



First Person Week Four

Opening Prayer: God, thank you for coming to bring healing and equality among all of us. Be with us today as we seek your wisdom, expressed in scripture and in one another's stories.

Talk It Over: This week we moved into Matthew and began to look at the idea that all of us have experienced what it's like to want something that we don't know how to get. Before Jesus, people would follow rules in order to feel accepted by God. Jesus came to change that and in Matthew we see the new ideas of radical acceptance begin to be revealed through five of Jesus' messages. Learning to know what it is like to be radically accepted by God without getting all the rules right is still something we struggle with thousands of years later.

- Based on your upbringing (religious or not) what were some of the ideas you formed about God?
- Can you see ways that you have connected your behavior to his acceptance of you?

Read Matthew 5:20-22 NLT

This passage of scripture comes across as pretty harsh. As we explore it more we realize it is also impossible to do! None of us are perfect and we cannot follow rules 24/7. What Jesus was actually doing here by raising the bar was in fact leveling the playing field. None of us will be Jesus. We are fully human and in our humanness we mess up. With that truth we can hopefully take a deep breath and embrace the gift of grace Jesus is offering. God's acceptance is through Jesus.

- Have you felt the difference between pushing for acceptance and just receiving it? If you have words to describe those visceral feelings share that with the group.
- As children we all strive to please our parents or primary care giver. Can you make a connection between some of those childhood behaviors/leanings and the way you now view God as an adult?

Read Romans 3: 23-24 NLT

613 rules and no way to get them all right, thank God we don't have to! When we are seeking the wisdom that God has to offer we find it in Jesus and in standing with each other. Acceptance is a natural desire for us as individuals. When we seek to build community, acceptance is the primary factor in finding safe relationships. This is so important because we know that both hurt and healing happens most often in relationship. It becomes extremely hard to attach and become vulnerable when we don't feel safe.

- Do you find acceptance in your circle of friends? Describe how you know that you have acceptance?
- How does the idea of being vulnerable with people close to you make you feel?

- Has anyone reflected Jesus and his gift of acceptance during a time where you realized you didn't deserve it but craved it desperately?
- Spend a few minutes reflecting on what it feels like to accept that gift but to also help reflect that gift of acceptance to someone in need.

Closing Prayer: God thank you for the gift of radical acceptance in Jesus. Help us to stand shoulder to shoulder and point each other to you as we seek the healing and comfort that is found in your love.

Challenge: We would like to invite you to follow along with us as a church as we read through the books of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. You can do that through the eDevotional. <http://eastlakechurch.com/next-steps/edevotional/> If you have already started this reading, share some thoughts or insight about your experience this week.