



Week Two

Opening Prayer

God, thank you for meeting us here. Help us to hear from you today. We want to say 'yes' to what you have for us. Amen.

Talk It Over

In this series we will be exploring who Jesus is, what Jesus did, and why his story matters to us now. Today we looked at the idea that Jesus is our friend.

- Looking back at your middle school and high school life, answer these next two questions:
 - What were some of the ways groups or tables were divide up in your school cafeteria? Band kids? Jocks? Cheerleaders? Nerds?
 - What table did you find yourself at?

Read Matthew 9:9-13

Much like we find in middle school or high school cafeterias, who is allowed to sit where said a lot about the social structure of Jesus' day. In this section of verses we just looked at, it's important to note that two tables emerge in contrasting positions — the "sinner" table and the "saint" or religious elite table. Moreover, we see that the divide between these two tables was brought about by those who saw themselves as the saints or religious elite. In other words, it's the religious elite in this story that are struggling with Jesus' choice to make room for others.

- We all use the word 'friend' differently. How do you define the term friend?
- Tell us about a time you were rejected or deemed "unworthy" of being included in something you wanted to be included in.

Two issues we see emerge out of the religious elite is they divide sin into various categories and, in turn, they divide people between various categories. In their attempt to hate the sin, they started to hate people.

- Without gossiping or oversharing about someone else, tell us about a time you disliked how someone was behaving but you genuinely loved the person.
- Generally speaking, how hard or easy is to for you to separate behavior from the person doing the behavior?

Read Romans 3:23 and Read Romans 5:8

Jesus' love for us is not based on our merit, it's based on his mercy. Here at EastLake we like to say, "there is nothing you could ever do to make God love you any more or any less than he does right now."

- Tell us about someone who knows your faults or the ways you fall short and still extends genuine love to you.
- Without gossiping or oversharing about someone else, tell us about a time you extended mercy freely onto others. *Consider leaving all names out of your story.*
- When it comes to your view of others, when is it hardest to extend mercy to others? When is it easiest for you? Why do you think this is the case?

The Bible tells us that sharing openly with trusted people about our faults is not simply us taking ownership, it's us engaging in the spiritual practices of confessing, and opening ourselves up to healing.

- What are some ways you know you are falling short this season? Feel free to share as little or as much as you like here. Please remember this might not be the context to give too many details.

Read Matthew 11:19 (Voice) and 2 Corinthians 5:19-20 (MSG)

The message of Jesus teaches us that God invites every single one of us to the table. In Jesus' opinion, we all belong at the table. As individuals, we each have the freedom to say 'yes' to that generous invitation and we are each called to extend the generous invite onto others.

- In your opinion, what is the scariest or most challenging part of making room at the table for others?
- Following up on the previous question, what intentional steps can you take or truths can you hold onto in light of your fears or concerns?
- How are you doing at saying 'yes' to Jesus' mercy and grace this season? In other words, are you buying into the idea that you are invited to his table regardless of what you do or don't do?
- In light of the previous question, how can you say 'yes' to more of God's mercy and grace this season?

Closing Prayer

God, thank you for inviting us to your table. Help us to truly believe this simple but profound truth. Help us experience your friendship and mercy in new, growing ways. And please help us to extend that invitation and mercy onto others. Amen.

How To Use this Discussion Guide

The guide is meant to serve you and your group as you intentionally create space to grow in friendship and faith. Use the guide as a tool to help your unique group connect in friendship and grow faith.

With that in mind, consider reviewing the guide before your group to see if some content or questions might resonate more or less with your group. Don't feel pressure to read all the content or to hit all the questions. The guide is not meant to be something you power through for the sake of completing. Pick the content from the guide you feel will help foster friendship and faith in your specific group.

Spend some time praying for your group, preparing your heart, and asking God for wisdom and guidance regarding your specific group.