KINGDOM of HEAVEN

A SERIES IN THE BOOK OF MATTHEW

Community Group Material

Matthew 9:9-17

Week of 21-26 August

Leader Preparation

Read through the passage so that you are familiar with it.

This passage includes two discipleship-related stories:

1. The calling of Matthew, followed by the Pharisees questioning why Jesus would associate with sinners.
2. The disciples of John questioning Jesus about why his disciples were not fasting.

Read through the exegetical material on pages 12-14 of the CG leader manual, familiarising yourself in particular with the parts that were not taught in the sermon.

Think through the main issues you would like your group to learn from this passage. Focus on the questions related to these areas in the discussion time.

Spend some time praying for the members of your group, and asking God to guide you as you lead your time together. Read through the questions, particularly looking for ways to share openly with your group.

Group time

a) Icebreaker questions

1. Just as in Jesus' time, most of us don't love tax collectors! Share something about how you deal with tax:
    - Do you complete your tax return yourself, or does someone else do it for you?
    - Do you do your tax return immediately the tax season opens, or do you wait until the last possible moment?
    - Do you have a file of every till slip from the past year to check through and account for?
    - Are you still 5 years behind in your returns?

2. Most jobs have stereotypes about them. What is one good thing about people in your field that other people probably don't know?

b) Recap

Last week we talked about the authority of Jesus to manage difficult situations – like physical danger, evil or sin. Have you found yourself in any situation like that this week. Were you able to call out to Jesus and trust him to help you?

c) Exploring the Passage

i. READ Matthew 9:9-13

The call of Matthew

- What about JESUS would have allowed Matthew to respond so quickly? What about MATTHEW could have made him respond in that way? Do you think you could choose to follow Jesus so instantly?

- We often show concern about the types of friends young people spend time with. What kind of people would you advise a young person to identify as good potential friends? What kinds of people would you suggest that they avoid?
- Most people would say that it is out of caring that we give this advice. What are we trying to protect these young people from? Did God have a similar reason for giving laws?

- Jesus's association with sinners was scandalous to the Pharisees. Some Christians use this text to justify participating in events & behaviour that are 'worldly'. Discuss what this passage means for how Christians interact with non-believers in their lives today.
    - An important passage to be reminded of here is the 'Salt & Light' passage (Matthew 5:13-16).
    - Turners comments on this are helpful:
        - 'Jesus's social interaction with notorious sinners scandalised the Pharisees, and likewise tends to challenge Christians today. Association with unbelievers must be handled wisely so that ethical compromise is avoided (ie maintaining 'saltiness' Matt 5:13), but fear of such compromise cannot lead one to isolation' (pg 13 of the CG manual)

- The reflection on Matthew's call may be an ideal time to share your testimony, or have someone from the group share theirs!

The 'healthy':

- The Pharisees represent people who THINK they are 'healthy', and therefore don't need a 'doctor'. Do you view yourself as healthy in relation to God compared to other people? What about our religious rituals today could lead us to a self-righteous estimation?

The 'sick':

- The tax collectors and sinners really did go against many of God's rules. What made Jesus want to spend time with them?
    - Here you could reflect on 1 Tim 1:15-16, Luke 15:1-7

ii. READ Matthew 9:14-17

- The disciples of John were puzzled about why Jesus' disciples were not following the traditions related to fasting. Did Jesus say that these old laws no longer applied?

- What do you understand from the illustrations of the patched garment and the wineskins?

- Discuss how we sometimes impose man-made religious traditions on others as binding, and end up forsaking the 'new wine' that Jesus brings (and leading others to miss the new wine too!)

d) Sharing & Prayer

If you haven't done so already, share any prayer needs in the group.
You could particularly share:

- Any decisions you are making where you need courage to follow God
- Any situations where you are experiencing fear and need help to trust God
- Any confessions related to our desire to earn our salvation through religious actions, rather than relying only on the gift of God in Jesus.

You may wish to use this prayer to address some of the thoughts covered in the discussion:

> Lord God of invincible power, you are our great and mighty, omnipresent God, and yet you love us with a steadfast, gentle, merciful love, embracing saints and sinners, rich and poor. Your love makes no discrimination between Jew or Gentile, nation or race. It calls and reaches out to the sinner, the weary and downtrodden, the burdened and the suffering. You Lord, are a righteous God, and look upon your creation with grace and mercy.
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> All you desire of us Lord, is honest love and confession, rather than meaningless and mechanical religion. You treasure genuine and sincere behaviour, and attitudes that harbour humility over empty hypocrisy. In humility you ask us to recognise our own sin before condemning others for theirs, and to extend to them the same mercy that you have shown to us.
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> We love you, Heavenly Father, with all our hearts, minds and senses, knowing that you long for truth in our inner beings and deep comprehension of our loving Father. We repent for all empty religious acts and vain sacrifices. We devote ourselves to a deeper communion with you, Father, by a Christlike spiritual transformation, in the name of Jesus our Lord. Amen