

Small Group Guide

"No Perfect People Allowed"

Overview

This sermon challenges us to abandon the pretense of perfection and embrace a culture of authenticity in the church. Drawing on Scripture and the work of pastor John Burke, the message calls us to understand that every person — inside and outside the church — is broken, in need of Jesus, and in the process of being made holy by God. True community begins when we stop hiding and start being real with God and one another.

Key Takeaways

- God expects us to pursue holiness and perfection, but it is Jesus — not our own effort — who makes us holy through his sacrifice and the work of the Holy Spirit.
- All people fall short. No one is exempt, including those who lead and teach in the church.
- The Pharisees failed not because they taught the wrong standard, but because their hearts were wrong. They performed righteousness outwardly while remaining unchanged inwardly.
- Jesus was known as "the friend of sinners." If he is our model, we must ask how we see and treat the broken people around us.
- Real healing begins when we embrace authenticity — confessing our struggles, humbling ourselves, and allowing God and community to work in us.
- Sanctification is a process. God sees us as fully holy because of Christ's sacrifice, and he is also actively working out the wrinkles in us every day.

Discussion Questions

Opening (Getting Comfortable)

1. When you first started attending church — either as a new believer or visiting for the first time — what expectations did you bring with you? Were those expectations met, challenged, or changed?
2. Have you ever felt pressure to appear more spiritually put-together than you actually were? What did that feel like?

Going Deeper (Into the Scripture)

3. Lee referenced Matthew 5:48, where Jesus calls his followers to be perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect. How does that command make you feel? Does it motivate you, discourage you, or something else?
4. Hebrews 10:14 describes believers as those who have been "made perfect forever" through Christ's sacrifice, while also being in the ongoing process of being made holy. How do you hold both of those truths together in your daily life?
5. In Matthew 23, Jesus rebukes the Pharisees for being like whitewashed tombs — clean on the outside but corrupt on the inside. Where in your own life is there a gap between how you appear to others and what is actually happening in your heart?
6. Lee pointed out that Jesus was called "the friend of sinners" by the Pharisees as a criticism. What does it say about Jesus that he wore that title? What would it mean for us to wear it too?
7. Romans 3:23 reminds us that all have sinned and fall short of God's glory, and Romans 3:24 follows immediately with the truth that all are justified by his grace. Why do you think we so often remember the first verse and forget the second?

Getting Personal (Honest Reflection)

8. Lee shared that he once shifted from one addiction to another — exchanging destructive habits for religious busyness — without actually drawing closer to God. Have you ever experienced something similar? What did that look like for you?
9. Lee mentioned that one in three women, one in four men, and one in six people in any given congregation are dealing with abuse, addiction, or serious mental health struggles. How does knowing that change the way you look at the people sitting around you?
10. The group was challenged to pray specifically for humility — to ask God to help us see ourselves truthfully. Is there an area of your life where pride is making it hard to receive correction, accept help, or show compassion to someone else?

Looking Outward (Beyond the Group)

11. Lee argues that we cannot expect people outside the church to live like Jesus when they do not yet know Jesus. How does that shift the way you think about or talk about people in your life who are not believers?
12. What would it look like practically for this small group — and this church — to build a genuine "come as you are" culture? What might need to change?

Practical Applications

Choose one or more of the following to put into practice this week:

Pursue Authenticity Identify one struggle, fear, or sin you have been keeping hidden. Share it with at least one trusted person this week — a friend, a small group member, a counselor, or a pastor. James 5:16 calls us to confess our sins to one another so that healing can take place.

Pray for Humility Set aside time each day this week to specifically ask God to reveal where pride is blocking your growth, your relationships, or your compassion for others. Keep a simple journal of what he shows you.

Examine Your Expectations Think of someone in your life — inside or outside the church — on whom you have placed unrealistic expectations. Write down what those expectations are. Then ask: Am I holding this person to a standard I do not hold myself to? Bring that to God in prayer.

Pursue the Inside The Pharisees had the outside right but the inside wrong. Pick one spiritual habit this week — reading Scripture, prayer, or worship — and approach it not as a duty to perform but as a conversation with God. Ask him to use it to change your heart, not just your behavior.

Reach Toward Someone Messy Think of one person in your life who is struggling — with addiction, with pain, with sin, with doubt. Take one concrete step toward them this week. Send a message. Make a call. Show up. Be the friend of sinners that Jesus modeled for us.

Closing Reflection

The pastor closed with these words from his prayer:

"Help us to grow. Help me to grow. Help me to learn and help us to learn that we can better serve you and to serve others, to love you and to love others."

Close your group time by praying those words together, and invite anyone who wants to share a specific area of growth to do so before you pray.

Memory Verse for the Week

Hebrews 10:14 — The writer of Hebrews teaches that through Christ's one sacrifice, believers have been made perfect in God's sight forever, even as God continues the daily work of making them holy.