

Awkward Conversations.

(something needs to change)

SMALL GROUP CURRICULUM / WEEK THREE

SCRIPTURE: Luke 7:1-10 // Faith of the Centurion
BIG IDEA FOR THE SERIES: Jesus desires dramatic change in the status quo.
THIS WEEK'S BIG IDEA: Faith in Christ is unusual but it is what He desires.

CULTURAL CONTEXT

The Scene: Jesus has just given His staple sermon (the Sermon on the Mount). He called people to live for a heavenly reward, to love their enemies, to not judge, and to put God's word into practice. Then Jesus ventures into Capernaum (<http://www.bibleplaces.com/capernaum.htm> and www.bibleplaces.com/capernaum.htm) and is greeted by Jewish elders making a request on behalf of a Roman centurion.

The Characters: Surprising alliances and the flipping of cultural power structures mark this story.

Jewish elders: The Jews live under Roman occupation. According to Jewish thought, Rome's military presence represents God's unfulfilled promises to restore His people.

A Roman centurion would naturally be seen as an obstacle to God's purposes. However, this centurion earned the respect of the Jewish elders—so much so that these religious leaders are willing to make a scandalous exception. It's taboo for a practicing Jew to enter the home of a Gentile because of kosher laws (practices regarding food preparation). Yet, the Jewish elders are willing to humble themselves and subvert their laws to ask Jesus, a Jewish Rabbi, to visit this Roman military leader's home.

Roman centurion: A centurion was associated with a "century" (100) of troops; however, in practice it typically consisted of sixty to eighty troops.

This centurion has cultural superiority, military might and money on his side. However, he doesn't let his cultural concepts of power or his personal position get in the way of him worshiping the God of Israel and recognizing Jesus.

Though his income dwarfs that of his troops, he must have sacrificed substantially to donate the funds to build the local synagogue. And, though he has political power, he humbles himself to ask the Jewish elders a favor that would challenge their religious sensibilities. The favor he asks isn't ultimately for himself, but for his servant. A man of military might fights for the health of his house servant.

The servant: The servant plays only a bit part in this drama, with no lines or personal appearance. Yet, every other character in the story is advocating on his behalf.

Roman soldiers were not allowed to marry during their service in the army. The Roman centurion may then have considered this servant as a part of his family, perhaps like a son.

Jesus: It's obvious that Jesus has a reputation as a teacher and healer with great authority. While he was rejected in his hometown, his fame has spread—even to Roman ranks. Jesus is willing to help the Jewish elders by visiting a Gentile's home. He also experiences amazement at the level of faith shown by the Roman centurion.

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

There are multiple implications for this passage. This story spotlights Jesus' passion for belief embodied in action. He has just preached his Sermon on the Mount and now he gets to see it being played out in front of him.

This encounter also shows how a proper understanding of power comes through humility. Each character in this story subverts some form of power to help a weaker party.

Another aspect of the story is that God chooses to heal whom He desires—not always the people we count as worthy, who have our theological leanings or political positions (i.e., the servant of a Roman occupier benefits from the God of Israel). The Renovaré Spiritual Formation Bible reflects on it this way, "Blessings that fall upon those who are different from us are an invitation to humility on our part. They are also windows that permit us to see God not as we wish him to be, but as he is" (page 1897).

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

> What surprising alliances are we as a Warehouse 242 community pursuing, or might we pursue, to put Jesus' words in action? (i.e., For swaths of time, the Church has had a combative rather than collaborative relationship with artists. We long to celebrate creativity in our midst. What surprising alliances might we consider with prisoners, homeless neighbors, city schools, AIDS patients, city planners or illegal aliens?)

> By global comparison, we are people of power and privilege, what cultural beliefs of superiority might blind us from helping others and recognizing Jesus in our midst?

PERSONAL APPLICATION

> Do you think your level of faith ever surprises Jesus? What in your life right now might God be calling you to face with audacious faith?

> How might you use your specific gifts, resources and experiences to advocate for those who have no voice?

COMMUNITY RESPONSE

Read the following article about the Toy Store:

<http://www.qcitymetro.com/faith/articles/beyond-the-boundaries-121730937.cfm>

What surprising alliances were formed? What might your small group do to serve Camp Greene out of your strengths?