



First Person Week Six

Opening Prayer:

God, help us to hear what you have for us to hear. Help us to be open and honest with where we are and where you are inviting us to grow.

Talk It Over:

If we are honest about our humanness, we all probably know we run into moments where we see a gap between who we say we are and who we really are. As imperfect, but growing people, we can anticipate to run into both small and big gaps between our intention and action from time to time. At its most severe, we can look at the gap and see it as “hypocrisy” – that practice of claiming to have certain moral standards or beliefs that our behavior doesn’t conform to.

- Tell about a time you saw a little or big gap between who you claimed to be and who you were.
- Sometimes we become aware of our hypocrisy because someone else points it out to us. Tell about a memorable time you learned about a gap between the moral standard you claimed to hold and your behavior because someone else shared their hurt, frustration or observations with you. What was that experience like?

Read Matthew 25:31-33-36 (New Living Translation)

In Matthew chapter 23, Jesus calls out the religious leaders of the day for being hypocrites. He tells people to do what those religious leaders say, but not what they do, because they are hypocrites. He appears to be communicating to those leaders phrases like: “Your words and actions don’t line up”, “You say one thing and you do another”, or “You don’t practice what you preach”. When we read ahead to Matthew 25:31, we see that He describes what’s going to happen to everyone whose actions and words line up, and to anyone whose actions and words don’t.

- Share about a time you wrestled with whether or not you were going to commit your behavior to the a moral standard you claimed to hold. What did you end up doing? What was that experience like? Regardless of what you ended up doing, what did you learn through the process?
- We all have struggles and challenges that make it hard for us to do what is right. Even though you may mentally know better per say, and you really would like to do the right thing, what are some common hang ups or challenges you face regarding your words and actions lining up? Why are those particular struggles or challenges hard for you? What is the core fear, message or motivator that makes the issue more complicated? In what ways do you want, need or know grace in this area?

Read Matthew 25:34-36 (New Living Translation) and Matthew 25:37-40 (New Living Translation)

Whether we try to actively care for others or not, we often run into the realization that we cannot permanently solve most problems. It’s easy to live with this idea that no matter what we do, our effort is like one drop in an endless sea of need. Sometimes the feeling of hopelessness for a situation can get so large that we enter into “compassion fatigue”.

(Continue to next page.)

- Have you ever felt compassion fatigue? How did you handle it? What did you do — good, bad or neutral — in the midst of those feelings?
- Is there a problem or person you can think of now that sparks some level of compassion fatigue for you? Describe the situation. Share what you think would make the world of a difference to the situation and what little — and manageable — thing you might be able to do to help move things forward.

The passage we read in Matthew 25 makes it very clear that Jesus is saying: Help people with the basic necessities of life — food, shelter, clothing, acceptance and love. While God's love is not dependent on what we do or do not do, and it's not our job to be the police of others, claiming to follow Jesus while not caring for others brings up a contradiction. God desires for us to be the hands of Jesus.

- What does this idea stir up in you? Is this something you believe, are comfortable with, recently came to term with, or wrestle with?
- Share about a time you experienced someone else helping you with the basic necessities of life — food, shelter, clothing, acceptance and love.

Read 1 John 3:16 (New Living Translation) and Acts 4:34 (New Living Translation)

One of the messages of the Bible is that God desires for the love and care we give to others to be an overflow of the love and care he gives to us firsthand. It's the idea that we receive from God, and from that same flow, we give to others with gratitude for all we have received. Our service, and our faith, is meant to be a response to Jesus. We are invited to be defined by the love and generosity of God because we draw from God as our perfect, endless source.

- Have you ever served someone else with a deep sense of knowing that your generosity was rooted with gratitude for all God has done for you? Tell about that experience.
- When you are made aware of a need, how do you come to terms with finding your role in a given situation? Have you ever tried to do too much or too little and later learned you missed God's invitation to you in that situation?

Closing Prayer:

God, we want to be better at being your hands to others and we want you to be our truest source. Help us to graciously experience your goodness and generosity so we can give that same love to others.