

WE GO TOGETHER



MOPS

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MOPS INTERNATIONAL 2022-23 THEME

Some men came carrying a paralyzed man on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus. When they could not find a way to do this because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus. When Jesus saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven." LUKE 5:18-20, NIV

This year is for the ones who notice discontentment — either in themselves or others. The ones who sense a churning loneliness, a longing that you can't quite name but know is there. This low-grade dissatisfaction just below the surface is a signal that there is potential for something different, something better.

Søren Kierkegaard, a 19th century theologian and poet, wrote "People settle for a level of despair they can tolerate and call it happiness." This is the year we no longer settle for tolerable despair, and instead dream bigger, risk greater and love better. And the way we're going to do that is through the company we keep. We're here to remind you that having your people by your side is not a perk of living a giant, beautiful, juicy life — it's a prerequisite.

It's time to toss out our notions that we must do any of this alone, that it's "too late" to create an abundantly rich group of girlfriends or that the pace of life leaves no room for meaningful connection. Instead, we'll take in something new, something God is always using to reach out to us: deep relationships.

Having a genuine, supportive, honest group of female friends in your circle is one of the biggest life upgrades. "Ran out of gas? Of course I'll help push your car, but we will definitely laugh about it for the next 40 years." Friends to put down as your kids' emergency contact at school. People who help themselves to whatever is in your pantry without asking. Someone who has witnessed your most embarrassing moment and who would never serve your kid peas because she knows it makes him gag.

If you desperately want this kind of friendship but it feels hard to come by, you're not alone. Community is such a cliché concept, but the truth is, we are all pretty desperate for it. We know it will make our lives better, and yet finding friends as adults can feel intimidating. Despite our best efforts, we all seem to be in the midst of a loneliness epidemic.

- Emotional loneliness that says no one really loves me.
- Relational loneliness that says no one knows the real me.
- Vocational loneliness that says my life has no purpose.
- Spiritual loneliness that makes us feel alone, cut off from God.
- Physical loneliness that says no one carries the load with me.
- Situational loneliness that says I don't feel included.¹

This is why we are declaring it the year of friendship, courage and purpose. Friendships where we aggressively believe in each other, pray for each other and believe the other deserves the world. That is what we do at MOPS. If you're ready for a community like this, then you belong here. Your best days are ahead of you. We are going to be here cheering you on. And what you can't do alone, we can and will do together.

Get ready, because this year we will be each other's hype women, ride or dies and emergency contacts when life demands a call for help. You and me and all of us, we go together.

¹Ideas from Elisa Morgan Instagram and "You Are Not Alone: Six Affirmations from a Loving God"
(Grand Rapids, MI: Our Daily Bread Publishing, 2021).

OUR CHALLENGES FOR THE YEAR

BE UNOFFENDABLE

If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Romans 12:18, NIV

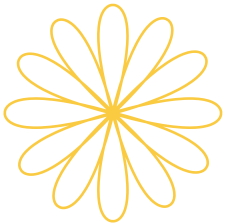


Over the past few years, too many relationships have ended due to division and different viewpoints. This is the year to fix what's broken. Refuse to spend any extra time on petty arguments or trivial disagreements. We won't let differences divide us; we don't have time for this kind of no-win wandering. The people around Jesus were always trying to bait him into black/white, right/wrong, and he always found the third way. He wasn't offended, wasn't defensive. Instead, he was the one turning water into wine, eating with his enemies, providing stimulating conversation and healing people. Because of that, everyone wanted Jesus at their parties.

This year, we will be people who do things, not people who talk about how others are doing things. We'll offer help more readily than we offer criticism. When we feel judged or criticized, we'll assume the best. If we mess up, we'll ask for forgiveness. We'll learn from each other and surround ourselves with people who are different from us. Instead of dwelling on our insecurities that cause us to huddle together, we'll dismantle the cliques that make us feel safe and look for ways to make others feel included. Everyone is in. Everyone is welcome. We'll be teachable. Unifiers instead of dividers.

SHOW UP

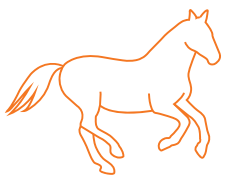
Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing. 1 Thessalonians 5:11, NIV



Showing up is what turns people you know into your people. People who you've seen at their best and worst and who you can invite in even when you, your house or your world is a wreck. Yes, this kind of relationship will require risk, but this is the year to be courageous with friendship. To resist insecurity and embrace awkwardness because connection requires vulnerability. We'll show up for each other in the ways we need, and if we don't know how, we'll ask. We'll get creative in connecting with people and be the kind of women who shout our friend's name in a room full of opportunities. No jealousy or competition here. Instead, we'll be midwives for each other, coming around to help birth each other's dreams and bring one another's unique offerings into the world. Building the life you want takes a village. May it begin with being courageous, bold, and going all in on friendship.

EXPECT GOOD THINGS

So [Jesus] said to the paralyzed man, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God. Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, "We have seen remarkable things today." Luke 5:24-26, NIV



You aren't behind. Sometimes we look around and feel like we haven't done enough — haven't worked hard enough to cultivate friendships, haven't accomplished what we thought we would in life. Motherhood, marriage and life have proved harder than we thought they would be, and shame tells us it's because we've done it wrong, we don't measure up, it's too late. The disappointments of life make us forget how to live expectantly. Don't buy into the oppressive voice that always tries to convince you you're not enough or don't have enough time, money, accomplishments. Imagine that you are 95 years old looking back at your today-years-old self. You'd tell her, "Your life is just beginning! You are sitting on a pile of gems, you just can't see it yet because you are blinded by your shame. Resist the rush. Just because it hasn't happened yet doesn't mean it's not going to. Beautiful things are ahead of you. Your current season is the proving ground for divine participation." May this season be filled with confident faith. Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see (Hebrews 11:10, NIV). May we be people who pray crazy big prayers. May we be alert to the voice of God, developing a deep trust in what our purpose is. No longer will we wake up in the morning, merely looking forward to nap time. Instead, we will wake up expecting to see remarkable things because God is at work.

This year, we are going to come together as friends and show the world the remarkable things that God can do. As we do, may you find sisters who will help you do what feels impossible. May you find boldness in your purpose and comfort in being known. May you find ease in dealing with people who would normally annoy or offend you. May you find yourself at home in any room you enter. And may you say yes to the new things God wants to do in your life.

EXEGESIS

On one of the days while Jesus was teaching, some proud religious law-keepers and teachers of the Law were sitting by Him. They had come from every town in the countries of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem. The power of the Lord was there to heal them. Some men took a man who was not able to move his body to Jesus. He was carried on a bed. They looked for a way to take the man into the house where Jesus was. But they could not find a way to take him in because of so many people. They made a hole in the roof over where Jesus stood. Then they let the bed with the sick man on it down before Jesus. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the man, "Friend, your sins are forgiven."

The teachers of the Law and the proud religious law-keepers thought to themselves, "Who is this Man Who speaks as if He is God? Who can forgive sins but God only?" Jesus knew what they were thinking. He said to them, "Why do you think this way in your hearts? Which is easier to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or, 'Get up and walk'?"

"So that you may know the Son of Man has the right and the power on earth to forgive sins," He said to the man who could not move his body, "I say to you, get up. Take your bed and go to your home." At once the sick man got up in front of them. He took his bed and went to his home thanking God. All those who were there were surprised and gave thanks to God, saying, "We have seen very special things today." Luke 5:17-26, NLV

Word spread that Jesus has arrived back in Capernaum, and a crowd gathers with people wanting to hear from him and maybe witness a miracle or two. Then, as Jesus shares inside a house, a group of friends arrive outside. Friends have carried their paralyzed buddy to Jesus only to be turned away by the volume of the crowd.

The Bible doesn't give details, but there had to be a moment of disappointment. The guy on the stretcher might have said, "Hey, guys, thanks for trying, but it doesn't look like it's going to happen today." However, in that moment of resignation, one of the friends gets creative (there's one in every group) and says, "I have an idea. What about the roof?" Everyone gets a second wind.

The friends climb on the roof and start tearing through the tiling. They are men possessed by determination. It's a huge risk. It's destruction of property. And yet their friend needs to see Jesus.

People in the house start to hear noises, and minutes later dirt and debris begin falling on their heads, followed by a person. These friends courageously go all in and interrupt Jesus in the middle of his teaching. Peering through the hole in the roof, they watch as Jesus approaches the man they have just lowered and says to him, *Friend, your sins are forgiven.*



BE UNOFFENDABLE.

Your sins are forgiven. These powerful words of Jesus were quite provocative but incredibly intentional. Along with the neighbors and friends in the house listening to Jesus were religious leaders called Pharisees. They were devoted to a very rigorous set of rules that were to be followed perfectly. They separated themselves from everything and everyone they thought were unholy, believing that God's love was reserved for those who behaved the same way they did. They listened to Jesus with critical ears, ready to pounce on any words or behavior that offended their understanding of Scripture.

When the Pharisees hear Jesus say to the paralytic man, *Your sins are forgiven*, they consider Jesus to be blasphemous; only God can forgive sins." Yet Jesus is intentionally revealing that he is the Messiah, on equal footing with God, with the power to forgive and heal. The religious leaders used logic and correctly believed that only God could forgive sins. They were wise to be cautious of a new teacher. And yet their error was in refusing to see who Jesus actually was: God the Son, who has the authority to forgive sins.

Another important thing about this story is that when Jesus forgives the man's sin, he isn't pointing out that the paralyzed man is especially sinful or that his paralysis had been caused by sin. Instead, he's addressing the man's greatest need and the common root of all pain and suffering — our separation from God. Jesus heals the man's soul, and then he heals his body.

All of this happens because of the borrowed faith of his friends. May we have faith for ourselves but also know that Jesus can and will meet the needs of others we bring to him. May we resist the urge to decide who is in and who is out, and may we carry people to Jesus, no matter the weight, even when it's heavy or awkward or doesn't fit into our time line. May we carry people to Jesus who sin differently than we do, people who vote or live or parent differently. Most of all, may we live unoffended so we can see the truth of who Jesus is and what he wants to do in the life of every person we meet.

EXPECT GOOD THINGS.



There is a myth that comfort is a collective right, and we should do everything we can to obtain it. So we try to mitigate risk, make wise long-term investments and stay safe. This concern for comfort seeps into our faith too. Yet the men in Luke 5 didn't choose the safe route. It wasn't a "wise decision" to lower a friend through a hole in the roof.



Some of the best things are on the other side of fear. And let's be honest, following Jesus isn't safe. So this year, let's consider what "safe" plans we have constructed and consider where Jesus is saying to get a little more creative in how we bring our friends to him. How can we bravely expect good things for our friends just like the buddies in this story who took a risk because they knew something better was possible for their hurting friend.



Your courageous faith could be a catalyst in someone else's life. Faith moves the hand of God. Jesus is the Son of God who has the authority to forgive sins and bring freedom. He is worth the risk. There are desperate, paralyzed, hurting people who need some friends to get pushy on their behalf. May we have the wisdom to exchange safety and control for the opportunity to love and serve. And may we show ourselves grace when we need to be served.



Lastly, we don't have to do it alone. In this story, we watch a group of friends carry the weight of one soul. Too often we think we have to carry the weight ourselves or put pressure on ourselves to have all the answers. The truth is, it can be a team lift. It's a team effort to carry people to Jesus. We each have a role, but it's not up to us alone.



Friendship matters to God. When God created the world, God said that everything was good. But once he created Adam, something was not good. *It is not good that the man should be alone* (Genesis 2:18, ESV). Although humankind's deepest problem is sin, our first problem was aloneness.

Then throughout the Bible, we read of our fracturing and God restoring our relationship with Him and with each other.

Enoch and Noah *walked with God* — a Hebrew expression of friendship (Genesis 5:24;6:9, ESV).

Abraham was called a *friend of God* (James 2:23, ESV).

Moses spoke with God *face to face, as a man speaks to his friend* (Exodus 33:11, ESV).

Jesus came to lay down his life for our sins because *greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends* (John 15:13, ESV).

After Jesus' death and resurrection, his friends are so compelled that they begin to live differently, and people flocked to it because it was different and refreshing. What was it about this new community that caused people to want to be a part of it? In part it was radical friendship. Mutual flourishing. Courageous faith.

In fact, at the end of this story we read, *At once the sick man got up in front of them. He took his bed and went to his home thanking God. All those who were there were surprised and gave thanks to God, saying, "We have seen very special things today"* (Luke 5:25-26, NIV). The crowd saw the determination of the friends. Jesus honored the friends' faith and healed

the paralyzed man. The people watching took notice. People who watch us this year are going to see remarkable things that resemble the early followers of Jesus.

Most "evangelism" in the early church was simply friendship, conversation and people living in different and compelling ways. Following Jesus encouraged the believers to think less about their differences and more about their commonalities. Their example of human flourishing compelled people. It stood out; it was distinctive. The Book of Acts portrays what it looked like in practice.

It wasn't fancy or showy; they simply *devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved* (Acts 2:42-47, NIV).

Can you imagine how powerful it will be as MOPS groups embrace this model and become countercultural communities of friendship and flourishing? This year, may you go all in on friendship and find sisters who will help you tear the roof off to get to Jesus. May you witness remarkable things as women get healed. And may the Lord add to our number daily those who are being saved. Amen, let it be so.