



SESSION 1: JESUS IS HERE FOR THE OUTSIDERS

Tax collectors like Levi, mentioned below, betrayed their own people, charging extra tax and skimming off the top to line their own pockets. Religious teachers such as the Pharisees should have been the first to lead such wayward public servants back toward the honest ways of God. Instead, they judged and shunned them, and thought they had no place among decent religious people. Check out how Jesus goes beyond the already radical step of "associating" with the traitor tax collectors to actually making one of them a trusted member of his team.

READ THE PASSAGE AND DISCUSS

- *What do you like about how Jesus interacts with Levi and his friends?*
- *Why do you think Levi follows Jesus and holds a banquet for him?*
- *What do you like about Jesus' response to the religious leaders?*

When Jesus says, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick," he shows that he is here for anyone who admits that they need God. Those who think they are fine on their own, like the Pharisees, will have trouble seeing anything of value in Jesus..

- *What do you like about Jesus' statement?*

The tax collectors in the story don't have to hide who they are with Jesus. What helps you feel like you can be more authentic in front of people? What prevents you from feeling free to be yourself? love to join him in his work for justice, if we say yes to him.

- *Jesus is ready to welcome our real selves. Do you want to hear from Jesus about how he welcomes you? (Listening prayer)*
- *Who else should we invite to join our community exploring Jesus?*

LUKE 5:27—32

²⁷ After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. “Follow me,” Jesus said to him, ²⁸ and Levi got up, left everything and followed him. ²⁹ Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. ³⁰ But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?” ³¹ Jesus answered them, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. ³² I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

NOTES



SESSION 2: JESUS HONORS THE AUTHENTIC WOMAN

At a dinner party full of the religious elite, Jesus elevates a woman who has been labeled a sinner and frees her from judgment and shame. Jesus honors her vulnerability and love for him, while he confronts the self-righteous attitude of the host of this party by telling an intriguing story.

“When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee’s house and reclined at the table. A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee’s house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume. As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.

When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, ‘If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner.’ Jesus answered him, ‘Simon, I have something to tell you.’ ‘Tell me, teacher,’ he said. ‘Two people owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?’ Simon replied, ‘I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven.’ ‘You have judged correctly,’ Jesus said.

Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, ‘Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little.’ Then Jesus said to her, ‘Your sins are forgiven.’ The other guests began to say among themselves, ‘Who is this who even forgives sins?’ Jesus said to the woman, ‘Your faith has saved you; go in peace.’” - Luke 7:36–50 NIV

READ THE PASSAGE AND DISCUSS

Talk about an awkward moment! This woman breaks social norms by interrupting the dinner party with her emotional reaction to Jesus. She fills the room with the smell of her perfume and the sounds of her tears and kisses.

- *Why do you think this woman was overcome with emotion towards Jesus? Why do you think this woman risks approaching Jesus so boldly?*

(Discussion continued on the next page.)

Jesus challenges Simon's view of the woman by telling a story about love that flows from someone whose great debt has been forgiven. In the honor-shame culture of Jesus' day, this story elevates the woman and publicly corrects Simon.

- *Why is Simon, a religious leader, so upset at the woman's actions? What do you think Jesus wants everyone to understand about him, himself, and how forgiveness works?*

Simon was unable to recognize his need for forgiveness, so his love for Jesus and others was selfishly limited.

- *Who does our surrounding culture tell us is undeserving of attention and love? How could we be there for them?*

Jesus asks Simon, "Do you see this woman?" Imagine yourself taking a risk to be your authentic self in front of Jesus, just as the woman did, and he responds by seeing you, being there for you, and challenging others to see you. Who does our surrounding culture tell us is undeserving of attention and love? How could we be there for them?

- *What would that experience feel like? Would you like to experience Jesus accepting you in this way? (Listening Prayer)*

LUKE 7:36–50

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Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. ² A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. ³ He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd. ⁴ So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. ⁵ When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." ⁶ So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. ⁷ All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner." ⁸ But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." ⁹ Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."



SESSION 3: JESUS RESTORES FAKERS

Large crowds were following Jesus and they were eager to see how he would free them from oppression, just as he promised. Here, Jesus meets Zacchaeus, a well-known leader of tax collectors who had become powerful and wealthy by skimming off the top and exploiting his own community .

READ THE PASSAGE AND DISCUSS

Devoted Jews avoided associating with known "sinners," such as the corrupt official in the story below. Zacchaeus was Jewish but religiously careless, and was considered untouchable by his community. Jesus invites himself over Zacchaeus's home!

- *Why do you think Jesus wants to spend time with Zacchaeus?*
- *How does Jesus' offer of a real relationship change Zacchaeus?*

After Zacchaeus plans to right the injustices he had committed, Jesus calls him a "son of Abraham" (the founding father of the Jewish nation). In front of the whole crowd, Jesus identifies Zacchaeus as one of them.

- *There are different labels associated with Zacchaeus-- chief tax collector, short, sinner. What are the labels that are put on you? What is challenging about wearing some of these labels?*
- *Why do you think Jesus heals and restores Zacchaeus's identity and relationship to his people?*

Encountering Jesus radically transforms Zacchaeus' view of himself and his loyalties. He moves away from his allegiance to the Roman Empire and moves toward his neighbors, seeking real repentance and authentic relationships.

- *What factors shape the way you use your time, money, and possessions? What changes might you want to make to live more authentically and justly?*
- *Have you ever experienced Jesus seeking you out to help? Or would you like to? You are invited to follow him just like Zacchaeus. Let's take a look at what it means to follow Jesus.*

Optional scripture study page

LUKE 19:1–10

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