"Can I Really Be Me At Church?"

*Remember: The goal of small group is 100% participation. Everyone talks.

Why do we NEED the CHURCH?

OPEN IT

- **The Real You.** What's something about you that people might not discover until they get to know you pretty well?
- **A Little Growing Up.** What's something you used to believe, do, or care about that has changed significantly as you've grown older?

READ IT:

- **Luke 18:25** — Jesus says what is impossible for people is possible with God.
- **Luke 19:1–10** — Jesus welcomes Zacchaeus, and their encounter leads to repentance and transformation.
- **James 5:16** — Confessing our sins to one another and praying for one another.

EXPLORE IT:

- **The Safety of Being Real.** The message asks, "Can I really be me at church?" Why might someone feel safer being honest with an AI chatbot or an online stranger than with people at church? What makes it difficult to be vulnerable with other Christians?
- **Curiosity That Moves Us.** Read Luke 19:1–4. Zacchaeus was curious enough about Jesus to do something unusual and potentially embarrassing. What do you think made him so eager to see Jesus? What might keep someone today from taking that first step toward Him?
- **Getting Past the Crowd.** Read Luke 19:7. The crowd judged Jesus for welcoming Zacchaeus. What kinds of attitudes or behaviors might make people feel unwelcome or keep them from getting closer to Jesus today? How can we make sure we aren't becoming that kind of crowd?

- **Known Before We Know Him.** Jesus called Zacchaeus by name before Zacchaeus had demonstrated any change. What does this reveal about Jesus? How might remembering that Jesus knows us and seeks us change the way we approach Him with our struggles and uncertainties?
- **Safe, but Not Stagnant.** The message describes the church as a place where people can be honest and vulnerable, but also a place where lives are changed. Why do you think churches sometimes struggle to hold grace and accountability together? What happens when we emphasize one without the other?
- **The Courage to Confess.** Read James 5:16. Why is it important for Christians to confess their sins and pray for one another? What makes confession difficult? What would need to be true about a group of believers for people to feel safe enough to be honest?
- **Come as You Are.** Read Luke 19:5–9. Jesus welcomed Zacchaeus before his life had changed, but the encounter led to significant repentance. What is the difference between welcoming someone without judgment and communicating that their choices don't matter? How can we demonstrate both grace and a genuine desire to see people grow?
- **What Does Real Change Look Like?** Zacchaeus didn't simply say he believed in Jesus; his actions demonstrated a changed heart. Why do you think genuine encounters with Jesus should affect the way we live? What are some practical signs that someone is becoming more like Christ?
- **Accountability or Autonomy?** The message contrasts accountability with autonomy—the desire to remain independent and answer to no one. Why can accountability feel threatening, even when it is intended to help us grow? What is the difference between someone trying to control us and someone lovingly helping us follow Jesus?
- **Honest and Hopeful.** The message closes with the challenge to be honest about who we are and hopeful about who we can become in Jesus. Which of those two comes more naturally to you? What is one area where you need to be more honest with God or others, or more hopeful about the change God can bring?

DO IT:

- **Practice Being Real.** Identify one thing you've been hesitant to share with a trusted Christian friend or group member. Take a step toward honest conversation, remembering that vulnerability is an important part of authentic community.
- **Make Room for the Outsider.** Look for someone who might feel like an outsider at church. Learn their name, initiate a conversation, invite them to join you, or simply help them feel that they belong.

- **Invite Accountability.** Ask a trusted Christian to help you grow in one specific area of your life. Be honest about where you're struggling and invite them to check in with you.
- **Confess and Pray.** Follow the instruction of James 5:16. Share an appropriate area of struggle with a trusted believer and ask them to pray with you. Make the goal healing and growth, not simply getting something off your chest.
- **Take a Zacchaeus Step.** Identify one practical change that would demonstrate a growing commitment to Jesus. Like Zacchaeus, let your response to Jesus show up in your choices, relationships, generosity, or priorities.

PRAY IT:

Jesus, thank You for knowing us completely and welcoming us with grace. Make our church a place where people can be honest about their struggles without fear of shame, but also a place where we lovingly encourage one another to grow and change. Give us humility to confess, courage to pursue accountability, and faith to believe that what is impossible with us is possible with You. Help us become more like You as we share life together. Amen.