

WHERE THE LAST GO FIRST

How the Gospel Changes Everything

THEME: Humans seem to have developed the capacity to read life and people in the most negative of terms. Among other elements of transformation, the gospel alters the way we read reality. In particular, it teaches us to see people differently – through the eyes of Jesus.

ICE BREAKER

1. As you open your time together in prayer, celebrate and give thanks to our Gracious God for the safe return of Kurt and Roxie from India. Pray for the ongoing work in that country to spread the message of Christ.
2. Ask if anyone in your small group can remember an experience of being “passed by” – perhaps by being chosen late/last for an athletic team, missing the cut for admission to a school or club, being denied a promotion. What effect does it have to feel unappreciated or unwanted?
3. Remind yourselves that nobody is “best” at everything. Yet everybody does have feelings. Everybody interprets and reacts to slights – whether real or imagined.

THINK

1. Whom does God love more: Bill Gates or Homeless Bob, bank presidents or people on welfare, faithful mates or adulterers, missionaries with Ebola or street persons with AIDS? [Warning: Yes, this is a *trick question!*]
2. Assuming your answer to #1, why do we have so much trouble viewing people the way God views them?
3. According to 1 Corinthians 1:26-31, where did the gospel message find its most eager reception in the first century? Explain why.
4. What should we learn from first-century experience in preaching the gospel? Who is more likely to hear the gospel with eager receptivity in our own culture? Is that where we address our strongest efforts?
5. Comment on the following statement: *People have all sorts of needs in this world! Rich people may need good tax advisors, and homeless people may need their first meal in two days. But everybody needs a Savior.*

EXAMINE

Read [Matthew 19:28-20:16](#) as background to the following questions:

1. What is the point of the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard. *Hint: It isn't about how companies should hire and pay people.*
2. What does this parable tell you about God's heart for all human beings?
3. Discuss the following statement: God expects us to see people through the same eyes he has for them, so racism, sexism, and the other “isms” we have come to tolerate must be intolerable in the church.
4. Most churches seem to be catching on to the idea that Christianity involves seeking the outcasts and hurting people of the world in order to serve them with the love of Christ. How do we make sure we serve them to God's glory and not as “just another bunch of do-gooders”?
5. In connection with #4, also ask this: How do we serve people in Christ's name and for the sake of introducing them to Christ without being “brassy evangelists” who run people off or self-righteous people who help others only with strings attached?

Read [1 Corinthians 2:1-5](#) as background for discussing the following questions:

1. Earlier, in the “Think” section, you were asked to read 1 Corinthians 1:26-31 and to reflect on the fact that the early church drew most of its members from the “underclasses” of the Roman Empire. How does this paragraph connect to that fact? How did Paul “demonstrate” the power of the Holy Spirit to those people? How can we do it in our generation?
2. If your answer to #1 focused on miracles and supernatural gifts, it might be good to recall that Acts 18 has no such focus! It tells instead of Paul's preaching, including Gentiles as well as Jews in his ministry, being misrepresented by his enemies, etc. Want to recast your answer to #1?
3. Reflect on this possibility: Demonstrating the Spirit's power is not only about occasional miracles but also about staying with our tasks, reaching out to excluded people, and sharing the story of Jesus with them.
4. From what you know of first-century history and culture, try to imagine how difficult it would have been for the church (at Corinth and elsewhere) to be made up of such diverse persons as slaves and their masters, Gentiles and Jews, etc. What problems would that diversity have created?
5. How does Grace Chapel deal with the diversity of its membership? The community around us? Our shrinking planet?

THIS WEEK: Some people study the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard and leave it more frustrated than encouraged. That is typically because they are thinking about the “injustice” the story narrates – and wind up sympathizing with the folks in vs.11-12! As you close, remind yourselves of what the parable is teaching us. Put it in your own words one more time.

Close by praying for God to help you see the worth and dignity of every person who crosses your path this week – and to be alert for opportunities to share the good news about Jesus with someone.