

Jun 7 - Chapter 8 Restore: Generosity for the Greedy - p.163-180 Women Only
Love interrupts ... the consequences of our actions. ~ Bono

Community Building: Last woman standing

First Reading: p. 164-166 JESUS AND THE TAX COLLECTOR Rumors of Jesus' coming flew around the city. As Jesus and the disciples entered Jericho, a parade of fascinated people joined them. Among those in the crowd was a Jewish man named Zacchaeus. Arguably one of the most powerful men in Jericho, Zacchaeus was the chief tax collector of the city. He was also—unfortunately for him on this day—exceedingly short in stature. Unable to glimpse Jesus through the horde of onlookers, Zacchaeus sprinted far ahead and fumbled his way up a sycamore tree. There he waited, perched in the branches like a ten-year-old boy. Soon the parade of people reached his tree. Craning his neck, Zacchaeus finally saw the face of Jesus of Nazareth. Then, with a start, Zacchaeus realized Jesus had stopped beneath the sycamore and looked straight up at him. The throng of people following Jesus also paused to gaze upward, gawking at the tax collector. “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down,” Jesus called. “For today I must stay at your house.” Branches creaked and leaves filtered down as Zacchaeus tumbled from the tree to where Jesus waited. Unable to contain his joy, Zacchaeus received Jesus and led Him warmly to his home. All evening people talked about it. “He has gone to be the guest of a man who is a sinner. The denigration echoed throughout Jericho, but Zacchaeus neither heard nor cared. Jesus, the Son of God, was dining in his home! The meal ended; the time for pretense had past. Zacchaeus stood. “Behold, Lord, half of my possessions I will give to the poor,” he said. “And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will give back four times as much.” The wealthy tax collector meant every word. Jesus turned at this pronouncement and looked Zacchaeus square in the eyes. “Today salvation has come to this house,” the Messiah declared before His disciples, “because he, too, is a son of Abraham.”

1. Again and again Jesus went to the meek, the poor, the powerless, and the oppressed - and they were the ones He called blessed. Did Zacchaeus fit into these categories?
2. What kind of a person was Zacchaeus?
3. What does the story of Zacchaeus and his encounter with Jesus reveal to us?

Second Reading: p. 168 As Christians, we want to see people change and make retribution. But often we ask them to do this before they enter our community. First, we want to see the unjust, the powerful, and the oppressors get busted. We hope wayward sinners will deal with their issues and turn their lives around before they sit next to us in church. Rarely do we open the door and offer love, grace, mercy, and acceptance first. There are people outside our church walls who want to come in and meet Jesus. We wave them in, inviting them to wipe their feet on an entry mat that reads “Welcome—You Can Come in Once You Get a Few Things Fixed.” The people who need Christian community most are precisely those whose lives are not in order. They know our expectations. They also know their own deficiencies. And so they hightail it for the hills.

4. As members of the church, we establish unspoken “rules” because we don’t know how to deal with the issues, vices, and bad habits - the baggage- people bring with them. What are some unspoken “rules” that churches make?
5. Should people make some changes (as in cleaning their act up) before they enter our church community? Is there a limit to what is acceptable at church?

6. How can the church avoid a culture that consists of unspoken “rules”? Are all unspoken “rules” bad?

Third Reading: p. 170 While we care for the “least of these,” we often expect and desire divine judgment for people who have abused wealth and power to exploit others. We would like to see harsh justice inflicted on the perpetrators of oppression. Ironically we consider the oppressors “unreachable” by God’s grace, and ultimately we condemn them. Which brings us back to the subject of judgment. As we work for justice, we must remember that God did not commission us to judge the world—not even those who seem most deserving. When we render people unforgivable, we underestimate and misinterpret the extravagant grace of God in Christ. Ephesians 6 reminds us that our battle is not against flesh and blood. So whatever evils these oppressors employ, our true war is against the powers and principalities of darkness that perpetuate systems of injustice.

7. Read Ephesians 6:10-20.
8. What does Ephesians 6:12 mean?
9. With this in mind, how should we view the oppressors? Who is another example in the bible of an oppressor that Jesus reached out to? Do you know anyone who was once an oppressor turned Christian?

Fourth Reading: p. 175 By Jesus’ death and resurrection, you and I are new creatures. The image of God is restored in us; we are redeemed image bearers. Yet whenever we exalt something to the place of supremacy in our lives, we distort the image of the true God within us. When we follow after lesser things, these counterfeit gods, it inhibits our ability to rightly bear God’s image. From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible sings of the nature of God as a generous giver. He doesn’t manipulate us to coax a response nor invest in us that He might earn a profit. God is pure giver. He gives out of His character and generously so to those of us who don’t deserve it. You and I were created in the image of this generous God. When we fall in love with idols, we misdirect our worship and become greedy takers instead of the generous givers God intended.

10. Read Luke 16:13 Where was Zacchaeus’ heart when Jesus approached him? What was his idol? What are some things we need to be careful not to idolize?
11. Read Luke 19:6 What was Zacchaeus’ response to Jesus?
12. What led Zacchaeus to repentance and then restoration?

Optional Reading: p. 180 As we love others and look more like Jesus, we attract the same kinds of people He attracted—people like Zacchaeus and people like me in high school. We can then show the mean, the unjust, and the oppressors the same kindness we show to the poor, the hurt, and the oppressed. This is the kindness that draws souls to repentance. And by it we will see the lives of people at both ends of injustice restored.

Share with your spouse or a close friend in the Lord: How Jesus showed an oppressor, like Zacchaeus the tax collector, kindness that drew his soul to repentance. Share a way that you could do the same to reach a friend or family member for Christ. **Pray together.**

Next Week: JUN 14, P. 183-202, 9. Renew: Gods’ Process for All Things, *Men’s Week*