

Awkward Conversations.

(something needs to change)

SMALL GROUP CURRICULUM / WEEK SEVEN

SCRIPTURE: Luke 18:18-30 // The Obstacle
BIG IDEA FOR THE SERIES: Jesus desires dramatic change in the status quo.
THIS WEEK'S BIG IDEA: Ditch the obstacle that gets in the way of following Christ.

CULTURAL CONTEXT

The Setting: Jesus has been traveling to Jerusalem and teaching en route. So, in this section of Luke we have a string of encounters and parables.

The Encounter with the Rich Ruler: *Eternal Life* // Jesus is approached by a ruler and asked, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?"

To "inherit eternal life" was an idiom of the day associated with "the kingdom of God" (see verse 25) and "being saved" (see verse 26). Jesus underscores these connections, showing that eternal life wasn't simply locked into a destination or a time (i.e., the after-life). For Jesus, it was a way of life, a participation in the God-breathed, God-oriented life.

Jesus' banter with the ruler and then his disciples reveals a paradox about eternal life. Jesus first asked the ruler if he had kept the commands of the Torah. After the ruler replied that he had, Jesus asked him to sell all his possessions and follow him.

Jesus was zeroing in on the ruler's heart. Was his heart God-oriented?

Jesus expected the ruler to keep the Torah, but the ruler needed to see that eternal life couldn't be obtained by the mere keeping of the commandments. A Jewish Midrash (an ancient commentary on part of the Hebrew Scriptures) on David's words in Psalm 41 captures this sense:

David said, "Some trust in their fair and upright deeds, and some in the works of their fathers, but I trust in you. Although I have no good works, yet because I call upon you, you answer me."¹

Eternal life was a gift from God and received because one trusted in the character of God. Yet with this gift came a call to radical obedience. One's obedience was done not out of a desire to gain a reward, but out of love for God. And nothing was to stand in the way of that love. In light of God's graciousness one's heart naturally was to be all-out invested in God's kingdom.

Ancient Discipleship // Loving God with all your heart meant a desire to please Him. And pleasing Him meant knowing and doing his desires articulated in the Torah (Hebrew Scriptures). So, Jewish disciples would basically indenture themselves to a rabbi or sage in order to study the Torah. This disciple would put his master's needs and requirements above his own family or his own claims to personal wealth.

Rarely did rabbis call disciples to divest themselves of all their possessions, but occasionally they'd ask this of the wealthy to determine their true loyalties. While Jesus' disciples may not have sold all their possessions, they did leave their economic security (i.e., fishing and tax-gathering) for the sake of following after him.

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)

BIBLICAL INTENT/IMPLICATIONS

Eternal life cannot be considered apart from the character of God. A generous God—in Jesus, One who abandoned all his riches for the sake of the Kingdom and our hearts—desires for us to live this same quality of life.

The disciples of Jesus, who left their professions to follow him, were the ones who shared all in common with the early Church (see Acts 2: 42-47). And, just as Jesus promised, they inherited eternal life during their day and in the heavenly life to come.

HOW TO USE THIS CURRICULUM WITH YOUR SMALL GROUP

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

- > What do you think modern-day discipleship looks like? Or, what do you think it should look like?
- > What holds us back from following Jesus as a community?
- > What aspects of God's character do we need to experience to free us from our obstacles?
- > Do you believe following Jesus looks differently during economically fragile times versus economically thriving times? Why or why not?

PERSONAL APPLICATION

- > If Jesus was to expose one obstacle that keeps you from following him with abandon what might it be?
- > While your obstacle might feel impossible to overcome, God promises to do what we can't. What might God need to do in you, or show you about himself, to free you to follow?

COMMUNITY RESPONSE

Meditate on Luke 10:27 this week:

He answered: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind"; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself."

¹ There is discussion about the original wording of "good" in verses 18:18-19. To explore this further see the following article: www.jerusalemerspective.com/Default.aspx?tabid=27&ArticleID=1672

² Midrash Psalms 141 (ed. Buber, pp. 530-531) - www.jerusalemerspective.com/Default.aspx?tabid=27&ArticleID=1672