

Epic Tales

Through the Roof

Week 4 – July 24, 2022

Scripture: Luke 5:17-26

Grab your Bible and a few people to connect with. Look up the verses and share your thoughts. It's that easy!

Share: If you have experienced the forgiveness and healing offered by Jesus, recall your path to finding your way to His feet. Did you have any friends helping you find your way?

Read the scripture noted above together: Take turns reading if you prefer. Enjoy the different Bible translations we each read.

Discuss the following context: Jesus is in Capernaum which was renowned in its day for being the "ivy league" area for some of the top Rabbinic schools. Jesus is teaching to a crowd full of the academic and religious elite who were anxious to hear this upstart rabbi from Nazareth teach. They blocked the way to Jesus for someone that they would have seen as unclean or unworthy.

Share your thoughts about the following questions:

1. These friends refused to stop when they hit serious obstacles on the way to Jesus. They loved their friend so much that they were willing to risk and cause a big mess to get him to the feet of Jesus.
Do you find yourself willing to sacrifice and get uncomfortable to bring a friend to Jesus? Explain.
2. Who are you in this story?
 - A friend who is willing to do anything to help a friend to Jesus?
 - Part of the crowd, uncomfortable when someone unclean/sinful makes a mess trying to get to Jesus?
 - The one on the bed, desperate for healing and freedom in Christ?
3. Jesus sees the faith of this group of friends and tells the man, "friend your sins are forgiven". That gets everyone's attention! Granting forgiveness is something only God can do. So, Jesus demonstrates his authority by healing the man physically as well. After this, Jesus doesn't invite the man to follow him, but instead directs him to "take up your mat and go home". Why might Jesus have sent him home carrying his mat?
4. In verse 25 we see that the healed man went away praising God. How does the crowd respond after seeing this man praise God? Do you ever find opportunities to "praise God" around people? What does it look like for you and have you ever seen a reaction from "the crowd"?

Pray together: Ask each other to share what is on your heart today. Ask God to bring someone to your heart who needs the love and forgiveness and healing of Jesus. Pray for the Holy Spirit to show you if there is any way you can help bring this person closer to Jesus. Sometimes the only thing we can do is intercede in prayer. Commit to praying for this "friend" regularly.

Epic Tales

Zacchaeus

Week 3 – July 17, 2022

Scripture: Luke 19:1-10 / Luke 18:18-23

Grab your Bible and a few people to connect with. Look up the verses and share your thoughts. It's that easy!

Share: Think about a time when the gift of grace was extended to you (undeserved, unearned favor). Share what it felt like and what your reaction was.

Read the scripture noted above together: Take turns reading if you prefer. Enjoy the different Bible translations we each read.

Discuss the following context: Grace is a free, undeserved, unearned gift from God. But, like every gift, there is something that grace requires of us, and every gift requires of the recipient. It must be received. There are two types of people who have difficulty receiving this extraordinary gift God offers us and they're reflected in two conversations Jesus had that are recorded in the gospel of Luke.

Share your thoughts about the following questions:

1. Zacchaeus became a chief tax collector, which was a decision that had huge social and spiritual consequences. He would have been hated by his fellow Jews, banned from the synagogue, and considered despicable. What do you think he expected to happen when he went to catch a glimpse of Jesus passing through Jericho that day?
2. When Jesus spots Zacchaeus in the tree, he said "Come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." There were sick people in the crowd who needed Jesus, as well as morally good people who were honest and trustworthy. But Jesus chooses to zero in on Zacchaeus.
 - How might you have reacted if you were Zacchaeus? How did Zacchaeus respond?
 - How might you have reacted if you were in the crowd that day?
3. This story ends with Jesus saying "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost" Who do you consider "lost"? Do you find it difficult to extend God's grace to that person/people group? Do you believe God extends grace to them?
4. In the story of the rich young man, at first it seems strange that Jesus would tell him he had to sell his possessions and give to the poor in order to have treasure in heaven. But Jesus knew he didn't understand grace. He thought there was a way to earn his way. He was a very good person who tried to live a very good life. But Jesus basically says "Nope, not good enough". What is your reaction to this story?
5. We generally have difficulty receiving the free gift of grace. Which story resonates with you more? Zacchaeus who appears to be unworthy of the gift, or the young man who has tried to earn the gift?

Pray together: Ask each other to share what is on your heart today. Pray that God would open your hearts to His Grace for each of you and that you would believe that there is nothing you can do to make Him love you more or love you less. Pray that God would also open your hearts to be an extension of His incredible grace to others.

Epic Tales

"Fiery Furnace"

Week 2 – July 10, 2022

Scripture: Daniel Chapters 1 and 3, Isaiah 43:2, Isaiah 48:10-11

Grab your Bible and a few people to connect with. Look up the verses and share your thoughts. It's that easy!

Share: The epic tale of men remaining completely unharmed after spending time immersed within a blazing fire can be difficult to believe. Do you believe God really orchestrated this particular miracle we find in the bible? Do you believe God can perform miracles now?

Read the scripture noted above together: Take turns reading if you prefer. Enjoy the different Bible translations we each read.

Discuss the following context: Nebuchadnezzar was King of the largest, most powerful empire in human history. This made him the most powerful human on the planet. People referred to him as a god and called him king of kings and lord of lords! The 4 Jewish boys he captured would have studied the Torah and understood the wisdom from the prophet Isaiah. They knew they were the fulfillment of a prophecy! They knew their identity in God and could not be swayed by the power of the world.

Share your thoughts about the following questions:

1. When the four young men are captured, what are some of the things the Babylonians attempted to do to erase their identity and replace it?
2. God creates each of us with a unique identity. He calls us who we truly are and the world cannot erase that core identity.
 - Have you asked God who He calls you and how you are uniquely designed?
 - What are some of the ways the world has caused you to be unsure of your God-given identity? What things get in the way of you being rooted in your true identity?
 - What are the practices that help you root yourself in your God-given identity?
3. King Nebuchadnezzar erected a giant statue and commanded everyone to bow before it in worship or be thrown into a fire. How did the Jewish men respond? How do you think you would respond?
4. In their response to the King, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego claim that their God will rescue them, but they add "even if he does not...we will not serve your gods." Do you think they had doubts about what God would do as they headed towards the fire? If so, do you see that as a lack of faith? Do you have doubts about how God will show up?

Pray together: Ask each other to share what is on your heart today. Pray that you would each hear clearly from God what your unique and true identity is and that you would each stay rooted in that truth as you go through your days. Commit to praying each day this week: "God, who do YOU say that I am?"

Epic Tales

"Jonah"

Week 1 – July 3, 2022

Scripture: Jonah chapters 1-4

Grab your Bible and a few people to connect with. Look up the verses and share your thoughts. It's that easy!

Share: The story of Jonah is quite well known. If you've heard it before, do you find yourself viewing it as an historical account or a myth/story that we can learn lessons from? (Biblical teachers and scholars land in both camps- it's OK to be honest or to disagree).

Read the scripture noted above together: Take turns reading if you prefer. Enjoy the different Bible translations we each read.

Discuss the following context: The story of Jonah is much more than a story about a man and a great fish. It is a profound illustration of God's mercy and grace. No one deserved God's favor less than the people of Nineveh. Jonah knew this and he wanted vengeance, not mercy.

Share your thoughts about the following questions:

1. Jonah was given an assignment, but he chose to run away instead. We all have experiences where we notice a need or feel a nudge to love or serve, but we don't act on it. Share about a time when you missed an opportunity (big or small).
2. Jonah didn't simply avoid his assignment, he ran (sailed) in the opposite direction. Then God went to extremes to get Jonah's attention. Why do you think God didn't just call on someone else to help the Ninevites?
3. It would be understandable for Jonah to have fear about facing people who God describes as wicked. But fear of the people doesn't seem to be the reason he flees. Why do you think Jonah fled and tried to avoid the assignment?
4. Consider a person or group of people who might elicit similar feelings in you that Jonah felt about Ninevites. Think about a person or people group that you have difficulty imagining God extending His perfect forgiveness, love, and grace to. Maybe you would prefer that they experience his wrath instead? Can you share?
5. Which of these three lessons from the story encourages you most? Challenges you most?
 - a. God does not cancel us, he pursues us, in spite of our stubborn disobedience.
 - b. God's compassion is for everyone; no one is outside the bounds of His love, no matter how wicked their ways.
 - c. God wants to root out our biases, prejudices, hatred and judgement and invites us to instead share His love with others.

Pray together: Ask each other to share what is on your heart today. Pray for God to open your hearts to His perfect love and compassion for others. Ask God to help you see when you are desiring judgement and vengeance rather than love and grace. Ask for God to give you courage to be his agent of love in this world, even when people are difficult to love.