



Group Leader Guide

“Jesus Makes a Promise” – Famous Last Words

March 7-8, 2020

Group Creed

We come together as a Group with the goal of Spiritual Formation; encouraging one another to become the same kind of person that Jesus is, so that we can live out every part of our lives inside of His Kingdom.

// Message Summary

Lead Pastor, **Jim Burgen**, continues **Famous Last Words**, focusing on when Jesus made a promise to the repentant criminal being crucified next to him, saying, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.” (**Luke 23:43**) Jesus forgave him and promised that the criminal would be with Him (Jesus) after his death. Looking at a trio of stories Jesus told earlier in his life, culminating in the parable of the Prodigal Son, we will see how Jesus taught this very concept of undeserved grace in response to the self-righteous people who opposed it.

// Word Study

Luke 23:39-40: The word in Luke to describe the men being crucified on either side of Jesus is the Greek word “**kakourgos**,” which is a generic word for “evildoer” or “criminal.” However, the word used in Matthew and Mark is the word “**lestes**,” usually translated at “robber” or “thief.” However, this word also carries political connotations, meaning that these men were possibly more than just common thieves, but violent zealots who opposed the occupation of Rome and stirred up the general public to act against Rome. This is exactly what Jesus himself had been falsely accused of earlier in the chapter in verses 2 and 5.

// Biblical Context: The Three Parables

As Jim mentions, Jesus is speaking these three parables to some Pharisees (a particular group of religious bigots) in response to their criticism that Jesus was hanging out with “tax collectors and sinners.” To avoid the Pharisees seeing themselves as the protagonists in each story, He seemingly chooses characters they would not identify with: a shepherd (whom they considered unclean), a poor woman (possibly a widow), and a merciful father (who ignored Jewish-suggested punishments for such a rebellious son (Ex. 21:17; Deut. 21:18-21)). He leaves no doubt who He is comparing the Pharisees to: the self-righteous older brother in the last story.

One interesting note in the older brother’s response is the fact that he had nothing to lose in welcoming his brother home. The inheritance had already been divided, so it wasn’t like he was going to be out anything financially. He was just bitter that his father would welcome him back.

Finally, Jesus ends the story before giving the brother’s final response. This is intentional on Jesus’ part. He is basically extending the very mercy He had just explained to them, allowing them to write their own ending by repenting if they are so willing.

// In Preparation

As a group leader, it can become tempting to think that you are miles ahead spiritually than the people in your group, similar to the older brother and Pharisees. This can tend to happen more the longer you are in a position of spiritual leadership. And while it is perfectly okay to want to be prepared and competent, and even available to offer advice, counsel, and/or mentorship to the people in your group, a feeling of superiority will not serve you well. This weekend, Jim ends his sermon by driving home the meaning of our “me too” slogan. Basically, if we ever lose sight of the fact that the only way any of us gets to be with Jesus is not because we are better than anyone else or because we are religious enough, but because He cut us a sweet deal when we didn’t deserve it. We are all in the same boat, no matter your level of spiritual maturity. Keeping this in mind as you lead will keep you humble, grateful, real, and raw. Be honest and vulnerable about your own life in your discussions. This will create safety for the people in your group to be willing to be honest and vulnerable as well. Or, perhaps, you are on the opposite side of the spectrum, not believing you have anything to offer anyone in your group spiritually. That’s okay too! You don’t have to have it all figured out. No one does, despite what they may say. You may be only one step ahead because you got to read the discussion questions a day early. You don’t have to have every answer that may be asked. God has *YOU* here for a reason. Don’t forget that. Just let God use you where you are at!

// References

Keener, Craig S Ph.d. *IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*. InterVarsity Press, 2014.

Wright, Christopher J. H. *To the Cross: Proclaiming the Gospel from the Upper Room to Calvary*. IVP Books, an Imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2017.

Zodhiates, Spiros. *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*. AMG Publishers, 1994.



Group Discussion

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// Bible References

Luke 23:35-43, Luke 15:1-32

// Message Screenshots

- Grace without Truth doesn't change anything.
- Truth without Grace is just mean and overwhelming.
- Grace always proceeds Truth.
- Lesson #1: Sheep get lost and stay lost until somebody cares enough to go and find them.
- Lesson #2: Coins don't lose themselves.
- Sometimes, you get lost because you didn't know what you were doing.
- Sometimes, you get lost because somebody else didn't know what they were doing.
- Either way, Jesus is looking for you to joyfully bring you back to safety.
- Lesson #3: Sometimes, you get lost because you decided to do something stupid.
- If you are lost, and you're tired of living in a pigpen, change your mind, turn your heart towards Jesus because He is looking for you, waiting for you and he wants you back.
- Me Too.

// Community Questions

1. Have you ever lost something expensive or important? What was it, and did you ever find it?
2. What did you come up with from last week's challenge?

// Core Questions

3. Re-read **Luke 15:1-32**. Who or what do you most identify with in these stories?
4. If you have read or heard these stories before, did anything new stick out to you that you hadn't noticed or learned before? If so, what?
5. What person or group of people do you have a hard time believing Jesus would give grace to? Why?
6. If you are being honest, where do you think the line should be drawn as far as what sins get forgiven or not?
7. In your daily life, what person or group of people do you judge as worse than yourself? This doesn't have to be on a sin level, but just in a more general sense? *(examples: homeless people, people of a different gender, people of a different political party, people*

of a different race, people who work a certain job, etc.)

8. Read **1 Timothy 1:15**. Whether the apostle Paul was actually the worst sinner of all time or not, what does this verse say about what our attitudes should be when comparing ourselves to others?
9. Read **1 Timothy 1:16**. Jesus showed patience to the self-proclaimed worst sinner in the world in order to set an example for those of us who follow Him. How is your patience with people that you deem inferior or “behind” you? Do you show mercy or judgment?
10. Read **Luke 18:9-14**. How does this parable relate to what we have been talking about?

// Challenge

Philippians 2:3-8 tells us that we are to treat others as more significant than ourselves. Like Jesus, we are to demonstrate that with humility, service, and sacrifice. Thinking back to your answers from above, especially to questions 5 and 7, how can you begin to think of these people as better than yourself? Where can you find opportunities to serve them? Despite whatever makes you “lean out” from them, what is a way that you can show them the patience and mercy of Christ this week? It could be as simple and anonymous as letting someone in your lane at rush hour that you think is being a jerk. Or, it could be something a little more meaningful, such as striking up a conversation with or offering help to someone you usually try to avoid or makes you uncomfortable. Come back to group next week with a story of how you served someone you usually wouldn’t.

This could even be a group effort. Consider how your group could serve someone or a group of people this semester in an effort to humble yourselves and become more like Christ. If this is what you all choose to do, come back to group next week with some ideas of what you all could do!