



#9: Who is He hanging out with? | Pastor Joe Wittwer | August 10, 2009

A. Fellowship Time (10-15 minutes)

1. Chitchat. Perhaps offer coffee, tea, or a cold drink with some snacks.
2. Pray (or invite someone to pray) to open the discussion.

B. Review Time (Read the summary below to the group: 5-10 minutes)

Introduction: Jesus' mission wasn't to collect all the good and righteous people and take them to heaven. It was to call all the sinners, like us, to join His kingdom and change the world! The religious leaders were very particular about the company they kept. They didn't want to be contaminated by contact with sinful people. But Jesus loved and hung out with these people.

Mark 2:13-17 tells the story. *"Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them. As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. 'Follow me,' Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him. While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and 'sinners' were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the 'sinners' and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: 'Why does he eat with tax collectors and "sinners"?' On hearing this, Jesus said to them, 'It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.'* Let's see what we can learn about following the Leader.

1. Jesus chooses a reject. Jesus called Levi to follow Him. Levi's other name is Matthew the author of the gospel that bears his name. When Jesus chose Levi, He chose a guy nobody wanted—a reject! Levi was a tax collector. In Israel in the first century, tax collectors were the most hated men in town. They were traitors who collaborated with the Roman oppressors and got rich from fleecing their countrymen. Tax collectors were also considered unclean because of their contact with Gentiles and were forbidden to attend worship services at the synagogue or temple. They were ostracized by their countrymen. Levi was a reject and Jesus chose him to join His team. Jesus is for everyone; including the people we think are impossible, the ones we think are hopeless. If we're going to follow the leader, we've got to open our hearts to the people on the margins, the people nobody wants, the rejects. It's easy to avoid such people, but Jesus embraced them. He saw something in Levi nobody else saw. They saw a traitor and a cheat; Jesus saw a gospel writer and a world changer. They saw his profession, but Jesus saw his potential. Jesus sees the potential in every one of us.

2. Jesus hangs out with the riffraff. **Mark 2:15-16** *"While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and 'sinners' were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the "sinners" and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: 'Why does he eat with tax collectors and "sinners"?"* Levi was excited about following Jesus, and he wanted all his friends, other tax collectors, to meet Jesus too. So Levi threw a dinner party at his house. The religious leaders, the Pharisees who were known for meticulous keeping of every detail of the law, were upset. They would never eat with such people because contact with irreligious people was considered contaminating. The word "Pharisee" means "separated one" or "separatist". By eating with these "sinners", Jesus was violating the orthodox conventions of His day. When the Pharisee's asked why he was doing this, Jesus answered, *"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."* Jesus hung out with sinners and tax collectors because they needed a Savior. None of us wants to be a Pharisee, but sometimes, in our desire to be holy, we naturally seek out people "like us". But that's not what our Leader did. At Levi's house, Jesus got to speak to a crowd who would never darken the door of the synagogue.

3. Jesus is hard on the self-righteous. Mark 2:17 “On hearing this, Jesus said to them, ‘It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.’” Jesus warned the Pharisees that the self-righteous will miss the kingdom. He is hard on the self-righteous not because He hates them, but because He loves them and He loves us. He knows that our self-righteousness will keep us from ever coming to Him. In the story of prodigal son, a father has two sons. The younger takes his share of the inheritance, moves away to a distant country and squanders it all on wild living. Then, when he comes to his senses, he returns home and is welcomed back by his father, who throws a party to celebrate his return. But when the older brother finds out that his brother has returned and his father has welcomed him back and thrown a party, he refuses to go in. **Luke 15:29-30 says**, “All these years I’ve slaved for you, and never once refused to do a single thing you told me to. And in all that time you never gave me even one young goat for a feast with my friends. Yet when this son of yours comes back after squandering your money on prostitutes, you celebrate by killing the fattened calf.” Jesus told the story for the Pharisees; He wanted to show them there was more than one way to be lost. We can be lost in a distant country, or lost at home. We can be lost in sin or lost in self-righteousness. Both sons were alienated from their father, one by his rebellion, the other by his goodness. It’s dangerous to be good or to be religious! Jesus saves us and changes us but we can get so good that we forget we’re still sinners in need of Jesus. The good news is that Jesus came to call sinners. If we understand our capacity for sin, we can’t help but be astonished, amazed, and wonder at God’s capacity for grace!

C. Life Group Questions (select, revise, and add as desired: 20-40 minutes)

1. What kind of person did Jesus "choose" in this passage from Mark 2:13-14? Why would that be an extraordinary action in that time? In our time? What was Levi's response?
2. Levi lived in margins of society but Jesus saw great potential in him. Are there people that you may find it hard, or nearly impossible, to see their potential? Do you avoid the hopeless person? Discuss how you could become more like Jesus, seeing beneath the surface, seeing others potential.
3. Do you found it easy to hang out mostly with other Christians? (Of course, it's important that we help each other grow in Christ and encourage one another.) Can you see yourself inadvertently becoming a "Pharisee"? When was the last time you intentionally spent time with non-Christians? What steps could you take to become more available to people who live in the margins?
4. Have you ever let self-righteousness creep into your attitude about others? Is it easier or harder to love others when you're feeling that way? What causes us to think we are less of a "sinner" than someone else?

D. Personal Application (1-3 Minutes)

- Think of people in your life others might consider a "reject." Find an opportunity to reach out to one person this week.
- If you were in church Sunday, you participated in some brainstorming about how to throw a "Levi party" (one where you invite non-believers). Have you made any follow-up plans? If not, plan a block potluck, a game night, a Monday Night Football night, a pie fight, a "back to school" party or any of the great ideas that you came up with. Just plan to follow-up this month.

E. Prayer Time (As a whole group or subgroups of 3-4: 10-15 Minutes)

- Thank God that He sent His Son to rescue and chose sinners - that's us!
- Pray every day for God's mercy and forgiveness...it's something we need all the time.
- Ask God to help you act on your "Levi party" plans. Ask Him to put people in your life that need to meet Jesus. Ask God to help you see others with His eyes...to see the Godly potential in each person.
- Offer any other praises or requests that arose during your discussion.