

Small Group Guide: Jesus Is... Your Friend

Opening Question/Icebreaker:

If you were back in high school, which lunch table do you think you'd be sitting at and why? Were you with the jocks, the band kids, the geeks, or maybe a mix of different groups?

This question ties into Pastor Dan's illustration of high school lunch tables and helps set the stage for discussing how Jesus chooses his 'table' differently.

Opening Prayer:

"Dear Heavenly Father, we thank You for bringing us together in fellowship and community. As we dive into Your Word, open our hearts and minds to understand the depth of Your love and grace. Guide our time of discussion and conversation today. Help us learn to reflect Your mercy in our lives and relationships. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen."

Key Takeaways:

1. Jesus doesn't view people the same way we tend to - He doesn't have a "badness scale."
2. All have sinned and fall short of God's glory - we're all at the "sinner's table."
3. Jesus' friendship is based on mercy, not merit.
4. Jesus desires to be close to us because of His love, kindness, and grace.
5. As believers, we're called to invite others to experience God's grace and mercy.

Discussion Questions:

1. The sermon mentions how we often categorize sin and people. Have you ever caught yourself doing this? How does this mindset affect our relationships with others and with God?
2. **Read Matthew 9:9-13.** How does Jesus' interaction with Matthew, a tax collector, challenge the societal norms and expectations of his time? In what ways does this passage illustrate Jesus' role as a friend to sinners?
3. Pastor Dan talks about the "sinner's table" and the "saint's table." Why do you think Jesus chose to sit with the sinners? What does this tell us about His character?
4. **Read Romans 5:8.** Consider the phrase "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." How does this understanding of unconditional love impact your relationship with others?
5. How does understanding that Jesus' friendship is based on mercy, not merit, change your perspective on your relationship with Him?
6. **Read Romans 3:22-24.** Discuss what it means when Paul says, "This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe." How does this truth influence our view of salvation and grace?
7. Pastor Dan suggests that we should "live in that moment of recognizing that there's nothing that I've done to be worthy of His love and His grace showers me." How might this mindset change the way we interact with others, especially those we might consider "sinners"?

8. Pastor Dan mentioned the tendency of believers to create a 'badness scale' and become judgmental. How can this be dangerous to our spiritual growth? How can we guard against this mindset and instead foster an environment of grace and acceptance with others (following Jesus' example)?

Practical Applications:

1. This week, try to catch yourself when you start categorizing people or sins. Instead, remind yourself of God's grace towards you.
2. Identify someone in your life who might be considered a "sinner" by societal standards. How can you show them Christ's love and friendship this week?
3. Reflect on your own journey with Christ. Write down ways you've experienced His grace and mercy despite your shortcomings.
4. If you haven't been baptized, consider taking this step of faith. Discuss with the group any questions or hesitations you might have.
5. As a group, brainstorm ways you can create a welcoming environment for people who might feel like outsiders in church or Christian circles.

Closing Prayer: Encourage group members to continue reflecting on the sermon throughout the week and to put into practice the idea of extending Christ's friendship to others.

"Dear Lord, thank You for this time we've shared, exploring how You call us friends. Help us to take what we've learned and let it shape how we see and treat others. Guide us to be more loving and merciful, just like You are with us. Keep us grounded in Your grace as we go about our week. In Jesus' name, Amen."