



God with Us

 illuminate

Episode five

Episode five
Jesus and the
Tax Collector



How to use these studies

The study in front of you now is adapted from the 2014 Illuminate material. It is designed to be used by youth & young adult groups, small groups, or families to journey together through the Gospel story over the course of a year.

Illuminate Camp is based on a practice of 'storying', recapturing the stories behind the Bible texts we have heard so many times. It is an inherently community-based practice, involving reading the narratives together and participating in discussion as a group. The aim is to hear the stories as if it was the first time; to try and put aside the years of knowledge you have accumulated and hear them fresh.

To get the most out of these studies, we recommend the following process:

- Get a group of friends to journey through these stories together. These studies are also ideal for family groups. (While it is possible to do these studies solo, we cannot oversell how much better they will be if you do them as a group)
- As a group, read aloud the original Bible texts, based on the references below.
- As a group, read aloud the Illuminate re-write.
 - ◊ As you hear the story, make notes of things that stand out to you and questions that you have.
- If possible, read the original texts again, perhaps in a different translation.
- Discuss the stories as a group. Use the supplied questions as a guide, but don't be afraid to follow the discussion. Explore the stories wildly, asking every question that comes to mind.
- Pray together. Included in each study is a small Experience station that can be used as a guide for prayer and reflection, either as a group or individually.

We hope that you find this material as encouraging and stimulating as we did on camp. If you were on camp to hear these stories, we hope you find something new this time through. The Gospel stories are rich and complex, and no two times reading them are ever the same.





Episode 5: Jesus and the Tax Collector

Intro

Who Jesus chooses to be his disciples tells us more about the Kingdom of God than almost any other part of the Bible.

The Twelve are a perfect cross section of Jewish society and general humanity. You have lowly fishermen and wealthy tax collectors, devout followers of God and jaded cynics, members of the formal religious system and religious extremists, Roman sympathisers and Jewish freedom fighters. One of Jesus' most overlooked miracles is the fact that he managed to keep the Twelve from killing each other in their sleep.

It speaks to the universality of Jesus' message that these are the Twelve people he chose to represent him. And further, that he would sit down and eat a meal with the people who would have been willing to keep company with Matthew. In all likelihood, all these people would have had in common was that they were on the margins. They weren't the 'in' crowd. In a society dominated by religion and the Temple system, the religious leaders had almost complete power over their towns. Anybody they didn't like, for whatever reason, would get a collective cold shoulder.

Jesus shatters expectations again and again in this story, as Jesus is wont to do. He sides with the 'sinners' over the religious leaders. He extends basic human contact to those people who would have had little of that beyond the occasional swear word. He doesn't dismiss the person because of their sin. His message is for everyone; details like politics, behaviour, and society can wait.

Access a video version of this introduction at vic.youthvision.org.au/GodWithUs



Bible References

Matthew 9:9-13



Story

The town of Capernaum sprawled over the bank of Lake Galilee, stretched along the beach and reached tentatively into the hills. It was one of the larger towns around the lake, and sat along the main road travelling north and south. It was a bustling hub of trade, by land and by sea.

In this town lived a Jewish man named Matthew. He made his way home through the dark streets each night, hurrying between pools of light from open windows and doors, not allowing himself to be caught in the darkness where there might be someone waiting for him. Each night he slammed the door closed behind him and drove the bolt home. Each night he ate dinner in silence and isolation. And each morning, he awoke to do it all again.

He walked from his house to the docks on the Sea of Galilee and sat in his booth, watching the fishing boats coast in from their night's catch. He waited for them to come to him with details of their catch, as they knew they had to do. He would then tell them how much Rome would take as tax. The fishermen would grumble, maybe even look at the knives they used for gutting the fish that could just as easily gut a person, but they would pay. The soldiers who wandered the docks saw to that.

So the morning passed with only the normal number of angry murmurs and curses. Before long the fishermen were angrily cleaning their catches, away from Matthew's tax booth. He got himself to his feet and began the next task, cataloguing the other wares merchants had brought into the town. He was walking through a stack of pots stored along the waterside when he saw another boat on the lake. He peered through the bright sunlight reflecting off the water. It was a fishing boat, of local make. Some fisherman late back to shore, perhaps. Matthew set himself back up in his booth and waited.

The craft pulled up to the dock and the small crew lashed it to the thin sodden posts. A man stepped onto the dock. Unlike most of the other men with him, he did not look like a fisherman; Matthew could tell a fisherman. This man dressed better, didn't have the same salt-worn skin, nor the same broad shoulders and muscled back. He carried himself differently, with an authority no fisherman would dare assume. He looked like the religious leaders of the town, the ones who assumed they knew everything, the ones who made those snide comments about Matthew, his job, his worth.

The man who looked like a Pharisee approached the tax booth. Matthew dipped a reed in ink and readied a sheet of parchment.

"Name and cargo?" he asked the man.

The teacher looked at him in silence. This was not new tactic to Matthew. He settled in to stare the man down.

The teacher smiled. "Jesus of Nazareth. No cargo." He paused as Matthew began to write the name. "Can I ask your name?"

"Matthew," Matthew responded automatically.

"Well, Matthew, I think you may have guessed that I am a Rabbi." Jesus paused. "Were you ever the disciple of a Rabbi?"

Matthew clicked his tongue. "What do you think?" he asked waspishly, leaning back on his small rough stool at his Roman tax collection booth. "I asked to follow, they refused."



Jesus smiled. "Well, I say to you: Come, follow me."

There was silence over the dock. Matthew's brow wrinkled as he peered up at Jesus.

"Really?" he asked. "Me?"

"Yes," Jesus said. "I really mean it."

Matthew stood slowly, placing his reed on the open ledger. Ink dripped and dirtied the pristine scroll, but Matthew didn't notice. He quietly walked out from behind the tax booth and followed Jesus into the town.

That night, Matthew held a celebration for Jesus. He gathered the best food and wine he could afford—which meant the food and wine were excellent indeed—and sent out invitations to all his friends. Soon his lavish house was filled with tax collectors and other people Peter and the other fishermen were not particularly comfortable with.

The disciples sat in a huddled group, apart from the rest of the party. They sampled the fine food sparingly, and tried not to make eye contact with the people around them.

"This is disgraceful," James muttered under his breath.

"Disgraceful!" came a loud echo from the other side of the room. The disciples looked up to see a small knot of men entering the party. They were dressed in their finest robes and wore simple and severe headdresses over scowling expressions. Peter felt himself tense. These men were obviously local Pharisees.

Matthew, as the host of the party, got to his feet immediately and welcomed the Pharisees with frosty politeness. They ignored his offers of food and the opportunity to wash their feet, and instead brought their attention, laser-like, onto Jesus.

"This is utterly unbecoming," the lead Pharisee said, "for a man of your station. These people are sinners. You are making yourself unclean simply by being in their presence."

Jesus lowered his cup of wine and looked at the Pharisees levelly. "It is not the healthy who need a doctor," he began, "but the sick." He got to his feet, never breaking that calm, level stare. "I have not come to call the righteous, but instead to call sinners into repentance."

The Pharisees became furious. They began to shout, all at once, but Jesus remained calm and addressed them in a level voice. It didn't matter that nobody could hear what he was saying. They saw his calm assurance, and his willingness to stand up on their behalf, and they loved him for it.

"Go and learn what this means," Jesus said, silencing the Pharisees with a wave of his hand. "I desire mercy, not sacrifice."

The Pharisees harrumphed and gathered their robes around them. They stalked out of the house and into the night. The party guests cheered Jesus loudly.





Questions

- Which part of the story stood out to you? What made that stand out?
- Who did you relate to in the story? What was it about them you related to?
- Is there anything about this story that you hadn't considered before?
- How did the people of Capernaum view Matthew? What or who was he to them?
- Matthew was really just doing his job. Are there people we dislike because of their job or role?
- It is likely that Matthew would have wanted to be a Rabbi's disciple at one point in his life, but was rejected. Have you ever felt like you have been excluded from something based on your intelligence or some other lack?
- If Jesus would call someone like Matthew to be his disciple, what does that mean for us today?
- Who are the people we would call 'sinners'—in the same way the Pharisees did—today?
- How does this story inform how we relate to 'sinners'?
- Even Jesus disciples were initially uncomfortable being around 'sinners'. How does the character of our society affect our following Jesus today? Where do we Christians, who should be loving and inclusive, sometimes draw the line on who we extend unconditional kindness to? Is this ever appropriate?



If you were a camper on Illuminate...

- What do you remember about hearing this story on camp?
- Compare that to your response hearing it now. How is your reaction different? Did you notice the same things? New things?



Experience

You will need:

- A loaf of bread
- Wine/Grape juice (optional)

Take a moment to eat together as a group. If you choose, you could make this a full Communion experience. As you eat, reflect on the following (either printed for participants to read, or spoken by the group leader):

*To “break bread” with someone is a symbol of your acceptance of them.
Eating together is a symbol of community, across human cultures. To be included in a community’s meals is to be included in the community itself.*

Jesus always accepted people before he tried to change them.

Pray together, thanking God for his acceptance of you, and then that you can pass on that inclusive love to people who need to feel included.



Developed by Youth Vision Victoria & Tasmania and the Illuminate team.

©2014 Youth Vision Vic/Tas. All rights reserved.

Youth Vision is the youth and young adult ministry arm of the Conference of Churches of Christ in Victoria and Tasmania.

1st Floor, 582 Heidelberg Rd, Fairfield VIC 3078
03 9488 8800
vic.youthvision.org.au
yv@churchesofchrist.org.au

