

LIFE GROUP NOTES:

SERIES: Disciple

PART SIX: Living on a high wire

Tax collectors and other notorious sinners often came to listen to Jesus teach. This made the Pharisees and teachers of religious law complain that he was associating with such sinful people—even eating with them! So Jesus told them this story...

“A man had two sons. 12 The younger son told his father, ‘I want my share of your estate now before you die.’ So his father agreed to divide his wealth between his sons.

13 “A few days later this younger son packed all his belongings and moved to a distant land, and there he wasted all his money in wild living. 14 About the time his money ran out, a great famine swept over the land, and he began to starve. 15 He persuaded a local farmer to hire him, and the man sent him into his fields to feed the pigs. 16 The young man became so hungry that even the pods he was feeding the pigs looked good to him. But no one gave him anything.

17 “When he finally came to his senses, he said to himself, ‘At home even the hired servants have food enough to spare, and here I am dying of hunger! 18 I will go home to my father and say, “Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, 19 and I am no longer worthy of being called your son. Please take me on as a hired servant.”’

20 “So he returned home to his father. And while he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him. 21 His son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son.[b]’

22 “But his father said to the servants, ‘Quick! Bring the finest robe in the house and put it on him. Get a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet. 23 And kill the calf we have been fattening. We must celebrate with a feast, 24 for this son of mine was dead and has now returned to life. He was lost, but now he is found.’ So the party began.

25 “Meanwhile, the older son was in the fields working. When he returned home, he heard music and dancing in the house, 26 and he asked one of the servants what was going on. 27 ‘Your brother is back,’ he was told, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf. We are celebrating because of his safe return.’

28 “The older brother was angry and wouldn’t go in. His father came out and begged him, 29 but he replied, ‘All these years I’ve slaved for you and never once refused to do a single thing you told me to. And in all that time you never gave me even one young goat for a feast with my friends. 30 Yet when this son of yours comes back after squandering your money on prostitutes, you celebrate by killing the fattened calf!’

31 “His father said to him, ‘Look, dear son, you have always stayed by me, and everything I have is yours. 32 We had to celebrate this happy day. For your brother was dead and has come back to life! He was lost, but now he is found!’”



INTRODUCTION

We’ve seen in the gospel of John that in Jesus we have the full embodiment of grace and truth. And we go on in the New Testament to discover that as Jesus followers, we also must somehow get to that full embodiment of both grace and truth. If we’re just *grace*, or if we’re just *truth*, there will always be something missing.

In many scenarios from Jesus’ life, we can see how he applied this. He surprises us with his amazing ability to dispense grace and truth in just the right amounts. So how do we do that as well?

In our last session, we looked at how Jesus modelled the embodiment of grace and truth. In this session, we’ll see that he actually taught this. And what made his teaching so significant on this occasion was his audience. It’s an audience in which we’re sure to find ourselves.

DISCUSSION STARTER

What is the most valuable thing you’ve ever lost? How did you respond to losing it? Did you eventually find it? If so, how did you react to finding it?

MESSAGE SUMMARY

As Luke 15 begins, Jesus finds himself surrounded by two very different groups. One group, ‘tax collectors and sinners,’ felt they were so alienated from God that he would never approve of them. The other group, ‘Pharisees and teachers of the law,’ believed they were so good that God already approved of them. And they were muttering this about Jesus: ‘This man welcomes

sinners and eats with them.’ In response, Jesus told a simple story of a man with a hundred sheep who loses one. Jesus asked his audience, ‘Doesn’t he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it?’ (15:4). Jesus described this man’s joy upon finding his lost sheep. ‘In the same way,’ Jesus added, ‘there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who do not need to repent’ (15:7).

He then told another story of a woman who lost part of her dowry price (a coin). Again Jesus asked, ‘Doesn’t she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it?’ (15:8). Finding it, the woman was filled with joy. “in the same way,” Jesus added, “there is more rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents” (Luke 15:10).

Jesus then launched a third story; it was about a man who had two sons. The older son was a ‘behave’; the younger son was a ‘misbehave.’ Shockingly, the younger son spurned his relationship with his father and asked for his inheritance. He travelled to a distant country and squandered what his father had saved for his inheritance in a lifestyle that would have shocked Jesus hearers. Having lost everything, this Jewish boy found himself working with pigs. Surely he was getting what he deserved. But Jesus went on to tell of this starving son coming home, resigned to lose his place in the family and become his father’s servant. Surely servant hood for life was a worthy fate for this reprobate. But Jesus painted a picture of a stunning reception for this boy. His father lavished compassion, tenderness, and restoration upon the son who had humiliated him. He called for a celebration feast. All of this angered the firstborn son. He was angered in the way some Christians are today- Christians who self-righteously believe they deserve better treatment from God than they are getting, and who despise the grace shown to the ‘undeserving’

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1) In what ways do you sense alienation from God among people in your community?
- 2) In what ways do you see evidence of self-righteousness among religious people in your community?
- 3) Are you convinced there’s nothing you can do to cause God to love you more than he already does? Why or why not?
- 4) Are you convinced there’s nothing others can do to cause God to love them more than he already does? Why or why not?
- 5) In what ways are you tempted to grow slack in your understanding and acceptance of God’s grace OR truth?
- 6) Have you encountered angry Christians or seen any in the media. What is at the heart of their anger?

KEY POINTS

- We’re called to capture and reflect the full embodiment of grace and truth that Jesus manifested in all his encounters with people.
- God seeks out the lost, and he wholeheartedly celebrates their return to him. In the same way, we’re called to have the same heart and attitude towards others.
- God wants us to become increasingly more comfortable with embracing the tension between God’s grace and truth, refusing to let go of either.

Moving Forward

Examine your heart. Do you realise God cannot love you more than he already does? That there is nothing you can do to cause him to love you any more, or any less? Do you realise the same is true about God’s love for others? Let this saturate your thinking, so that sin (yours and others) will always break your heart....while repentance will always stir up your highest joy.

Preparing for session 7

To help you prepare- use these suggested devotions during the week leading up to your next life-group.

Look at Jesus encounter with religious leaders in Matt 15:1-9. What exactly were these men doing wrong? How did Jesus demonstrate his own values and heart in this situation?

Turn to Romans 13:8-10. What do you see as the foundation and prime motive behind all the laws in the Bible. What is the lens through which we should see every law and command? What one thing fulfils the whole law?