

YOU'RE
NOT
FAR

Unsettling

Scripture contains eyewitness narratives devoted to a message that connected all the individual parables and miracles in the minds of Jesus' first century audience— the Kingdom of God is here, *now*, and it represents a complete reversal of the values of the world, extending an open invitation to *everyone* to get involved in the constructive work of making all things new. Of course, this open invitation to *everyone* chafes against the social categories and distinctions we like to use to classify people according to worth. The disruptive message of Jesus, therefore, inevitably collides with our way— because it's better.

Start Talking

1. Think about unknown aspects of the future (sports outcomes, health problems, geopolitical tensions). What's your natural orientation towards such situations? Do you think of yourself as optimistic, pessimistic, or somewhere in between? Why?
2. Did you ever try to do anything crazy "on faith" as a kid? (For instance, I remember asking Jesus to move a mountain, trying to use "the force" to pull a book off the shelf, etc) What was your attempt? How did it go?

Looking Back

1. Last week we brainstormed three ways to get involved in the active, redemptive work of the Kingdom of God in the days to come. What steps did you take on that front?
2. Jesus radically bucked the definitions of authority that were held by Jewish and Roman culture at the time, and modeled a better way to lead. Think back on the situations this past week in which you had some authority. How did you do when it came to embodying the leadership practices of Jesus (gentleness, self-sacrifice, service over self)?
3. When and where did you find yourself excited by the possibility of bringing the Kingdom of God to earth this past week?



What About You?

1. When you hear the term “faith” used in a religious context, what do you assume it means?
2. How do you think most people understand the term, “faith?”
3. In our religious culture, we’re unlikely to exclude people merely for having a disease (as the first century Jews and Romans did), but it seems naive to think we don’t have any exclusive practices. How does *our* religious/spiritual culture define worth? Who do we see as “lesser?”
4. Thinking outside of our own spiritual community, how does our broader culture classify people, split them up, judge their value?
5. Have you ever seen anybody use the term “faith,” to harm or control other people? What happened?

Look It Up

Read the Following Passages: Mark 1:1, 14-15, 22, 28, 39-45.. Mark 2:2-14.

1. The text in Mark 2:2 says that, “when Jesus saw their faith...” What did Jesus see that he equated with faith?
2. We’ve all had unanswered prayers. Have you ever been blamed or blamed yourself for not having enough faith? What does the story of the leper teach about this?
3. How much faith did the leper in this story have? How do we know?
4. What strikes you as remarkable about Jesus’ decision to associate himself with Levi, the tax collector?
5. What does Jesus’ willingness to engage with both a leper and a tax collector tell us about how he views human value? How did the people around him react?
6. What do you think, “repent,” means in this context? (“Repent, for the kingdom of God is near.”)

Putting It All Together

1. Where are you allowing the artificial categories of our culture to keep you from treating other people as fully human, image bearers of a loving God? (Perhaps it’s political distinctions, problematic people at work, teachers who are making your children’s lives difficult, etc)
2. What can you do to fight those attitudes, insecurities, and prejudices this week?
3. If we allow the passages we just read to help us build a working definition of the word “faith,” what does it require of us in everyday life? How does it apply to the week ahead?
4. How can you hold your own definitions of faith and value more loosely this week in order to make room for Jesus to redefine those terms in your life? What would need to change about your thought patterns? About your prayers?
5. What are three ways you can make your faith into tangible action this week?

