



# Facing the Challenge

# **Meals with Jesus**

An eight-week course for groups and individuals

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Focus Radio 2007

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## Introduction to the Leaders' Guide

Welcome to the 'Meals with Jesus' course. This course is designed for home groups and cell groups, Christian Unions and Adult Sunday Schools. You can also use it in youth groups or in schools, or for personal study.

In Luke's Gospel, the meals Jesus takes with different people play a vital role in the story. They are important because of *who he eats with* - often people who are the social misfits and outcasts and the religiously unacceptable members of society. The meals are also important because they *symbolise the great feast of God's future kingdom*. Our purpose in this course is to explore the meals of Jesus in Luke's Gospel, and to think through how they are practically relevant for us today.

The course takes eight sessions to complete. When you use it with a group, each session is designed to last about 50 minutes. This is so the group will have time to do other things together too (pray, talk, eat and drink...).

This book is the leader's guide. It's designed to help you lead your group through the course. If there's more than one leader, each leader needs a copy of this guide. However, don't give it to members of the group! Do give each member a copy of the question sheet for each session.

Give out these sheets in advance of the session if you can. This will help members of the group to get the most out of the study by giving them a chance to think about the questions and to look up the Bible references before the session. If you do this, you may want to give group members an opportunity at the beginning of the session to mention any particular questions or difficulties they've had. Don't necessarily respond to these straight away, but do make sure that you cover them at some point during the session.

## **Each session includes:**

### **Purpose**

A brief explanation of the purpose of the session – what we hope group members will learn through this session. This is for you as the leader – **don't** share it with group members at the start of the session!

### **Getting started**

Each session begins with some questions to get people thinking and talking about the key issues. Before you start on these it would be helpful to spend a few minutes reviewing how people got on with the 'to do' activity from the previous session.

### **The Bible**

This section includes some Bible passages to look up and some questions to help group members think about them. For more information on the passages referred to we recommend [www.bible.org](http://www.bible.org). Use the '[List articles... by passage](#)' link to help you find the appropriate resources.

## **Real life**

Some questions to help us apply what the Bible says to our lives today. This course is meant to be very practical, so it's important for you as the leader to focus strongly on the application. Be as specific as you can and encourage the members of the group to think through what they will do differently because of this session. It would be good to end the session with a brief time of open prayer, so that group members can pray through what they've learned and apply it to their lives.

## **To do**

Each session includes activities to do at home. Encourage the members of the group to complete these activities. This will help them to get the most out of the session.

## **Going deeper**

Most of the sessions also include some extra material for members of the group who want to go into the subject in more depth, for example book recommendations or web site links.

The questions and Bible readings are here to help you, not to tie you down! Feel free to leave out some of the questions or Bible passages, or to put in your own questions and Bible passages. Only you know what will work best for your group.

We have included suggested answers to some questions, but not all. For 'open-ended' questions, you as the leader may be happy to let the discussion go in whatever direction it is taken. However, for some of the questions, the answers given here include points that we believe are important to draw out during the discussion.

*You may copy or print the question sheets that go with each session to give out to members of the group.*

We would love to hear from you how the course goes with your group, and how it could be improved for future users.

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# 1

## In Levi's home (Luke 5:27-32)

### Purpose

The purpose of this session is to understand why Jesus' meals are important in Luke's Gospel, and how they are relevant to us today.

### Getting started

1. Who have you eaten meals with recently?

Most likely it will have been with our families (although even this is becoming rarer). Perhaps we've also eaten with friends, work colleagues, or neighbours.

If you invite someone to your home for a meal it shows that you're welcoming him or her as a friend and as someone you want to spend time with and get to know better, not just as a colleague or someone you meet for business. (I don't invite the dentist or the postman to eat with me.) If I do invite someone from work, this shows that our relationship has progressed beyond just being colleagues.

In Bible times, eating with someone was even more important than it is now. If you ate with someone you were acknowledging them, affirming them, and recognising them as part of your social circle, perhaps even your clan.

The IVP 'Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels' says: 'Being welcomed at a table for the purpose of eating food with another person had become a ceremony richly symbolic of friendship, intimacy and unity. Thus betrayal or unfaithfulness toward anyone with whom one had shared the table was viewed as particularly reprehensible. On the other hand, when persons were estranged, a meal invitation opened the way to reconciliation.' (p. 796)

## **The Bible**

2. Read Luke 5:27-32. What does Jesus call Levi to do? Why wouldn't the people around expect this?

Jesus calls Levi to be his disciple (v. 27, NIV). A disciple is someone who learns from the *example* and *teaching* of their master – a sort of spiritual 'apprentice.' (Levi is almost certainly the same person as Matthew, the author of the first Gospel.)

To the people around, Jesus calling Levi is unexpected because Levi is a tax collector. For more on Capernaum and tax collectors see the 'Going deeper' section.

3. Why do you think Levi leaves everything and follows Jesus (v. 27-28)?

There are probably all kinds of things going on in his heart – but surely one of them is sheer amazement that a religious teacher like Jesus would call someone like Levi to follow him.

4. How does Levi show his commitment to Jesus? How does Jesus show his commitment to Levi (v. 29)?

Levi shows his commitment by inviting Jesus to a meal. Jesus shows his commitment by accepting Levi's invitation.

5. Why do the pharisees complain? What is wrong with what Jesus is doing (v. 30)?

He is eating with socially undesirable people.

6. How does Jesus explain his actions (v. 31-32)?

He has come to call the unacceptable people – the misfits and rejects and sinners, rather than the 'righteous.'

7. What do you think 'righteous' means (v. 32)? Are there people who don't need to hear Jesus' call?

Is there anyone who is really righteous? It seems likely that Jesus is being ironic. The New Living Bible translates this verse 'I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners and need to repent.'

In Luke's Gospel meals are important. The Gospels often describe the coming of God's kingdom in final glory as being a feast (See for example Luke 14:15-24). For Luke, Jesus' meals point forward symbolically to this great feast. So it's especially important that the people Jesus eats with aren't the ones you expect to be at God's great celebration. Rather, they are the outcasts and misfits, the tax collectors and sinners. Jesus upsets people's expectations. He is deeply subversive of the social order, and causes trouble!

## **Real life**

8. How does the place of Jesus' meals in Luke's Gospel change the way we think about meals today?

9. What kinds of people are socially unacceptable for us today, as Levi was to the people of Capernaum? What can we learn from Jesus' approach?

## **To do**

When the first Christians met together as church, they met informally to pray, to listen to God speaking to them through teaching and prophecy, and to share a meal. We have turned our gatherings into something more formal and stylised. Take some time to think through whether we have lost something important by doing this. What place should meals together have today in our church life? In our outreach to others?

## **Going deeper**

Capernaum was a large fishing town, on the north-west coast of the Sea of Galilee, on the main road to Damascus, and on the border between the kingdoms of Herod Antipas and his brother Philip. Levi may have collected taxes from the local fishermen and other traders, or he may have collected taxes from people transporting goods along the road.

For more about Capernaum, visit

<http://198.62.75.1/www1/ofm/sites/TScpmain.html>

In the Roman Empire, there were different kinds of taxes:

- A poll tax
- A land tax – a tax on your harvest

- Indirect taxes on things you bought and sold – like VAT today.

It's been estimated that up to a third of someone's income could go in taxes.

Taxes were collected at major cities like Caesarea and Jerusalem and Jericho.

The system for collecting taxes was called tax farming. The city rulers leased the right to collect taxes to an individual or group. They had to bid for this right, and pay for it in advance.

This position usually went to rich Romans, who hired other people to do the actual collecting for them. So there were different ranks of tax collector. In session 6 we will meet Zacchaeus, who is described as the 'chief tax collector' at Jericho.

## **In Levi's home (Luke 5:27-32)**

1. Who have you eaten meals with recently?
2. Read Luke 5:27-32. What does Jesus call Levi to do? Why wouldn't the people around expect this?
3. Why do you think Levi leaves everything and follows Jesus (v. 27-28)?
4. How does Levi show his commitment to Jesus? How does Jesus show his commitment to Levi (v. 29)?
5. Why do the pharisees complain? What is wrong with what Jesus is doing (v. 30)?
6. How does Jesus explain his actions (v. 31-32)?
7. What do you think 'righteous' means (v. 32)? Are there people who don't need to hear Jesus' call?
8. How does the place of Jesus' meals in Luke's Gospel change the way we think about meals today?
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# 2

## **In Simon's home (Luke 7:36-50)**

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this session is to understand that following Jesus means accepting and welcoming people contaminated by sin and by lifestyles we feel uncomfortable with.

### **Getting started**

1. In what kinds of situations do you feel that the world around you contaminates you?

Religious Jews – like the pharisees – believed that they could be contaminated by physical contact with a person or thing that was not pure. (See Leviticus 11:24-28 and Haggai 2:10-13 for the Old Testament background to this.)

If you wanted to please God, you had to keep yourself from being polluted. You did this by separating yourself from people who were morally and ritually impure. If you did accidentally get contaminated you worked hard to purify yourself.

## The Bible

2. Read Luke 7:36-50. What is it that bothers Simon (v. 39)?

Jesus is letting himself be contaminated by the touch of the sinful woman. Because of this, Jesus cannot be a prophet. If he really were a prophet, God would have shown him what the sinful woman was like.

For more background information about meals in New Testament times see the 'Going deeper' section.

3. What is wrong with the way Simon is thinking?

He thinks that *if* Jesus knew about the woman, he would not let her touch him. Jesus *does* know what the woman is like, but is content to let her touch him anyway. He is not contaminated by her touch.

4. What is the point of Jesus' story in verses 41-42?

The more aware we are of how much we have been forgiven, the more we shall love God.

5. Do some people need more forgiveness than others?

It is not that some of us need more forgiveness than others. But some of us are more aware that we need forgiveness than others. The woman was an obvious sinner and knew that she needed to be forgiven. Simon lived a 'righteous' life and doesn't seem to have had much sense that he needed to be forgiven.

6. Who do you identify with in this story? Why? How do you think this person feels as the events unfold?

## Real life

7. What are the implications for us of how Jesus responds to the sinful woman?

Jesus accepts and welcomes the people the rest of the world thinks will contaminate them. He brings good news and forgiveness to them.

8. What are the implications for us of how Jesus responds to Simon?

### **To do**

Think it through: who are the people I feel contaminated by? How does my attitude towards them need to change in the light of this story?

### **Going deeper**

For more on purity and contamination, go to <http://www.bibles.com/brcpages/PurityCleanandUnclean>

The meals of wealthy people like Simon in New Testament times were different from ours today:

Imagine a big U-shaped table – a low table, surrounded by couches. You don't sit at the table; you lie at it on your left side, with your feet trailing out behind you. The host is at the top of the table, with his most honoured guest on his right hand side and his next most honoured guest on his left.

There will be bread and wine on the table and in the middle a big bowl of casserole. You tear off a bit of bread, dip it in the bowl and eat.

These meals aren't private affairs. The doors are open and the poor people of the town come in and stand around behind the guests, hoping that they may get some of the spare food. (This is a poor economy. Many people are hungry most of the time.)

## **In Simon's home (Luke 7:36-50)**

1. In what kinds of situations do you feel that the world around you contaminates you?
2. Read Luke 7:36-50. What is it that bothers Simon (v. 39)?
3. What is wrong with the way Simon is thinking?
4. What is the point of Jesus' story in verses 41-42?
5. Do some people need more forgiveness than others?
6. Who do you identify with in this story? Why? How do you think this person feels as the events unfold?
7. What are the implications for us of how Jesus responds to the sinful woman?
8. What are the implications for us of how Jesus responds to Simon?

### **To do**

Think it through: who are the people I feel contaminated by? How does my attitude towards them need to change in the light of this story?

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These meals aren't private affairs. The doors are open and the poor people of the town come in, and stand around behind the guests, hoping that they may get some of the spare food. (This is a poor economy. Many people are hungry most of the time.)

# 3

## In Martha and Mary's home (Luke 10:38-42)

### Purpose

The purpose of this session is to encourage us to think through our priorities, and to help us focus our attention on listening to Jesus when we eat together.

### Getting started

1. What do *you* think are the most important things in your life?
2. How would *other people* see your priorities if they looked at how you spend your time and your money?

### The Bible

3. Read Luke 10:38-42. Where do you see yourself in this story? Are you more like Martha or Mary?
4. Put yourself in Martha's sandals. Was she justified in feeling how she did?

5. What did Jesus mean when he said ‘only one thing is needed’ (v. 42)? (The New Living Bible translates this: ‘There is really only one thing worth being concerned about.’)

Jesus may have meant ‘don’t fuss about making a special meal. Keep it simple, so that you have time to listen to me.’ Or he may have meant ‘there’s no need to worry about getting a meal. Just concentrate on listening to me.’

In the culture of the day meals were important, and showing hospitality to guests was important. So it isn’t likely that Jesus meant ‘don’t bother with a meal.’ It’s more likely that he meant ‘keep it simple so there’s time to listen.’

6. How do you think Martha felt after Jesus had spoken?

### **Real life**

7. How do you listen to Jesus today?

8. What are the things that distract you from listening to Jesus? Does this sometimes include things to do with church?

9. How could you make a place for listening to Jesus together when you meet with other Christians over a meal?

### **To do**

One of the aims of this course is to encourage us to show hospitality and invite people to meals as a way to give them the opportunity to meet Jesus.

One thing that may put us off sharing meals with people is the feeling that we have to do something complicated and ‘special.’ The story of Jesus at Mary and Martha’s

home encourages us to 'keep it simple,' so that there is time and space to slow down and listen to Jesus. (That concern to do something special may be nothing more than pride!)

Why not take the opportunity to arrange a simple meal with friends that will include the opportunity to listen to Jesus in some way?

### **Going deeper**

Read 'The Busy Christian's Guide to Busyness,' by Tim Chester (IVP, 2006)

## **In Mary and Martha's home (Luke 10:38-42)**

1. What do *you* think are the most important things in your life?
2. How would *other people* see your priorities if they looked at how you spend your time and your money?
3. Read Luke 10:38-42. Where do you see yourself in this story? Are you more like Martha or Mary?
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### **Going deeper**

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# 4

## In a pharisee's home (Luke 11:33-53)

### Purpose

The purpose of this session is to think about what motivates us in our relationships: are we motivated more by what other people think or by what will please God – generosity, justice, humility and integrity?

### Getting started

1. Make a list of the things you do (or don't do) because they will affect how other people think of you.

### The Bible

2. Read Luke 11:37-53. What surprised the pharisee (v. 37-38)? Why was washing important? (Think back to what we said about contamination in session 2. See also Mark 7:1-5)

3. How does Jesus respond (v. 39-40)?

He counter-attacks! It must have been a very uncomfortable meal-time. Even today we would think what he did was quite offensive. In New Testament times

to be rude to your host in this way was completely unacceptable.

4. What is the root problem that Jesus condemns the pharisees for in verses 41-52?

They were concerned with the outward performance of religion rather than the inward reality.

5. What are Jesus' priorities (v. 41- 44)?

- Being generous to the poor (v. 41)
- Justice and loving God (v. 42)
- Being humble (v. 43)
- Integrity (v. 44)

6. What does he condemn the teachers of the law for (v. 46-52)?

- Loading people down with burdens too heavy to carry (v. 46)
- Rejecting the prophets' message, just as their ancestors had done. (v. 47-51)
- Making it difficult for people to enter God's kingdom (v. 52)

In all this, the key point is that they were concerned with keeping a long list of *outward* rules and regulations, rather than with their *inner* attitudes towards God and other people.

## **Real life**

7. List as many ways as you can think of that we today can be concerned about getting our outward religious performance right.

8. If Jesus was here today, what do you think he would say to us about this?

### **To do**

Think of one specific thing you can do this week that will line up with Jesus' priorities of generosity, justice, humility and integrity.

### **Going deeper**

Read 'Criticism for Authorities,' ch. 27 of 'Mealtime Habits of the Messiah,' by Conrad Gempf (Zondervan 2005).

Today we all know that in the Gospels the pharisees are the wicked, self-righteous and arrogant people. It's rude even to call someone a Pharisee.

But it wasn't really like that in Jesus' time. The pharisees were the sound religious people. They worshipped God regularly. They said their prayers. They were serious about living to please God.

The Pharisees were examples of what good god-fearing people were like. They were teachers of others. People respected them and listened to them and looked up to them.

For more about the pharisees, go to <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11789b.htm> or <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pharisees>

## **In a pharisee's home (Luke 11:33-53)**

1. Make a list of the things you do (or don't do) because they will affect how other people think of you.
2. Read Luke 11:37-53. What surprised the pharisee (v. 37-38)? Why was washing important? (Think back to what we said about contamination in session 2. See also Mark 7:1-5)
3. How does Jesus respond (v. 39-40)?
4. What is the root problem that Jesus condemns the pharisees for in verses 41-52?
5. What are Jesus' priorities (v. 41- 44)?
6. What does he condemn the teachers of the law for (v. 46-52)?
7. List as many ways as you can think of that we today can be concerned about getting our outward religious performance right.
8. If Jesus was here today, what do you think he would say to us about this?

### **To do**

Think of one specific thing you can do this week that will line up with Jesus' priorities of generosity, justice, humility and integrity.

### **Going deeper**

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# 5

## In another pharisee's home (Luke 14:1-24)

### Purpose

The purpose of this session is to understand that caring for damaged people matters more to God than keeping religious rules.

### Getting started

1. How can you tell if someone is a follower of Christ?

Should it be because of certain things they do (or don't do) such as going to church on a Sunday, not drinking or smoking, not looking at pornography on the Internet, or should it be because they care for people in need?

### The Bible

2. Read Luke 14:1-6. What is the point of Jesus' question in v. 3?

The Ten Commandments taught the principle that the Sabbath was to be a day for rest and renewal, and to make time for God (see Exodus 20:8-11). However, by the time of Jesus, the pharisees had turned this into a rigid set of regulations to make sure no one did any work

on the Sabbath. For example, you could not travel more than a certain distance, or carry a load, or prepare food. By healing the man, Jesus was 'working' on the Sabbath, and so breaking these regulations.

According to the Gospels, Jesus frequently healed on the Sabbath. He didn't always have to do this so it looks as if he was being deliberately provocative and confrontational. He wanted people to think about who he was (See Luke 6:1-5). Perhaps he also wanted people to think about what really matters (Luke 6:6-11). This seems to be the point of this story in Luke 14.

3. How does Jesus explain his decision to heal the man (v. 5)?

His basic point is that caring for this man's well being mattered more to him than keeping the religious rules of the pharisees.

4. Read Luke 14:7-11. What is Jesus getting at in verses 7-11? Why? Is he just interested in social conventions, or is there something deeper going on here?

The main point he is making is: don't be self-important. Don't 'blow your own trumpet.' In verse 11, when he says 'everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted,' he is talking about God's future judgment. If you think you are 'righteous,' watch out – God may bring you down on Judgment Day. If you are humble and recognise that you need to be forgiven, God will lift you up.

5. Read verses 12-14. What is he getting at in these verses?

We should welcome and give hospitality to those who cannot repay us.

6. It isn't obvious why these sayings (in v. 7-11 and 12-14) are included here. Are they just random things Jesus said, or is there a connection with what goes before and what comes after?

They are linked together by the idea of looking forward to the reward that God gives, rather than looking for short term success, fame, influence or importance. So when Jesus says don't look for the place of honour, it is not because you will end up looking silly here and now. It's because on the Day of Judgment God will exalt those who are humble, not those who are proud. When he says feed and care for those who cannot repay you, it is because God will reward you on the Day of Judgment. It is all about looking for the long term good rather than the short term good.

7. Read Luke 14:15-24. How do you picture life after you die? What picture does Jesus use?

Jesus uses the picture of a feast – a great banquet. One reason why meals are so important in Luke's Gospel is that they're pictures of what the new creation will be like. It will be a celebration meal – and the people who are there will be the unexpected and the outcasts, not the obviously religious people.

8. Who do the invited guests represent (v. 16-20)?

They are a picture of the Jews – the chosen people, the religious insiders.

9. Who do the people from the streets represent (v. 21-23)?

They are a picture of non-Jews, those who have (apparently) not been chosen, the outsiders and outcasts.

10. What point is Jesus making through this story?

The people who will be saved are not those we expect - the religious insiders, but the outsiders and outcasts, who no-one expects to be saved.

## **Real life**

11. What kind of people should we invite into our homes (v. 13)? Why?

We should invite those who can't repay us. If we do this, we shall receive a reward from God on the Day of Judgment.

12. Who does this apply to today?

13. How may we let our rules and regulations stop us from meeting people's needs?

## **To do**

How could you help someone in need this week, maybe even at the cost of breaking some well-established religious rules?

## **Going deeper**

Read 'The Messianic Dinner Party,' ch. 6 of 'Mealtime Habits of the Messiah,' by Conrad Gempf. (Zondervan, 2005)

We assume that all Jews in Jesus' day believed the same things. But there was a mixture of different beliefs and groups (rather like Christianity today):

- **The Pharisees.** These were religiously observant Jews who believed that the way for the nation to regain God's approval was strict and detailed observance of the Jewish law.

- **The Sadducees.** This was a small but influential political/religious movement that controlled the Temple system during the time of Jesus. Sadducees did not believe in life after death, or in angels (See Acts 23:6-8). They compromised with the Roman authorities for the sake of peace and political power.
- **The Zealots.** These were essentially a terrorist movement, committed to using violence to free the Jews from the power of imperial Rome.
- **The Essenes.** These were the people behind the Dead Sea Scrolls. They were more strict than other forms of Judaism, believed that the Temple worship system was corrupt, and followed their own 'Teacher of Righteousness.'
- **The first Christians.** The movement of people who followed Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah. To start with, this was just one more strand of Judaism.

Of these groups, only the Pharisees and the Christians survived when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in 70 AD. In later years, the pharisee movement became the basis of what is called rabbinic Judaism.

## **In another pharisee's home (Luke 14:1-24)**

1. How can you tell if someone is a follower of Christ?
2. Read Luke 14:1-6. What is the point of Jesus' question in v. 3?
3. How does Jesus explain his decision to heal the man (v. 5)?
4. Read Luke 14:7-11. What is Jesus getting at in verses 7-11? Why? Is he just interested in social conventions, or is there something deeper going on here?
5. Read verses 12-14. What is he getting at in these verses?
6. It isn't obvious why these sayings (about not taking the place of honour (v. 7-11) and inviting those who cannot repay you (12-14)) are included here. Are they just random things Jesus said, or is there a connection with what goes before and what comes after?
7. Read Luke 14:15-24. How do you picture life after you die? What picture does Jesus use?
8. Who do the invited guests represent (v. 16-20)?
9. Who do the people from the streets represent (v. 21-23)?
10. What point is Jesus making through this story?
11. What kind of people should we invite into our homes (v. 13)? Why?
12. Who does this apply to today?
13. How do we let our rules and regulations stop us from meeting people's needs?

## **To do**

How could you help someone in need this week, maybe even at the cost of breaking some well-established religious rules?

## **Going deeper**

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# 6

## In Zacchaeus' home (Luke 19:1-10)

### Purpose

The purpose of this session is to understand that people's lives can be changed as we show them the love and compassion of Jesus rather than condemning them.

### Getting started

1. Among the people you know, who is the one least likely to become a Christian? Why?

### The Bible

2. Read Luke 19:1-10. How do the people react to Jesus going to Zacchaeus' home (v. 7)? Why do they react like this?

Zacchaeus was a tax collector. We have already seen some of the background to tax collectors in session 1 (Levi's house). He was a chief tax collector and was wealthy - with all this implies in terms of envy and jealousy (v. 2). (For more on why the Jews hated tax collectors, look at the 'Going deeper' section.)

3. How does Zacchaeus' change of heart show itself (v. 8)?

Zacchaeus promises to give back large amounts of his wealth. Under the Old Testament Jewish law the principle was that if you had cheated someone or had stolen from them you had to pay them back, plus a twenty percent mark-up (see Numbers 5:5-7).

Zacchaeus promises to do much more than the law required. He would pay back four hundred percent, not just a hundred and twenty percent. And he would give away half of his possessions.

The change in his heart shows itself in what he did. His money had been the most important thing in his life but now something else (or rather someone else) has become more important.

4. What is Jesus' verdict on what has happened (verse v. 9)?

He says that salvation has come to Zacchaeus' house. His broken relationship with God has been restored. (NOTE: Zacchaeus does not *earn* his salvation by giving away his money. Rather, giving away his money is the *evidence* that he has been saved.)

5. How does Jesus describe Zacchaeus in verse 9?

He calls Zacchaeus a son of Abraham. He is someone who matters to God, and he is one of the family who is in trouble.

6. How does Jesus describe Zacchaeus in verse 10?

Jesus is clear that Zacchaeus was lost and needed to be saved. Jesus does not say that everyone is fine as they are, all they need is some affirmation and

encouragement. They are lost, and he has come to save them.

7. What changed Zacchaeus' life?

It was not his money, nor was it the contempt or condemnation of the crowd. What changed him was when Jesus came and had a meal with him.

### **Real life**

8. Think back to the beginning of this session. Who is the 'Zacchaeus' in your world? The person who is a social outcast or misfit? (This need not be someone who is poor, disabled, or of a different ethnic group. Zacchaeus was Jewish and wealthy, but he was still an outcast.)

9. What work was Jesus training his followers to join him in (verse 10)?

He says that he came to seek and save what was lost. If we are his followers, he wants us to be involved in this purpose too.

### **To do**

Why not arrange a meal this week and invite the 'Zacchaeus' of your world to come?

### **Going deeper**

Jericho was a city, and it was on two major trade routes. It was an important customs centre, so there was plenty of money to be made from collecting taxes.

Tax collectors didn't just collect the taxes that Rome had set. They also added their own mark-up – and it was completely up to them how much they charged. They could charge whatever they could get away with.

So there were multiple collectors, each of whom added their own mark-up. It wasn't so much that there were corrupt tax collectors, as that the whole system was corrupt.

The Jews hated tax collectors. They saw them as robbers. The rabbis said that when a tax collector went into a house he made it unclean. (Think back to what we said about contamination in session 2). Time and again in the Gospels we hear the phrase 'tax collectors and sinners.'

So they were unpopular because they were corrupt. They were also unpopular because they were collecting taxes for the Romans – the occupying enemy power. They were traitors as well as being corrupt.

Zacchaeus had profited unjustly at the expense of other people. For the Jews, if you ate with someone who had 'ill-gotten gains,' that made you a partner in their crimes. You were accepting what they had done. You were sharing in their illicit profits, so you shared in their guilt as well. If you ate with a crook you became a crook. Apart from actually committing the crimes with them, there was nothing worse you could do. This is why it was so offensive when Jesus went to eat with Zacchaeus.

## **In Zacchaeus' home (Luke 19:1-10)**

1. Among the people you know, who is the one least likely to become a Christian? Why?
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# 7

## In a home in Jerusalem (Luke 22:7-38)

### Purpose

The purpose of this session is to help us think through why Jesus gave us the communion, and what part it is meant to play in our church life together.

### Getting started

1. If you never celebrated communion what difference would it make (a) to your church and (b) to you personally?

### The Bible

2. Read Luke 22:7-34. Imagine you had been at this meal. How would you have felt at different times as the evening progressed?

3. This was a Passover meal (v. 13, 15). In verses 14-20, Jesus re-interprets the Passover for his followers. What is the main point of the meal (v. 19-20)?

The purpose of the Passover was to remind the Jews of how God delivered them from slavery in Egypt. In the New Testament, the communion became a reminder of

how God has delivered his people from slavery to sin and death, through the sacrificial death of Jesus for us.

4. Why do you think Jesus told his followers to remind themselves of his death so regularly?

We are always tempted to think that there is some way we can earn the right to come to God. The communion is a regular reminder that God only accepts us because Jesus died for us.

Sharing the communion meal also reminds us that we are a united body of people who are all accepted by God on the same basis.

5. Why do you think Jesus tells the disciples that one of them is about to betray him (v. 21-23)?

He is preparing them for the shock of the betrayal, and for what is about to happen to him.

6. What attitude does Jesus expect from leaders in his movement (v. 24-30)?

We are to serve others humbly, rather than self-importantly expecting them to serve us.

7. Why does Jesus say what he does to Peter in verses 31-34?

Jesus is preparing Peter for his failure, and for what will come after. Peter needs to know that his failure is not final.

## **Real Life**

8. The Passover meal was a real meal. In the New Testament churches the communion was also a real meal (See 1 Corinthians 11:17-22). In our churches today we have usually turned the communion into a

symbolic meal within a service. How could we turn remembering Jesus' sacrifice back into a real meal? What difference would this make to how we think about his death for us? What difference would it make to how we experience our life together as a community of his people?

## **To do**

Arrange a meal for your church (a real meal!) where you come together to remind yourselves of Jesus' death for us. Does this count as communion? If so, why? If not, why not? What else would be needed for it to count as communion?

## **Going deeper**

What does a Jewish Passover (*Pesach Seder*) look like today? The core of the celebration is a family meal (often including guests). Important ritual celebrations and reminders surround this.

Several of the key elements are mentioned in Luke's account of the Last Supper, and we can see Jesus taking them up and giving them fresh significance as pointing to his own sacrifice and deliverance of his people:

- Unleavened bread which is broken and eaten at specific points during the celebration
- Four cups of wine drunk at specific points
- The retelling of the story of God's deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt and the first Passover. This retelling is highly stylised. For example, at one point, the youngest person present has to ask 'why is this night different from all other nights?'

- A celebration meal
- Blessings and prayers at specific points during the meal

We cannot be sure how much of the Passover celebration today is the same as what happened in Jesus' time. We do know that there were some changes following the destruction of the Temple in AD 70.

For more on Passover today, visit  
<http://www.jewfaq.org/seder.htm>

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# 8

## In a home in Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35)

### Purpose

The purpose of this session is to understand that the most important place we recognise Jesus and come to know him is through the Bible, and to encourage us to start reading the Bible regularly if we are not already doing so.

### Getting started

1. When you think about your life what picture comes to mind? Why?

People may have many different pictures – a storm, a boat on the sea, a painting or tapestry, a poem, a building...

2. One popular picture people use today is that life is a journey. If you saw your life as a journey, what would be the most important places on that journey?

## The Bible

3. Read Luke 24:13-35. The two disciples were literally on a journey, from Jerusalem to Emmaus. This was a two or three hour walk. Imagine you were one of these disciples. How would you have been feeling?

4. Why does Jesus ask them what they were talking about? What are the highlights of their reply (v. 15-24)?

- Jesus of Nazareth (v. 19)
- a powerful prophet (v. 19)
- crucified (v. 20)
- rumours that he had been raised (v. 21-24)

5. How did Jesus understand the Old Testament? What do you think were the key points he would have picked out from the Old Testament (v. 25-27)?

Jesus understood the Old Testament as pointing towards himself. (See also John 5:39)

He might have spoken about the priests, and the meaning of the sacrifices. Or he could have spoken about the true king of Israel. Or he may have spoken about prophetic pictures of himself, such as the Suffering Servant in Isaiah.

6. What makes the disciples recognise Jesus (v. 30-31, and v. 35)?

They recognise Jesus as he breaks the bread for them. Although he is their guest, by breaking the bread he is taking the role of the host.

7. Why do you think Luke includes this story?

It is an important testimony to Jesus' resurrection. But it also underlines how the Old Testament Scriptures point to him (v. 32).

8. Why are the Scriptures so important (see also v. 44-45)?

Because they point us towards Jesus. The Old Testament points forward to him, while the New Testament focuses on the historical facts about him. This acts as a check to our imagination. Without the Scriptures, we could drift into believing whatever we wanted.

## **Real life**

9. Life is a journey and Jesus is with us on the journey if we're his people. But sometimes, like the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, we don't recognise him. Today we don't expect Jesus to be physically present with us, but we recognise him by his Spirit and through his Word. What does this mean for the place the Bible should have in our lives? When do you read the Bible?

## **To do**

Start reading the Bible regularly, if you are not already doing so. Of course many people have found that reading the Bible can be hard work. Here are some suggestions to make it easier:

- Ask God to speak to you through his Word as you read it
- Make it a habit – have a definite place and a definite time. You know the old saying, 'we don't plan to fail. We just fail to plan.'

- Read in a modern translation that is clear and easy to stand. There is no virtue in struggling with a difficult translation.
- Follow a plan. There are many different reading schemes that will help you to read through the whole Bible in a year, or two years, or five years. Find a plan that works for you and persevere with it.
- Read big chunks. Especially when you are reading the narratives (the histories in the Old Testament, the Gospels and Acts in the New.) We wouldn't read only a few sentences at a time from a favourite novel, so why do we read the Bible that way? If you get stuck in a difficult part, speed up rather than slowing down.
- Read with someone else and talk it over with him or her.

Look back over this course about the meals of Jesus in Luke's Gospel. What is the most important practical thing you have learned from these studies?

### **Going deeper**

Read 'Dig Deeper: tools to unearth the Bible's treasure,' by Nigel Beynon and Andrew Sach (IVP, 2005)

Read 'God's Big Picture: Tracing the story-line of the Bible,' by Vaughn Roberts (IVP, 2002)

For more on how to read the Old Testament, visit <http://www.facingthechallenge.org/ot.php>

## **In a home in Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35)**

1. When you think about your life, what picture comes to mind? Why?
2. One popular picture people use today is that life is a journey. If you saw your life as a journey, what would be the most important places on that journey?
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