

# Seen: Fully Known, Fully Loved

“Jesus Sees the Overwhelmed”

Week 4 – January 28, 2024

Scripture: Luke 5:12-16

*Grab your Bible and a few people to connect with. Read the Scripture, reflect on the questions below, and share your thoughts. It's that easy!*

**Share:** Is there a regular chore you always dread? Perhaps it's raking your leaves every fall, maintaining your car annually, or grocery shopping each week. Share the chore and why you'd rather avoid it.

**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 heals a man with leprosy and when we read the story (**Luke 5:12-16**) we see a man who is *overwhelmed*, but even more we see the undercurrent of shame and depression and no hope this man has dealt with for years that was UNSEEN and equally overwhelming. In this overwhelming pain he begs Jesus for healing (relief and wholeness) and the beauty of Jesus offers his hand and says, “*I am willing*”. In this moment, greater than the external healing Jesus does, is the willingness of Jesus to offer relief to the interior of this man's life in the UNSEEN overwhelming burden and pain he carried. When we carry the weight of the world and nobody sees or seems to care, Jesus SEES the overwhelming burdens, doubts, anxieties, insecurities, loneliness, and troubles we carry and wants us to know he desires to help us with them.

## **Share your thoughts about the following questions:**

1. We all have overwhelming circumstances and situations in our lives (finances, jobs, family tension, relationship crisis's, physical illness, mental health struggles, etc) that lead us to being overwhelmed. Discuss what happens deep in our souls when we reach a place of being overwhelmed (wrestle with our identity, loose hope that change or relief is possible, etc). How do we often cope with being overwhelmed?
2. **Jesus SEES our pain and offers his proximity.** Jesus is close to the broken-hearted and in his proximity, there is compassion and love that can lead to healing. We are not alone in this. Read **Psalm 34:18**. What happens when we pull near to someone during a painful moment? Consider the opposite, what is the effect of encountering pain from a place of loneliness?
3. **Jesus SEES our doubts and offers us hope.** Jesus knows we all have seasons when we believe the best solution is to give up hope, forget that peace is possible and turn away from the future we hope for. Jesus intimately wants to offer real hope for the overwhelming situations we experience. Read **John 16:33**. What hope do you find in knowing our lives will have trouble, BUT Jesus overcomes it all?
4. **Jesus SEES our powerlessness and offers his hand of help.** Jesus sees our inability to make change happen from our own power and the effects of our powerlessness. He offers us life-changing rest by carrying our heavy burdens for us. Read **Matthew 11:28-30**. One of the healthiest things we can do is to ask for help. Is there a place in your life where you could seek help? Is there person in your life who you SEE as Jesus does, whom you could love and serve? What could a next step, for either yourself or another person, look like?

**Pray together:** Ask each other to share what is on your heart today. Thank God he see us, always. Ask God to help us to SEE others the way he does so we can help them in their loneliness, to offer the hope of Jesus to them, and to lift them up in care and prayer in their moments of powerlessness. Ask the Holy Spirit to give us ears to hear and eyes to SEE people as Jesus does and to act in the way of help and support.

# Seen: Fully Known, Fully Loved

“Jesus Sees the Wounded”

Week 3 – January 21, 2024

Scripture: Luke 15:1-7

*Grab your Bible and a few people to connect with. Read the Scripture, reflect on the questions below, and share your thoughts. It's that easy!*

**Share:** Have you ever lost something, and when you found it you overflowed with joy, relief, and gratitude? Share your experience.

**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 tells three parables (**Luke 15**) because the religious leaders complained about his association with tax collectors and sinners. These parables are a challenge for the religious to care for the lost like the shepherd does. Often when the Parable of the Lost Sheep (**Luke 15:1-7**) is told, we focus on how the sheep got lost, and sometimes even emphasize how stupid sheep are and how they love to wander off. However, it's a popular misconception that sheep are dumb. They are extremely intelligent animals with good memories, the ability to display and recognize emotions, and to self-medicate when they're ill. Sheep are made for community, their most natural behavioral instinct is to flock, so it's not in their nature to wander away without reason. A lone sheep is a sheep in pain separating themselves from the flock. In other words, if Jesus is speaking to the religious about the lost in this parable, we are invited to compassionately consider why someone has been separated, and how we may have contributed to that, not blame them for wandering off. This is an invitation to see people's hurt like Jesus does.

## Share your thoughts about the following questions:

1. Two groups, sinners and the religious, are represented in **Luke 15**. Jesus told this parable because the religious leaders were complaining about Jesus's association with sinful and unclean people, how he welcomed and ate with them. So, in response to their complaints, Jesus tells this story **to** the scribes and Pharisees **in the presence** of the tax collectors and sinners who had drawn near to listen to him.
  - a. If this story were told in a current day context, who would represent the “sinners” and who would represent “the religious”?
  - b. How do you identify with either group of people? Perhaps you've been the recipient of harsh words or judgment, or you've been the one judging others.
2. Going after the lost one requires noticing who is missing, meeting them where they are at, and leaving behind our personal comforts to do so.
  - a. How is this different than inviting someone to come to the place where you are?
  - b. Who do you know that needs to be gone after, searched for, and found?
3. Sometimes when we are hurting, our natural inclination is to withdraw to not burden anyone, or to protect ourselves from being hurt more. We pull away, often emotionally, sometimes physically too, and wonder if anyone will notice.
  - a. How have you experienced a season of pain and confusion in which God and/or others saw you and cared for you?
  - b. How have you been in the role of the shepherd, finding a lost sheep and learning how they got there?

**Pray together:** Ask each other to share what is on your heart today. Thank God that the way of Jesus is the way of mercy over judgment, invitation and welcome over limitation and exclusion, of justice and righteousness. Ask Jesus to give us his heart to welcome, seek out the one, and rejoice with them.

# Seen: Fully Known, Fully Loved

## “Jesus Sees the Outsider”

Week 2 – January 14, 2024

Scripture: Luke 10:25-37

*Grab your Bible and a few people to connect with. Read the Scripture, reflect on the questions below, and share your thoughts. It's that easy!*

**Share:** Are you naturally a risk-taker or risk-avoider? Share your disposition.

**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 responds to the question “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” in the parable of the Good Samaritan (**Luke 10:25-37**) when he shares about a scenario in which the expectation of following the rules and maintaining cleanliness is more important than God’s desire for us to show grace and mercy to someone in need. Jesus is very deliberate in the way he tells the story. The Good Samaritan story is well known in our culture. We use it as a statement about people who do good things for strangers. That is the heart of the story, but Jesus isn’t just telling us to care about people, but rather his commendment to love God and love others. Jesus answers the question “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” (**Luke 10:25**) with an answer that leads to a second question: “who is my neighbor?” (**Luke 10:29**). How and why did Jesus take us from the first question to the second question? Could it be that Jesus intentionally takes us from *eternity* to the *present*. Jesus reveals his heart for reconciliation. Jesus did not come to divide people into groups or subgroups; he came to reconcile what was lost, broken, and denied. Jesus takes the question about *eternal justification and justice* and refocuses it on *present compassion and reconciliation*.

### **Share your thoughts about the following questions:**

1. The good samaritan not only sees the wounded man, but he sacrifices for him. A Samaritan would not be safe in a Jewish town with a wounded Jew over the back of his riding animal. What does it mean for us to risk or sacrifice on behalf of others? How does being a good neighbor supersede our own tendencies?
2. Jesus invites us to see the outsider and step into their story. This ask does not always involve risk, sometimes it simply means creating a space for them to belong. Belonging is not about believing or behaving, belonging is being present, included, invited.
  - a. Where do you see opportunity to create a space for an outsider to be welcomed and included?
  - b. Who are the vulnerable in your community that require compassionate care and support?
3. Reflecting on your own life, have there been times when you took a risk to do what God was calling you to do? Did it result in your trust growing in God? How was God present in the journey?

**Pray together:** Ask each other to share what is on your heart today. Thank God that he sees us, all of us. Thank him that love is always the motivator. Ask God to help us take on the character of God’s love to see people the way God sees people. Ask God to help us remove any religious barriers, cultural barriers, and political barriers that would stop us from loving the way God loves.

# Seen: Fully Known, Fully Loved

## “Jesus Sees the Individual”

Week 1 – January 7, 2024

Scripture: Luke 9:10-17

*Grab your Bible and a few people to connect with. Read the Scripture, reflect on the questions below, and share your thoughts. It's that easy!*

**Share:** Do you have a memory of being overlooked? Perhaps it is connected to a first day of a new school, church, or job, or maybe a place that was familiar and known. Share what comes to mind.

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

### **Discuss the following context:**

We are all human and broken, but in recognizing the hurt and pain we've experienced, we can find the hope of Jesus in a pathway toward healing and restoration. Jesus invites us to see and welcome people like he did, because when we belong with Jesus, we become like Jesus. We find this in **Luke 9:10-17** when Jesus leads his disciples to feed five thousand people.

A crowd of thousands come to Jesus, some from far away, bringing their sick to be healed, and to listen to Jesus teach. Jesus invites his disciples to see this crowd of thousands the way he does: as individuals he loves. The disciples become active participants in Jesus' miracle, handing out food to people one by one, looking at the people they previously saw from a distance, face to face, perhaps learning their stories, and providing for their needs so they can remain in the presence of Jesus.

### **Share your thoughts about the following questions:**

1. Jesus invites his disciples to move towards the people to take care of their needs so the people could continue to learn from him. Jesus cared for the people's spiritual and physical needs and challenged his disciples to live in close proximity to the people. Can you think of a time in your own life when you preferred to move away from, instead of moving toward, a person with a need?
2. The invitation and challenge of Jesus is to no longer make assumptions about people from a distance. What happens when we get close and hear a person's story? Consider how being in relationship with a person impacts our perspective about who they are.
3. To reach people, as Jesus calls us to do, we must welcome them, move towards them, and see them. In **Luke 9:10-17** Jesus' power, authority, and mission to do this very thing is shared with the disciples; it is also shared with us.
  - a. The way of Jesus is the way of hospitality, provision, and compassion for the needs of others. Dietrich Bonhoeffer said it like this: "The Church is the Church only when it exists for others...not dominating but helping and serving. It must tell men of every calling what it means to live for Christ, to exist for others." Discuss one way you see the Church doing what Bonhoeffer describes. What is your role in it? Is there an opportunity for you in it?
  - b. Terence Lester said, "'Everyone is welcome' is drastically different from 'we built this with you in mind.' People don't want to go where they are merely tolerated, they want to go where they are included." How does this distinction encourage or discourage you?

**Pray together:** Ask each other to share what is on your heart today. Thank God that he loves us by seeing and welcoming us into his presence, no matter what our story is. Ask him to give us the same love, compassion, and hospitality towards the people we don't naturally welcome, or desire to be in relationship with.