

Awkward Conversations.

(something needs to change)

SMALL GROUP CURRICULUM / WEEK FOUR

SCRIPTURE: Luke 7:11-17 // The Funeral
BIG IDEA FOR THE SERIES: Jesus desires dramatic change in the status quo.
THIS WEEK'S BIG IDEA: Death will not survive the redemptive work of Christ.

CULTURAL CONTEXT

The Setting: Nain was a small village about 25 miles from Capernaum, and only 6 miles away from Jesus' hometown of Nazareth. In modern-day Israel a village named Nain exists in that location.

The Scene: Jesus encounters a grieving widow. Her only son had just died. According to Jewish burial practices the dead must be buried outside the city walls by nightfall. So, the past hours must have been a whirlwind of sorrow and commotion for this widow. And, not only had she lost her sole son, she had also been thrown into economic peril. From now on she would have to rely on public charity to survive.

Jesus greets her with the words: "Don't cry." In those days philosophers often addressed the grieving with: "Do not grieve, for it will do no good" in an attempt to console them¹. However, Jesus' words weren't infused with a stoic "buck-up" sentiment, but rather were offered from a heart of compassion. And his compassion was teamed with the power to flip her cause for tears.

However, if Jesus was to engage this situation, he was bound to put his ministry in jeopardy, at least for a time. If Jesus touched the bier (a wooden frame used to carry a corpse or a casket) he'd be considered unclean for the day according to Jewish law and custom (see Numbers 19:21-22). He wouldn't be able to interact—teach, heal, eat—with others; his traveling ministry would come to a screeching halt. If he touches the corpse he's considered unclean for the week (see Numbers 5:2-3; 19:11-20).

Jesus, of course, goes all out to rescue the widow from sorrow and her son from death.

BIBLICAL INTENT/IMPLICATIONS

Through this passage we see that Jesus continues to move boldly into the human experience of suffering and reaches out tenaciously to the most marginalized. He risks uncleanness to raise the dead and in later passages we'll see he does the same to heal the "walking dead" – the lepers. He chooses to be perceived as ritually impure in order to reveal God's holiest priorities.

Jesus' act of resurrecting the widow's son has echoes of Elijah's interactions with the widow in Zarephath (see 1 Kings 17:17-24). God uses Elijah to heal a widow's son, a widow who happened to be living in enemy territory. When Jesus mentions this story while teaching in Nazareth the crowds get infuriated (see Luke 4:24-27). Jesus' miraculous work was directed to a real woman and son right in front of him, yet it also displays the continuity of God's concern for the heartbroken through the ages.

Series Outline:

Week One: The Homecoming (4:14-30)
Week Two: The Moving On (4:38-44)
Week Three: The Centurion (7:1-10)
> **Week Four: The Funeral (7:11-17)** <
Week Five: The Parable (8:1-15)
Week Six: The Prayer (11:1-13)
Week Seven: The Obstacle (18:18-30)
Week Eight: The Return (24:13-35)

HOW TO USE THIS CURRICULUM

Encourage members to read the Scripture before group; if they weren't at Warehouse on Sunday they can download the mp3 at www.warehouse242.org. During group read the passage together. Have extra Bibles available to ensure that everyone has a copy. The goal of Scripture—and of this discussion material—is not information expansion but rather increased intimacy with the Father, Son and Spirit. It's God who enables that to happen, so be sure to pray for divine insight as you move through Scripture.

COMMUNITY INTEGRATION

> Who is the modern-day "widow" in our midst? Is it the single mom, the man who has been out of work for the past five months, the student in Camp Greene struggling to read? Perhaps it is also the man who is struggling with a rocky marriage or the woman who recently broke up with her boyfriend, or the guy who has a disappointing relationship with his father. Are there any religious or cultural norms in our community that block us from reaching out to others in our midst?

> Jesus told the woman, "Don't cry." The philosophers said, "Do not grieve, for it will do no good." What do we say to friends, neighbors, colleagues that are hurting? How do we follow the way of Jesus, expressing authentic compassion and reaching out in concrete ways?

> How might this story translate into how we are to care for others in the midst of this economically dodgy time? What might it reveal about how Jesus wants to care for us?

PERSONAL APPLICATION

> How might this story of Jesus inform your understanding of God?

> Who in your life seems beyond help? Who are "the walking dead" you know? Who are you afraid to help because it will interrupt your schedule, or your life's trajectory?

COMMUNITY RESPONSE

This week meditate on (and consider memorizing) James 1:27

"Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world."

¹ The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament by Craig S. Keener.