



THE HEIGHTS

CHURCH

LIFE GROUP TEACHING PLANS
THE SIMPLEST WAY TO CHANGE THE WORLD
LESSON 11

THE SIMPLEST WAY TO CHANGE THE WORLD

FROM REFUSING TO RECEIVING

LESSON 11

TEACHING PLAN

PREPARATION

- > Spend the week reading through and studying Luke 7:36-39 and Mark 2:1-5. 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:** The paralytic made himself vulnerable in allowing his friends to get him the help he needed. Jesus made Himself vulnerable by allowing a sinful woman to serve Him and lavish Him with her gift of gratitude. Our relationships should be marked by a spirit of humility, vulnerability, and reciprocity.
- > **Teaching Aim:** When we love our neighbors, we move from refusing their help to receiving their help.
- > **Memorize:** Proverbs 11:12

INTRODUCTION

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

DO NOT SKIP THIS

- 1 What new opportunities did you have to build relationships with your neighbors and share the gospel this week?
- 2 How did God speak to you as you walked around your block and prayed about those neighbors with whom peace has been broken and restoration is needed?
- 3 Which do you prefer in relationships—to give or to receive? To pray or to be prayed for? To help or to be helped? Why?
- 4 Is it easy or difficult for you to ask someone for help? Explain.
- 5 Have you ever had a friendship that felt one-sided, where all you did was give, give, give? Why does that kind of friendship always eventually fall apart?

Notes:

Throughout this study, we've talked about ways we can love and serve our neighbors. The caution for us as we challenge each other every week to go and be good neighbors is that we can begin to treat those neighbors as projects. When that happens, any love we might have for our neighbors gets lost in the perspective that we somehow see ourselves as "better than" or "less needy than" others. No one wants to feel like they're a charity case or someone else's project. We don't love our neighbors to complete a class assignment; we love them because it's the right thing to do. Loving our neighbors in the way God calls us to involves both giving to our neighbors and also receiving from them.

UNDERSTANDING

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

Notes:

> Ask a volunteer to read Luke 7:36-39.

- What risk did the woman take in showing up at this dinner party? What did she risk in giving this gift to Jesus?
- When do expressions of gratitude make you uncomfortable? Why does the gratitude of others sometimes have that effect on you?

Truth be told, we might relate most to the Pharisee in this encounter, not because of who the woman was, but because even if she was the most moral person in the room, her act of gratitude would make us entirely uncomfortable. Pharisees were more concerned with appearances and social mores than with genuinely loving others. We show the same tendency when we refuse or reject the help or kindness of our neighbors. We must not concern ourselves with how it looks to receive from others; rather, we should concern ourselves with the gospel opportunities our receiving from others might bring.

- Read John 4:8,31-33. The disciples tried to give Jesus food to eat, and He refused. He likely didn't need a foot-washing at the Pharisee's house any more than He needed to eat lunch when passing through Samaria. Why do you think Jesus didn't also refuse the woman's gift like He had the offer of food from His disciples?
- Read also John 4:7. Why did Jesus ask the Samaritan woman for a drink of water instead of just getting it himself?

- How might your willingness to ask for and receive help from your neighbors open up gospel opportunities you wouldn't otherwise have?

Notes:

Jesus didn't need the sinful woman in Luke 7 to wash His feet any more than He needed the disciples to give Him lunch or the woman at the well to give Him water. Every decision Jesus made was with kingdom purpose in mind. So should ours be. You can certainly google how to put together your new swing set, but what if you took your next door neighbor up on his offer for help, instead? What if, instead of reading Yelp reviews, you walked across the street and asked your neighbor how she likes the cleaning service she started using? These simple acts of humility and vulnerability can open up new doors of conversation like we talked about in week 5 of our study, move us from stranger to friend like we talked about in weeks 7-8, and could potentially allow you to share the gospel like we talked about in week 9.

> Ask a volunteer to read Mark 2:1-5.

- Normally when we read or study this story, we consider the length the friends went to in order to get the paralyzed man to Jesus. What difficulty might the paralyzed man have had in allowing these events to take place?
- How would you have felt had you been the one lying on the mat?

We don't know whether the paralyzed man took the initiative and asked his friends to take him to Jesus or if the friends took the initiative in taking him. Either way, the paralyzed man and his friends loved each other well—they in taking him to Jesus, and him in allowing or inviting them to do so.

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- Why is it important for your neighbors to know that you don't have it all together? How does this add to your understanding of the need to move from casual conversations to personal and spiritual conversations?

Notes:

In the account of Jesus and the sinful woman who washed His feet in Luke 7, we learn that our relationships should be marked by a spirit of humility, vulnerability, and reciprocity. We see this same truth in the account of the paralyzed man whose friends carried him to Jesus. Most of us are fine with being one of the four friends in the story, but we don't want to be the man lying on the mat. Being the one who is receiving help requires vulnerability, humility, and the lost art of receiving.

- What would the friends and all those who were watching have missed out on learning if the paralyzed man had rejected his friends' attempt at getting him help?
- Why might your efforts at sharing the gospel with your neighbors land on deaf ears if you refuse help, lack humility of spirit, and remain closed off instead of opening up with some measure of vulnerability?
- What is the difference between being a person who acknowledges his or her need for help and being a person others might consider as "needy"? In your neighborhood, how can you achieve the former without stepping over into the latter?

NEXT STEPS

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

Notes:

- 1 Are you good at allowing other people to care for you? Why or why not? What are some reasons you might be prone to reject the care of others?
- 2 What current needs do you have that a neighbor might be able to help you with?

DO NOT SKIP THIS

- 3 This week, ask someone in your neighborhood for help or advice in an area where you are lacking. Be ready to share about the experience in next week's final lesson.

PRAY

Thank Jesus for the humility and vulnerability He modeled in His earthly relationships. Confess your tendency to pridefully refuse the help others offer and to refuse to ask for help when you need it. Ask Him to give you the humility and vulnerability you need this week to ask your neighbors for help so that you might build deeper relationships and share deeper conversations.

FOR NEXT WEEK

> **REMIND:** Before you dismiss, remind group members to read Hebrews 13:15 and Luke 15:1-32.

Notes:

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

- Read Hebrews 13:15 and Luke 15:1-32.
- Think through these questions before we get together again: 1) Did you ask a neighbor for help this week? 2) Are you ready to share when you meet to discuss what you have learned and what God has done in this 12-week study?

LUKE 7:36-39

7:36. While Pharisees often criticized Jesus for eating with sinners, one member of this sect invited Jesus to a meal at his home. Jesus did not refuse the man, although He surely knew the nature of Simon's attitude toward Him. Willing to offer His love even to those who rejected Him, Jesus entered and reclined at the table.

Notes:

7:37. An unnamed woman who lived in this town came to the banquet. Luke described her as a sinner. Although the nature of her sin is not identified, the term "sinner" and Simon's reaction to her probably indicate she had a notorious reputation. Thus she was known to people at the dinner. Several social conventions were broken in the woman's encounter with Jesus. The woman brought a gift, not for the host but for his guest. An alabaster flask was often used for perfume. Mark 14:5 indicates the value of the fragrant oil at more than 300 denarii, nearly a year's wages for the average person then. Such would not have been used for ordinary purposes.

7:38-39. Luke did not address why the woman was weeping. The context suggests love and gratitude motivated her tears. Her tears also may have reflected remorse over and repentance for sin. Not daring to address Jesus, the woman wiped His feet, cleaning away the dust and the tears with her hair. Her humility and her love for Jesus led her to perform an unthinkable act of servanthood.

MARK 2:1-12

2:1-5. Jesus performed many miracles in Galilee, the region where He grew to adulthood and where much of His earthly ministry occurred. His healing miracles attracted large crowds, but His central focus was always His preaching. Citizens of Capernaum previously had gathered around Jesus to be healed. Learning that Jesus had returned to town, so many gathered that there was no room left, not even outside the door. Jesus taught long and intensely—until He was interrupted by some determined men.

All Mark recorded about the four men appears in 2:3-5. They were determined to get their sick friend to Jesus because they believed Jesus would heal him. They had more than one obstacle to overcome. The first barrier they faced was their friend's immobility. The friends' unswerving determination to get him to Jesus may imply that his need was desperate, so they the paralytic stretcher-style on a mat to the house where Jesus was teaching. The second challenge the friends faced was the crowd who refused to make way. The four were so confident that Jesus would heal their friend that they climbed the outside stairway and made an opening in the roof above Jesus. The friends obviously let nothing hinder their determination to bring the paralytic to Jesus.

Notes:

Everything the men and their paralytic friend had done is summed up in the words, Jesus saw their faith. By their actions both the paralyzed man and his friends had clearly declared their faith. The sick man expressed faith in Jesus by allowing his friends to carry him to Jesus and to lower him into the room. The friends showed faith by their determination and bold actions. As the Son of God, Jesus knew that faith was in these men's hearts.

Jesus apparently said nothing about the damaged roof or the incredibly rude interruption. His first word was unexpectedly kind. Son (literally "child," a term used to express affection regardless of age) shows that Jesus viewed the paralytic with warmth and respect. Most people probably had ignored or looked down on him because of his apparent long-term disability.

Jesus' next words, "your sins are forgiven," were perhaps not the words the man wanted most to hear. Yet Jesus knew that forgiveness was what he needed most. He knows that having spiritual needs met (forgiveness and a new relationship with God) is far more significant than having temporal needs met.

How did Jesus recognize that the paralytic needed forgiveness of sins? Jesus, of course, knew the man's heart. All people have sinned and stand in need of God's forgiveness.

Each individual's primary need is to experience God's forgiveness and to enter into a personal relationship with Him.

2:6-7. The teachers of the law, or scribes, were Jewish experts trained in interpreting and applying the Old Testament laws. These religious experts had come to hear Jesus for themselves. When Jesus announced that the paralyzed man's sins were forgiven, these teachers immediately concluded they had caught Jesus in a major theological blunder. To blaspheme meant to treat God's name or character lightly or carelessly. According to Old Testament law, those convicted of blasphemy were stoned to death. The Jews believed that one of the ways humans can attack God's character is to claim prerogatives and privileges that belong only to God. Jesus had made such a claim by declaring the man's sins forgiven.

Notes:

Furthermore, according to first-century Jewish tradition, not even the Messiah (the Christ) could forgive sins. The teachers of the law were right in their major premise: only God forgives sins. However, their commitment to their traditional religious interpretations blinded them to the reality that Jesus was the Messiah, that He was God in human flesh. Instead, they could only think, "He's blaspheming!" If the teachers were right about Jesus, He was indeed blaspheming and their logic was correct. They were wrong, however. The teachers of the law failed or refused to recognize that Jesus is the Son of God who truly forgives the sins of those who come to Him in repentance and faith. Sadly, the religious teachers continued in their spiritual blindness. They remained antagonistic to Jesus.

2:8-12. Jesus' question, "Why are you thinking these things?" was especially startling to the religious leaders because it was based on what they actually were thinking in their hearts. Jesus knew in his spirit what they were thinking—and revealed it to them. Spirit here is used in the sense of the inner person. Bible students have answered Jesus' question "Which is easier?" in two distinct ways. On one hand, saying, 'Your sins are forgiven' is easier because forgiveness is not open to direct observation. Saying, 'Get up, take your mat and walk' is clearly more difficult since

everyone can witness the result. On the other hand, in reality both forgiving sins and performing miraculous healings are equally impossible for human beings. Both are the work of God.

Notes:

Jesus referred to Himself as the Son of Man, His favorite designation for Himself during His earthly ministry. Jesus claimed authority . . . to forgive. Authority implies the moral or legal right to use power. God in heaven has the sovereign right to forgive sins. The Messiah on earth as God incarnate had the sovereign right to forgive sins. Jesus then said to the paralytic, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." Here, Jesus was demonstrating His authority to heal on the basis of His word alone, just as His forgiving sins was accomplished on the basis of His word alone.

The man obeyed. He got up, took his mat and walked out. In this case, Jesus performed a miracle as a sign that He was the Son of God. The instant healing of the paralyzed man confirmed Jesus' claim to forgive sins. The crowd was amazed. The people of Capernaum had never seen anything like this because no one like Jesus had ever been among them before. They praised God for His transforming work. God received praise because people recognized His hand at work in Jesus Christ's mighty deeds.