



THE HEIGHTS

CHURCH

LIFE GROUP TEACHING PLANS
THE SIMPLEST WAY TO CHANGE THE WORLD
LESSON 8

THE SIMPLEST WAY TO CHANGE THE WORLD

FROM ACQUAINTANCE TO FRIEND

LESSON 8

TEACHING PLAN

PREPARATION

- > Spend the week reading through and studying Luke 5:27-32. Consult the commentary provided and any additional study tools (such as a concordance or Bible dictionary) to enhance your preparation.
- > Determine which discussion points and questions will work best with your group.
- > Pray for the upcoming group meeting, your teaching, your group members, and their receptivity to the study.

HIGHLIGHTS

- > **Series Theme Aim:** Loving our neighbors means choosing to engage rather than unplug, open rather than close, and initiate rather than sit idly.
- > **Biblical Emphasis:** Jesus was intentional about socializing with all people so that all people might come to know Him.
- > **Teaching Aim:** When we love our neighbors, we move from acquaintance to actual friendship.
- > **Memorize:** Luke 5:31-32

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.

DO NOT SKIP THIS

- 1 Describe what it was like for you this week trying to move from stranger to acquaintance with one or more of your neighbors. What progress did you make? What obstacle(s) did you run into?

Notes:

Learning your neighbors' names and moving from stranger to acquaintance is an important first step. At the same time, we should remember that Jesus doesn't call us to simply be acquaintances with our neighbors. He calls us to love them, and loving our neighbors means having an actual relationship with them.

- 2 Describe a time when you took initiative and invested in a person you wanted to become friends with.
- 3 When has another person pursued friendship with you? How did he or she do it?

You can't force or program friendship, but you can take initiative and create environments that are conducive to forming relationships. When a person is important to us, we use the tools we have and do what we can for growing and continuing in friendship with him or her. That's what Jesus did. In Luke, we see Jesus attended a party to intentionally interact with tax collectors and sinners so that they may know Him.

4 What is the best party you have ever been to?

5 Who throws the best parties in your neighborhood/apartment complex?

Notes:

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

> Have a volunteer read Luke 5:27-32.

- Does it seem strange to you that the first thing Levi did after deciding to follow Jesus was to throw a party for Him? Explain.
- Jesus was just starting out in His earthly ministry, and there was much to teach and do. Why might He use His time to attend this party?
- Read John 2:1-3 and Luke 7:34. Then skim through Luke 14–15, and notice the bulk of these two chapters include the context of parties. Based on what you know about Jesus, can you be a follower of Jesus and also be consistently unsociable? Explain.

Levi, a tax collector, was so overjoyed at His newfound friendship with Jesus that the first thing he wanted to do was to honor Jesus with a party and invite all his friends so that they might know and honor Jesus, too. This wasn't a distraction to Jesus' mission; it was exactly in line with Jesus' mission. The same thing can be said for the wedding at Cana (John 2), and

the numerous other social gatherings Jesus attended during His earthly ministry (Luke 7:34). Jesus was sociable because He genuinely loved people, and social gatherings provided opportunities for kingdom work.

Notes:

- How did Luke describe the crowd gathered at this party in verse 29? How did the Pharisees describe them at the end of verse 30? What is significant about the different descriptions?

While Luke described the guests as tax collectors and “others,” the Pharisees called them tax collectors and “sinners.” This distinction sent a very clear message: Jesus should not have been dining with people who did not measure up to the Pharisees’ standard of holiness.

- What was the nature of the Pharisees’ objection to Jesus’ disciples? What truly bothered them?

Pharisees were no strangers to great banquets. However, they were strangers to social outcasts like the tax collectors feasting with Jesus. Granted, many tax collectors behaved in a way that earned them the hatred of the Pharisees, as well as many others. Not only were they Jews working for an enemy government, but they also collaborated with the enemy and had a reputation for building their own personal wealth, usually by overcharging those they called on. For Jesus, the Messiah of the Jewish people, to feast with people viewed as traitors of God was an outrageous act inconsistent with their theological understanding of who the Messiah would be and what He would do.

- Do you view the “tax collectors” of today more like the Pharisees or more like Jesus? How should you view people that others call sinners?

- Has your character ever been questioned because you spent time with sinful people? Explain.

Notes:

- How do you feel about the call to love neighbors who have different priorities and ideologies than you have?

Following Jesus' example in building relationships and loving people requires a willingness to step into potentially uncomfortable situations. Jesus didn't build relationships only with people who took the initiative to step into His world; He built relationships by stepping into theirs. When we consider the bigger picture of Jesus' life and work, His whole reason for coming into the world was that we all might have relationship with the Father. As His followers, we too must be willing to gather with people who do not know Jesus so that they might come to know Him.

NEXT STEPS

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

DO NOT SKIP THESE

- 1 What might keep you from moving from acquaintance to friendship with your neighbors? How does Luke 5:27-32 encourage or challenge you about that?
- 2 What are the activities you most enjoy doing at home? How might those activities become tools for building relationships with your neighbors?
- 3 Take out your block map and identify which of the following words best describes each of your eight closest neighbors—stranger, acquaintance, or friend.

- 4 In the context of your neighborhood, what are some practical steps you can take with an acquaintance to get to know him or her better (i.e. invite to dinner, host a block party, attend a block party, or invite over for game night)?

Notes:

Be purposeful this week. Take at least one intentional step that moves a neighbor from acquaintance to friend. We'll look forward to hearing from each other about that next week!

P R A Y

Allow group members to spend some time silently praying for their neighbors. Thank God for sending Jesus, who modeled intention in relationships for us, and for His Spirit who gives us the courage to follow His example. Ask God to open up opportunities this week for group members to step into the lives of their neighbors so that they might move from stranger to acquaintance to friend.

FOR NEXT WEEK

> **REMIND:** Before you dismiss, remind group members to read Romans 10:14 and Matthew 5:14-16.

Notes:

> **EMAIL:** Midway through the week, send a reminder email with the following information:

- Read Romans 10:14 and Matthew 5:14-16.
- Think through these questions before we get together again: 1) Have you determined one or two steps you can take to build friendship with a neighborhood acquaintance? 2) Have you taken a step to initiate deeper relationship with someone in your neighborhood?

LUKE 5:27-32

5:27-28. One day Jesus encountered Levi. The rebel with a cause against religious power structures met the man who represented foreign power structure at its worse—a man whose profession was to collect money for the Romans. Luke took up the Markan call narrative refrain: Follow Me (Mark 1:17). Levi showed how to join the proper power structure. He left everything he had—his profession, his profits, and his personal identity. He followed Jesus.

Notes:

5:29-30. Following meant more than just wandering the countryside listening to Jesus teach and preach. Following meant using your influence and skills for Jesus. Levi left the tax table to invite people to the supper table. Following Jesus meant telling others what Jesus had done for him. The others were friends Levi had known for a long time—not new acquaintances formed for convenience and prosperity.

5:31-32. In typical Jewish teacher fashion, Jesus cited a proverb to emphasize His message. Wellness did not drive people to the doctor. Illness did. Jesus was the spiritual doctor. He came with a message of repentance. That message seemed misdirected. It did not save Israel and the Middle East, where political confusion reigned. It saved those religious leaders considered unworthy of God's attention. Power began to reveal true positions in life. Who was sick? The tax collector's friends, people willing to work for the Roman government and thus against Israel? Or religious leaders who knew more about God than God did? The title Righteous One given to them by humans was the only title they would ever receive. Jesus picked out the lowest social positions as the positions through which He would work.