

*Where we start . . .*

Can you remember what it was like when you first met your future in-laws? What did you think of them? How did meeting them impact you?

*What we read . . .*

It's sometimes said that when you marry someone you not only marry your spouse but you marry his or her family as well. Although that may be a bit overstated, your connection with the one does result in your being related to a group! This is likely the kind of dynamic that Simon and Andrew, James and John felt as they were drawn into life with Jesus . . . and then He drew others into their circle. Read about this moment in Mark 2:13-17.

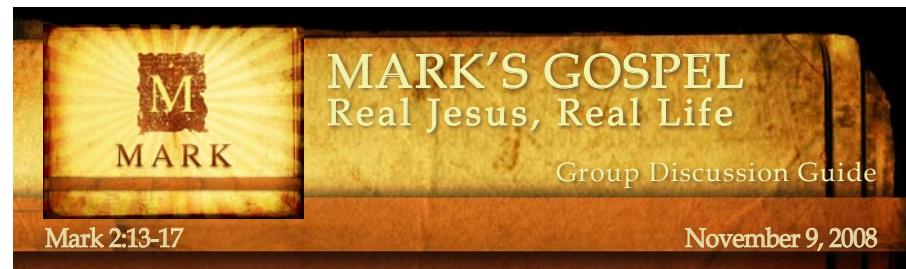
What might Simon and his companions have been feeling as they stepped into the house of Levi (filled with tax collectors and "sinners")?

Seeing as Jesus not only was there but had invited Levi to be part of His traveling band, how would Simon and his companions have begun to think about these other people Jesus was associating with?

Jesus isn't capriciously or randomly building relationship; what He is doing He is doing intentionally. What do you think Jesus wanted Simon and his companions to understand through His invitation to Levi and those other "sinners"?

*Why this matters . . .*

Jesus is no different today than in the days Mark tells us about. If Jesus included "sinners" in the circle of those He was seeking to establish relationship with, what must that mean for how you interact with those in the world around you?



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*Diving in . . .*

Having watched Jesus interact with outcasts – tax collectors and other “sinners” – last week we wrestled with what that means for us and our own relationship with Him. This week we want to add a bit to that conversation. As we watch Jesus eat with and initiate relationship with such outcasts, we’ll need to explore what this interaction with the sinners means as we consider our relationships with others. If we live close to Jesus, we may well find ourselves where He is . . . in the house of a someone who is a social outcast, in the company of sinners.

*Discussing . . .*

Why are so many jokes told about in-laws? It seems to be because in-law relationships can sometimes be so challenging. You get thrown into a family where you are not sure you are entirely comfortable. You may really love your spouse (or spouse-to-be), but you’re not so sure about the rest of the family! That kind of dynamic may help us picture what could well be going on with the small band of friends that Jesus has drawn around Himself.

Simon and Andrew, James and John, have been invited personally by Jesus to be part of His “group.” Where He goes, they go; they’re part of His circle. They are coming to identify themselves with Him.

And it is in the context of that relationship with Him that they encounter a challenge. Jesus invites Levi, a tax collector, into the circle! And not only that, Jesus begins hanging out with others like Levi . . . and maybe even some worse. That’s what is pictured for us in Mark 2:13-17.

Jesus first welcomes Levi into the same circle of friends that Simon and Andrew, James and John, have come to enjoy. That must have been startling, to say the least. (You might want to review last week’s Leader’s Guide to refresh your memory about how much an outcast a tax collector like Levi would have been in Jewish society.) We have to understand that Jesus’ invitation to Levi would have been shocking to those four nice Jewish guys who had been hanging with Jesus.

But it didn’t stop there. Jesus goes farther. Jesus begins to develop relationships with a bunch of tax collectors and other “sinners.” And, this draws Simon and Andrew, James and John, into a setting and into relationships that they would not have entered on their own. And that is

where there must have been some tension for them.

Can’t you hear them discussing among themselves? “I really like hanging out with Jesus. I am really impressed with what He is doing. I’m amazed and thrilled by the way He ministers to people. And isn’t it just so cool that He wants us to be part of it all. We’re kind of like His inner circle of friends. Wow!”

And then, Levi is brought into that little circle. And whispered conversations might be held. “What is *he* doing here?! Doesn’t Jesus understand anything about what is appropriate? Why a tax collector? Jesus is really scraping the bottom of the barrel. What can a tax collector bring to our circle of friends?”

But it doesn’t stop there. They find themselves at dinner at Levi’s house, in passing conversations with people they would never have even greeted in public. But Jesus is there and they like to be with Him so here they are. And I can imagine the under-the-breath talk. “What is going on? What happened to our nice little group? What are people going to think of us? It’s one thing to hang out with Jesus, but it’s another thing to hang out with *these* people!”

As you walk your people through the passage again, it might help to imagine conversations like the ones above. It’s not that our imagined conversations are scriptural or inspired, but we want to make sure that we are really paying attention to what really is going on in the passage. Don’t skip over the magnitude of what is going on for Simon and Andrew, James and John, as they are drawn into circles of relationships that they would never have entered . . . if it weren’t for their own relationship with Jesus.

Clearly Jesus wants these four friends to understand something about His own view of life. Much of it is encapsulated in 2:17 and Jesus’ explanation of why and what He is doing. That was what we unpacked last week. Drawing on what you remember about Jesus’ words, we want to help our people see what Jesus’ words and actions mean for those of us who would like to “hang around” Jesus.

What is inescapable is that if we want to be in relationship with Jesus we are going to have to go where He goes and begin to get involved in the lives of the people Jesus Himself gets involved with. And that may mean He will be taking us places and introducing us to people and involving us in the lives of others who we wouldn’t imagine ever coming to know . . . if it weren’t for Him.

This isn’t to say that we, individually, should be going out and looking for the seediest and most objectionable people we can find and deciding to make them our best friends. But it does mean that if we are serious about living life with Jesus that those whom Jesus reaches out to will be those we will also reach out to. For us to hang around Jesus (in our need and in our sin) may just mean that we will end up hanging around others who might not look like us but who are just as needy or just as sinful.