



LABELS | JESUS REPLACES REJECTION WITH LOVE – WEEK 1

“Disappointment” becomes “Irreplaceable” | Luke 15:11-24

Religious leaders in Jesus’ time had strict rules about who was worthy of belonging in their community. Jesus tells this story to “stick it to them” and their rules.

READ LUKE 15:11–24 AND DISCUSS

1. The younger son demands his inheritance while his dad is still alive. How does he view his dad?
2. How does Jesus describe the misery of hitting rock bottom? You may not have hit rock bottom, but describe how you feel when you are in a low place.
3. The son decides to go home, but he can’t imagine returning as a family member. He hopes he’ll be accepted as a servant. How might he be treated as a servant?
4. What do you like about how the father responds to his son?
5. Jesus tells this story to describe how much God loves us. Where are you in the story?
 - Far from God
 - Hitting rock bottom and pondering returning
 - Walking back toward God
 - Home in God’s arms

APPLY

Walking toward the Father is an intentional journey. Are you willing to put the time and energy into seeking God these next three weeks?

Coming home to the Father means becoming a follower of Jesus. What is one question you have for Jesus in order to figure out if he is trustworthy with your life? Bring this question back next week and tell us what happened.

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Let’s practice experiencing God’s embrace and lavish love for us. Pick one of these emotions that you have experienced most this week. We are going to invite God’s love into our souls and feelings.

Anger | Loneliness | Numbness | Sadness | Anxiety | Other

Pray this prayer: *Jesus, I have been feeling [emotion]. Would you please speak to me about this right now? Pause. Fill me with your love. Share with the group which emotion you picked and how you felt during prayer. This week, practice this prayer everyday: “Jesus, I give you my old labels. I embrace the new label of ‘Loved by God.’ Help me feel your love today.”*



LABELS | JESUS REPLACES REJECTION WITH LOVE – WEEK 2

“OVERLOOKED” BECOMES “CELEBRATED” | LUKE 15:25-32

Last week we talked about the younger son who turned his back on his dad, hit rock bottom, came back home, and shockingly was treated like family. The older son has a very different story from his younger brother. This son is a jaded workaholic. Will he embrace this label or exchange it for something better?

READ LUKE 15:25–32 AND DISCUSS

1. How does the older son view his father? How does he view his brother's return?
2. Why does he refuse to join the party?
3. How does he feel about working for his dad?
4. Jesus ends his story with a cliff-hanger. Do you think the older son will join the party after this little chat? Why?
5. The father was generous with the younger son in the first part of this story. Why does the older son see his father as stingy?

APPLY

Many of us struggle with wanting to work for God like a servant. But God wants you to be his child, not working for him. God wants to throw his arms around you and hold you. What might be holding you back from experiencing God's lavish love?

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

The older son hangs around his father's estate but is not close to his father. He also does not want to be around his messy younger brother. The older son represents the religious leaders who judged Jesus for hanging around with "sinners." The problem with religion is that it makes us like the older son, as we settle for rules instead of intimacy with our Heavenly Father. God's love heals broken relationships just like the father tries to do in this story between his two estranged sons. Let's do the same today. In prayer, let's each bring our relationships to Jesus where we feel disappointment. This may include getting ghosted, feeling shamed, or being labeled by someone.

Pray this prayer: *Jesus, show me which relationship needs your healing and compassion. Let your love flow through me to [person]. Show me one concrete way I can mend this relationship this week.*



LABELS | JESUS REPLACES REJECTION WITH LOVE – WEEK 3

“Unlovable” becomes “Chosen” (Luke 19:1-10)

Highly religious Jews avoided associating with known “sinners” since they were considered unclean, like in this story. Zacchaeus betrayed his people by becoming a tax collector and skimming off the top and exploiting them. In turn, they labeled him “unclean,” “tax collector,” and “corrupt.” These religious Jews avoided associating with Zacchaeus, a known sinner. Jesus isn’t stopped by Zacchaeus’ behavior or his labels when he transforms this community.

READ LUKE 19:1–10 AND DISCUSS

1. What do you like about Jesus in this story?
2. What do you like about Zacchaeus? What does he have to overcome in order to follow Jesus?
3. Jesus transforms the trajectory of Zacchaeus' life from greed to generosity. What would this day be like for the poor and oppressed in Jericho?

APPLY

At the end of the story, Jesus honors Zacchaeus and reinstates him into the community. Labels are reversed. What is one label you wish Jesus would reverse in your life?

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Jesus is good at seeking out people like Zacchaeus, like the father who runs to his son in Luke 15. Ask Jesus to seek after you.

Pray this prayer: *Jesus, how do you see me? Pause for 20 seconds and see if you feel or hear anything from him.*



LABELS | JESUS REPLACES REJECTION WITH LOVE – WEEK 4

“Unwanted” becomes “Embraced” (Luke 23:32-43)

In missional communities, seekers and skeptics all learn together from Jesus. At the end of his life, Jesus was accused of trying to become king. They sentenced him to die what was considered to be the most painful and brutal death: death on a cross. This is the story of those who died with him.

READ LUKE 23:32–43 AND DISCUSS

1. What do you like about Jesus in this passage?
2. Compare and contrast the attitudes of the two thieves who are dying.
3. What do you admire about the second criminal?

APPLY

Asking for help can be unpleasant. Think back on this week. Have you been more like the first man, looking down on others, or the second man, willing to ask others for help?

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

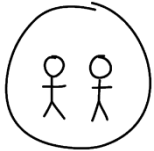
We have a choice. We can ask Jesus for help, or we can pretend we have it all together. What would it take for you to tell Jesus that you would like to be with him now and forever? Let's take a few minutes together to discuss what it means to become a follower of Jesus.

Read and respond to the following invitation to faith together.

What is Faith?

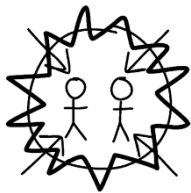
We don't want to just talk about the Bible; we want to put it into action. We want to live lives full of love and courage, and today we will be invited to grow in both love and courage. First, let's consider what Christians believe and what it means to follow Jesus.

Read the Big Story together



DESIGNED FOR GOOD

In Genesis, we see that God created the world to be a perfect place. He created us for right relationship with him, with each other, and with creation. Things were perfect!



DAMAGED BY EVIL

We long for these kinds of right relationships. But we thought we could run our lives better than God. Instead of placing God at the center, we put our own selfish desires at the center. Then everything fell apart. We damaged our relationship with God, with each other, and with all creation. Today we live in a broken, messed-up world. We have war, depression, anxiety, loneliness, abuse, suicide, drug addiction, shootings, etc. We deeply long for every relationship to be restored. Fortunately, God didn't leave us in this mess.



RESTORED FOR BETTER

God relocated into our world in the person of Jesus. He took all our brokenness onto himself. By dying on the cross and rising again, Jesus broke the power of our broken world. If we're willing to let God take his place at the center of our lives again, and if we are willing to trust Jesus with our lives, we can be restored to a right relationship with God. But that's not the end of the story.



SENT TO HEAL

Once we choose to follow Jesus, he sends us into the world to bring his love and hope, power and justice wherever we go. We get to live and declare this good news.

WHO IS AT THE CENTER?

Now we have a decision to make. Will we live with ourselves at the center of the story, or will we let God become the center? In order to be sent to heal, we must turn from our selfishness and trust Jesus with our lives. This is what the Bible means when it says, "Repent of your sins." If we are at the center of the story, our attempts to heal will be warped by our brokenness, which is not very effective. What would it take for you to trust Jesus with your life and relationships?

* This gospel summary is adapted from James Choung's book, *True Story: A Christianity Worth Believing In* (IVP, 2008).

Ponder Your Response

Read below, then share how each of us are feeling and how we want to respond today.

LOVE COURAGE

I'm a follower of Jesus.

For those of us following Jesus, our challenge is to grow as a courageous witness by sharing God's love with others. Look at this Love and Courage diagram. Which category best describes you this week?



Take a moment to pray and ask Jesus, "Who are you calling me to love? Jesus, bring a few people to mind. What is one step I can take to grow as a courageous witness?"

I'm considering following Jesus.

Trusting Jesus includes embracing, through the cross and resurrection, that we can be different people and receive a change of heart, both now and for eternity. This means making Jesus the center of your life, following his leadership. Are you ready to do that?

It's important to interact with God about this. Let's take a moment of silence. Ask God if he is inviting you to follow him. (20 seconds of silence)

Get a follow-up conversation with your small group leader to consider next steps you might want to take to grow in faith.