarm around him. And cutting through the crowd comes a man named Jairus.

Jairus is an official leader in the local synagogue, and though we don’t know his exact role, he was likely a prominent man in his community. His actions that day may have surprised his neighbors, particularly because he comes to Jesus about his daughter who is dying.

There aren’t many stories about children in the gospels, which may give us the impression that children were of little significance to God or society. I’ve often heard people say that children in the first century had no value. So I did a little research to confirm or deny that assumption. Here’s what I found.

In the first century, a quarter of all infants died before their first birthday, and 50% of children died before the age of 10; so family life came with much more grief than we experience. For Roman families it was socially acceptable to abandon infants if they were deformed or unwanted for any reason, and it was common to sell older children as slaves if they became a financial burden. Jews however, believed procreation was a divine command, that life was sacred at every age, and that children were a blessing from God. So Jews tended to have larger families than their Roman counterparts.

Ancestry was important to Jewish identity, so boys were particularly prized because they would continue the family line. Boys learned the trades of their fathers and as adults they added to the extended family’s economic stability. A father was responsible for having his son trained in the Torah and for finding him a wife when he reached about 25 years old.

Jewish girls were reared by their mothers. They were given a rudimentary education at home—taught the basics of reading and writing—and were trained to manage a household. Jewish girls could be betrothed as young as 12 years old, and married as soon as they were 12 and a half. A dowry was given from a girl’s father to her husband, so if your family was not financially stable, having a daughter or daughters marry had an economic impact on your entire family.²

Because of this, it’s possible that there was a distance between Jewish fathers and their daughters. In some cases, their bond may not have been as strong as the bond between mothers and daughters. Culture and economics could have influenced how fathers valued and interacted with their daughters. So now think of the story in Luke 8, where Jairus falls down at Jesus’ feet and begs him to come to his home and heal his daughter. Luke’s language makes it clear that Jairus is grieving and desperate for his daughter’s sake. It may have shocked the crowd to see such anguish.

Jairus knows of Jesus' power to heal, so he seeks out Jesus as soon as he walks into town. And though a household servant reports that the girl has died while Jesus was delayed, Jesus reassures Jairus that faith will save his child. Jesus gets to Jairus' house, takes the dead girl by the hand and simply says, "Child, arise." And she gets up at once.

Jesus' healing of the girl is significant. It probably said a lot to witnesses that a renowned rabbi and healer would stop to heal a dying child, especially a girl child, even if she is the daughter of a synagogue leader. And this healing might change the opinion of many of Jesus' critics.

Luke 8:52-53:

And all were weeping and mourning for her, but he said, "Do not weep, for she is not dead but sleeping." 53 And they laughed at him, knowing that she was dead.

It's clear in these verses that the crowd didn't expect Jesus to be able to heal her. The laughter Luke records is laced with scorn, meant to demean Jesus' claims that the child is only sleeping. But as soon as the girl returns to village life, they will be proved wrong. Maybe they'll come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the one who can heal any condition and set any captive free.

When Jesus heals Jairus' daughter, he indicates something great about the Kingdom that he's been proclaiming—the Kingdom of God is for children as well as adults. This is more clear in **Luke 18:15-16:**

Now they were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them. And when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. 16 But Jesus called them to him, saying, "Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God.

A Kingdom for Children

You may have heard people say that children are important because they are our future, or because they are the future leaders of the church. I used to serve with a pastor who regularly preached that children are part of the church now. That children matter *as* children because they too are created in the image of God.

I haven't found Scripture that clearly teaches that humans have greater value, or full value, only when our brains and bodies are fully developed. Or when we can

contribute to the economy. Or when we know enough to teach the Bible to others. Jesus called children to him not because they were cute and sweet-smelling, but because he saw in them the reflection of his father. Because they were intended to his father's Kingdom.

In 2014, I spent seven months in Hawaii working as the kindergarten through 5th grade chaplain at a large private school. My main responsibility was to lead chapel services and inspire the children, but I ended up being the one inspired.

There's nothing quite like having a front row seat to 300 children praising God by singing the Doxology! There's nothing like seeing their infectious joy for life; their ability to play and imagine and explore; or to see the way the little ones live carefree, not worrying about what others will think of them.

After I led chapel one day, a kindergarten girl marched right up to me, made eye-contact, and declared, "I believe in God." There was fearlessness in her testimony that I admired, and that I missed in myself. Weekly, I helped the students write original prayers for our chapel services. Every week the kids blew me away with the simple things they were thankful for, the places where they noticed hurt, and the confidence they had that God could right any situation.

Yes, as adults and parents our responsibility is to nurture, train, and discipline children in ways that shape them into capable and contributing adults. But if Jesus welcomed children—if God's Kingdom delights in children—then maybe we need to also *respect* children.

I'm convinced that kids can teach us a significant lesson about how to live with trust and confidence, knowing that God holds this whole world together. That's a reminder that we desperately need in an election year, and in the age of terrorism and human-trafficking, of mass-shootings and suicide clusters and racism.

If children are welcome in the Kingdom of God and are vital to the life of the church, how might we learn from them?

A Bleeding Woman

Let's turn to Jesus' encounter with the bleeding woman. Out of curiosity, I reached out to a good friend Mary Ritter, who is both a physician and a believer. I asked her to look at this passage through a physician's eyes, to think about a possible diagnosis and how

12 years of bleeding might have physically affected the woman. Dr. Ritter said there's not enough information in Luke for a true diagnosis, but that this kind of bleeding could have resulted in infertility and barrenness. She may have been anemic and iron-deficient, resulting in significant fatigue, dizziness, shortness of breath with exertion, and pallor.

In Luke 8, we don't know this woman's marital status, her age, where she was from, or what her daily life was like. We do know she had a flow of blood for 12 years—and the phrasing here compared to other first century sources makes it most likely that this was uterine bleeding. She must have been a woman of means since she had a living to spend on doctors and treatments. Mark's Gospel gives a bit more information than Luke's. Mark 5 adds that this woman's physical condition was deteriorating. She'd run out of money for doctors but she'd heard reports about Jesus. She believed if she could just touch Jesus' clothes, she would be healed (Mark 5:26-28).

And that's exactly what she does. She squeezes through the crowd pressing around Jesus and grabs the fringe of his cloak. Immediately, the bleeding that's plagued her for more than a decade is gone!

The physical healing is incredible and inspiring—that Jesus had such power that all she had to do was touch his clothes! But there's another dynamic that's easy to miss in this story. The most significant thing about this story is not that Jesus' power heals the woman's body. The greatest part is that this healing restores the woman's connection to her family, her community, and to God. This is a pinnacle spiritual moment for this woman.

To understand this dynamic we have to talk about menstruation. I know this may make you uncomfortable, but I have words of reassurance from one of our former pastors who said, "When this chapter speaks as it does of menstruation...there is no need for us to blush, to squirm, or to feel embarrassed. If we do, it is a sign that we need to adjust to reality."³ There you have it from Ray Stedman himself.[a] Let's not be shy about a natural, God-created reality.

Women have been menstruating throughout human history, but there was little medical understanding of the menstrual cycle in the first century. Back then people had wild, superstitious beliefs about a woman's period. Pliny the Elder was a high-ranking Roman soldier and scholar who lived during the first century. He wrote a

37-volume encyclopedia called "Natural History" which was the standard for all scientific and medical knowledge in the West for the next 1000 years. This is some of what he had to say about menstruation.

"Contact with the monthly flux of women turns new wine sour, makes crops wither...dulls the edge of steel... and causes a horrible smell to fill the air. Dogs who taste the blood become mad, and their bite becomes poisonous as in rabies...Linen, touched by the woman while boiling and washing it in water, turns black. So magical is the power of women during their monthly periods that they say that hailstorms and whirlwinds are driven away if menstrual fluid is exposed to the flashes of lightning."⁴

That's a first-century, expert, medical perspective. That's how the general public likely viewed what we know is the very natural, physiological process. But the woman in Luke 8 is not only dealing with the misconceptions and superstitions of her culture, she's also burdened by a spiritual weight.

The book of Leviticus outlines a holiness code for Jews. Chapter 15 gives instructions about bodily discharges, which includes menstrual blood. These discharges made Jews ritually unclean. That doesn't mean the people were dirty—these laws are fundamentally not about hygiene, but about *spiritual purity and impurity*. To approach their holy God, Jews had to be pure; otherwise they would defile God's dwelling place (Leviticus 15:31).

Menstrual blood made women temporarily impure and unfit to approach God at the tabernacle or temple, and would have impacted their presence in the local synagogue. For the days a woman had her period, she was to live somewhat separately so she wouldn't make others unclean through touch or secondary contact. For example, no one was to sit on her chair or lay on her bed. Seven days after the end of her period, a Jewish woman would do a ritual washing, probably just of her hands, feet, and clothes. After a sacrifice on the eighth day, she regained full access to family, community, and religious life.

However, Leviticus 15:25 stipulates that a woman who had a discharge of blood other than her regular monthly period was impure as long as the bleeding continued. So the woman from Luke 8 has been ritually unclean for 12 years! Her physical contact with family was limited for that long. She was forced to the periphery of religious life, which was central to Jewish identity.

[a] This quotation is taken from a Stedman article on Leviticus 15, which provides cultural background for Luke 8:43-48.

Can you imagine not hugging your family for 12 years? Not worshipping with your community for 12 years? That sounds like a miserable kind of half-life. Maybe she's lost confidence in the religious system of her ancestors. Maybe her relationships with her family are frayed. Maybe in her years of suffering she'd come to feel invisible to Israel's God of miracles. Maybe her spirit is as pale and weak as her body.

But then she hears about this man Jesus who has great power. Maybe she thought this Jesus was her last hope. As he is a faithful Jew, she doesn't expect Jesus to speak with her—a woman—in public, or touch her—a woman who is bleeding and impure—so she plots to touch his clothes. She hopes that will be enough.

And it is. She touches the fringe of his garment and is instantly healed. Jesus feels the power go out from him and wants to know who touched him. The woman, realizing she can't hide, falls down at his feet. From there she tells Jesus her story of her desperate need for healing. None of the witnesses would have faulted Jesus if he rebuked her for touching him and making him ritually unclean. But Jesus' response is one of compassion. He says, "Daughter, your faith has healed you; go in peace."

Jesus called her *daughter*. This is the only woman Jesus calls daughter in the Gospels. This response is probably the last thing anyone expected. This woman could have been the same age or even older than Jesus. She broke a cultural boundary by touching a man that was not her husband. She broke a religious boundary by touching Jesus and making him unclean. She, in a sense, violated Jesus, but he responded by claiming her as his own!

A Kingdom for the Spiritually Impure

When Jesus does this, he shows the world that the Kingdom of God is open to the spiritually impure. That God's compassion and mercy is greater than his need for human purity. For centuries Jews had been operating under the Levitical holiness code and the sacrificial system so they could stay in right relationship with their God, but Jesus' actions foreshadow a quickly approaching day when that code and system would be finished.

We know the pinnacle of that story. Through his own blood sacrifice on the cross, Jesus tore the curtain of the temple in two—that dividing wall between humans and their God—and simultaneously threw wide the gates of the Kingdom.

The need to be completely pure to approach God—gone!

The need for ritual washing—gone!

The need for distance between a holy God and the humans who love him—gone!

Jesus' death was an act of compassion for the spiritually impure, and that means it was for *all of us*. All human beings sin and fall short of the glory of God. Jesus' sacrifice cleansed us and issued an all-access pass to the Kingdom of God for those who believe in him.

It was a beautiful thing, what Jesus did for the bleeding woman. His power healed her and ended her suffering. He commended her faith in front of witnesses! He called her daughter and embraced her as his own.

It's a beautiful thing, what God has done for us. He saw that we were slaves to sin and sent his son Jesus to save us. Now we can draw close to God even in our imperfections and have a relationship with him. Like the woman in Luke 8, he calls us his daughters and sons. Hear this truth from John 1:12-13, "But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born—not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man—but of God."

The Kingdom of God is for the spiritually impure. It's for us. Because of Jesus' welcome, we are the children of God. Last week, we sang the song "No Longer Slaves" during our services.

*From my Mother's womb, You have chosen me
Love has called my name
I've been born again into Your family
Your blood flows through my veins*

*I'm no longer a slave to fear
I am a child of God.⁵*

When we got to those last two lines you were singing out. The volume was never higher that morning than when you sang of your freedom as children of God. Embrace that. Embrace your identity as God's beloved daughters and sons!

Welcome Interruptions

In the stories of the dying girl and the bleeding woman we've learned that the Kingdom of God is for children and for the spiritually impure. Jesus welcomed both. But I want to draw your attention to something else about Jesus that is important for our culture today. Early in this passage Jesus is on his way to Jairus' house when he is touched by the bleeding woman. Later, as Jesus is talking to the bleeding woman, he's interrupted by someone from Jairus' house. And did you notice his response? Jesus doesn't say, "Excuse me, I'm in the middle of something. I can't be bothered." Instead, he gives his time and attention to what comes to him. Jesus made time for interruptions and delays because they were important to the Kingdom of God. How different that is from our culture!

A few months ago I was at Michael's—the crafting superstore. I was the third person of six people in line. There was a single check-out line open. The woman checking out had some items without barcodes, so the employee was doing the difficult work of pricing the items through their catalogue. The woman who was fifth in line yelled up to the checker, "Can't you just call another employee to help you. Open another check out line! I really need to get to my daughter's class. I don't have time for this." The employee politely explained that the other front-end assistant called in sick and she was the only one available. The woman in line just kept complaining. Somehow her poor planning and running late for her daughter's class was now the employee's fault.

We live in a world that's all about our convenience. Our needs. Our timeline. Our agenda. And we often don't have time for people who get in our way. We don't always treat them well when they do. But Jesus did. He allowed himself to be interrupted, and he treated his interrupters with kindness. This a difficult thing for even the children of God to do.

This week was busy one for me. I was getting ready for my foster care home inspection. I put together the final pieces of furniture for my new apartment. I was writing this sermon. And I had all my regular emails and meetings on top of those extra things. What I wanted was large chunks of uninterrupted time to write and think. God had other plans.

Every afternoon there is a pastor on-call for counseling and prayer support for anyone who calls or walks in. Since that only happens a few times a year, I offered to cover for Alice for a few hours so she could meet someone for lunch. Five minutes after Alice left, I got a call from the office saying that a woman had dropped in and would like to talk to a pastor. I immediately started laughing—I was just writing the part in my outline where Jesus was willing to be interrupted.

I spent the next hour of my time listening to a woman who was hurting, lonely, and in need of healing. Sure I had tons of things waiting for me, but it was clear that this interruption was a divine appointment. That what I was doing had Kingdom significance. So I did my best to set aside my schedule and my need to be in control of my time, and focus on the person God put in front of me.

Can we be the gracious children of God who have margins in our lives to be interrupted? Can we live in such a way that makes us ready to listen when someone in need steps into our paths? Can we sacrifice our time and respond in love and compassion rather than frustration and complaint? Let's pray and ask Jesus to teach us.

Endnotes

- ¹ Eagles. "Take it Easy." *Eagles*. Asylum Records, 1972.
- ² Neuffer, Julia. *First-Century Cultural Backgrounds in the Greco-Roman Empire*. 1-2.
- ³ Stedman, Ray. "The Trouble with Nature" 8 Jan 1972. Sermon. <<http://www.raystedman.org/old-testament/leviticus/the-trouble-with-nature>>
- ⁴ Secundus, Gaius Plinius (Pliny the Elder). *Natural History*. book 28, chapters 23, 78-80; book 7, chapter 65.
- ⁵ Johnson, Brian & Case, Joel & Helser, Jonathan David. "No Longer Slaves." Bethel Music Publishing. 2014