



*The #1 catalyst for spiritual growth is reading and reflecting on the Bible.
Use these questions for personal study or as part of a community group experience.*

Goal

Jesus made an incredibly bold statement one day, “I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.” In this series, we will rethink the purpose of the church so that we can better understand why it should be a priority in our lives.

At the beginning of each gathering take a few minutes to connect with one another and get updated on the week. Then the discussion questions will begin with a few reflection notes about the message and progress into a discussion of the biblical text. Finally, there is a concluding prayer, which can be read aloud in the group after having discussed prayer requests from those attending.

Introduction

03/19/2017

God pursues a relationship with all of humanity, even while we are underserving or even adamantly opposed to him. What this means then is that God invites everyone to the family of God, but that requires a basic response from the individual. Early in the church a precedent was established in Acts 15, deciding not to enforce additional or unnecessary burdens on those wishing to come to God.

Discussion Questions

1. Write down any new insights or understandings taken from Sunday’s message. If comfortable, take a few moments to share these.
2. Why is this message often challenging to accept or implement?
3. In Luke 15, Jesus shares three parables. What is the theme produced in each? How does this transform our understanding of the church as either movement or institution?
4. How does this message sit with you? What are your hesitations, concerns or what things might you celebrate?
5. What does this message mean for you? How does it impact your relationships with God? How does it impact your relationship with those around you?

Background to the Text

The three parables of Luke 15—through common structure and subject matter, and repetition of key terms and phrases—present a cumulative response to the indictment of the Pharisees and legal experts in 15:2: “This fellow [Jesus] welcomes sinners and eats with them.” This and the surrounding chapters carry a larger theme related to Jesus’ defense of his ministry as an outworking of God’s own purpose of reaching and saving the least, last and lost. While also a



call to the religious to join him in reflecting in their practices God's own attitude toward sinners. The challenge of these parables is directly addressed to both the religious and the sinner. Both are faced with a call to repentance and an acceptance of God's grace and forgiveness. The religious Pharisees are challenged to drop their concerns and replicate Jesus' behavior in their own practices since those who gather around Jesus are "the lost" that are described as being found, restored and brought into the expansive grace of God.

"Tax collectors" though generally notorious in the first century as a dishonest, despised element of society, have been represented as persons responsive to the call to repent and follow Jesus (cf. 3:10-14; 5:27-32). Similarly, "sinners" were identified primarily as those that cannot be included among the righteous and are therefore persons of low socio-religious status counted among the excluded, even damned, have now been presented as recipients of good news, counted among those willing to repent and thus are welcomed as the people of God (cf. 5:29-32; 7:35-50).

6. In Luke 15:7, Jesus alludes to the fact that the righteous perceive they have no need for repentance. How does this perception affect their view of those that seem less "righteous" than themselves?
7. Earlier in the book of Luke, Jesus addresses the Pharisees: "And you experts in the law, woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them." What things does the church burden people with—perceived or real—that keeps them from coming to Jesus?
8. What things often keep you from coming to God? Are there things that you perceive in your own life that cause yourself to stay at arm's length from God? Or perceive that God is keeping his distance from you?
9. How can your perception of being accepted by God and God's acceptance of others change? In what ways would this change impact your relationships?

Prayer Requests

Take a few minutes to go around the room and ask for prayers. Write these down as they are being shared. Additionally, challenge people to begin praying about the step of boldness God may be calling them to during this series. Finally, pray together. You can pray the prayer below or your own prayer that incorporates the requests represented in the group.