36 One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to have dinner with him, so Jesus went to his home and sat down to eat. ... 41 Then Jesus told him this story: "A man loaned money to two people--500 pieces of silver to one and 50 pieces to the other. 42 But neither of them could repay him, so he kindly forgave them both, canceling their debts. Who do you suppose loved him more after that?" 43 Simon answered, "I suppose the one for whom he canceled the larger debt." "That's right," Jesus said. ... 47 "I tell you, her sins--and they are many--have been forgiven, so she has shown me much love. But a person who is forgiven little shows only little love." ... 49 The men at the table said among themselves, "Who is this man, that he goes around forgiving sins?" – Luke 7:36, 41-43, 47, 49 NLT

If you threw a party with Jesus as the honored guest, who would you be sure to invite? Of course you should invite your friends, but are there people in your life that really need to be there even if they are still rough around the edges? Are they neighbors, co-workers, classmates, soccer moms? If you held a big Holiday Open House, what unexpected guest could you include?

We need to invite those messy guests, not as a project but because we long for them to experience Jesus in the same way you have. Ask God to open your eyes and heart to see people like He sees them.

WRAP-UP

Jesus invites everyone to His table, regardless of their past, mistakes, or how society views them. Through His example of eating with tax collectors and sinners, He showed that God's love is not reserved for those who appear righteous but is extended to everyone. We don't have to clean ourselves up before coming to Jesus; He is the one who makes us clean and offers forgiveness. Like Matthew, we are called to share the hope we have found in Christ by welcoming others, especially those who feel rejected or overlooked. Our tables should reflect Jesus' love, grace, and acceptance, making room for everyone to experience Him.

MEMORY VERSE

31 Jesus answered them, "Healthy people don't need a doctor--sick people do. 32 I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners and need to repent."

– Luke 5:31-32 NLT

Challenge –

How can you create a Jesus-y table? It might be coffee at Starbucks or dinner at your house. But if you invite Jesus as the honored guest, be sure to include some people who need to meet Him, messy or not.

A Seat at the Table
Jesus-y Tables– Week 1

INTRODUCTION

As we read through the Gospels, we find that Jesus spent a substantial amount of time sharing meals with people. The table is where we connect with others and share our lives over food and drink and significant conversations. But there was something unique about gathering around a table with Jesus. Beginning in the Old Testament, the Jews were accustomed to following ceremonial laws that dictated who was considered "clean". And in Jesus' day, they required customary washing before they could eat a meal. Even more restrictive were the laws governing who was clean enough to approach God in the temple. But Jesus wasn't afraid to be associated with people considered "unclean" by religious standards. He ate with "tax collectors and sinners". Everyone had a seat at the table with Jesus, and they still do.

Ice Breaker

What were meals around the table like with your family growing up?

Key Passage

27 Later, as Jesus left the town, he saw a tax collector named Levi sitting at his tax collector's booth. "Follow me and be my disciple," Jesus said to him. 28 So Levi got up, left everything, and followed him. 29 Later, Levi held a banquet in his home with Jesus as the guest of honor. Many of Levi's fellow tax collectors and other guests also ate with them. 30 But the Pharisees and their teachers of religious law complained bitterly to Jesus' disciples, "Why do you eat and drink with such scum?" 31 Jesus answered them, "Healthy people don't need a doctor--sick people do. 32 I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners and need to repent." – Luke 5:27-32 NLT

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Sinners at the Table

In our key passage, Jesus was the honored guest at the home of Levi (Matthew), a tax collector, and he was surrounded by other tax collectors as well. A tax collector was considered ceremonially unclean because in working for Rome they were in proximity with Gentiles which defiled them. They were also considered a traitor to their people because in working with the Romans they imposed unfair taxes. Often, they would

collect more than required and keep some for themselves, making themselves rich at the expense of the people. And so, tax collectors were shunned and rejected by the religious Jews.
In Isaiah chapter 65, God recounts how He extended an invitation to help Israel, but no one responded. Instead, in sinful rebellion they accused one another of being less holy than they were and kept

> *2 This made the Pharisees and teachers of religious law complain that he was associating with such sinful people--even eating with them! – Luke 15:2 NLT*
>
> *5 Yet they say to each other, 'Don't come too close or you will defile me! I am holier than you!' These people are a stench in my nostrils, an acrid smell that never goes away. – Isaiah 65:5 NLT*

themselves separated. What parallels do we see in the passages above? Who are the outcasts in our culture that we may feel we need to avoid?

In our key passage we see that Jesus called Levi (aka Matthew) from his tax collector's booth to be His disciple (Luke 5:27). In that moment Jesus confirmed that Matthew's value wasn't based on his occupation or association with Rome, Jesus saw his value as a human being made in God's image. The Pharisee's saw an unclean sinner, but Jesus saw a future disciple.

What was the response of Matthew and what did that reveal about the weight of Jesus' opinion versus the opinions of others or even how Matthew saw himself? How would Jesus joining a party of tax collectors impact the way they viewed themselves?

Jesus didn't care about the opinions of others. His meals with people who didn't live like him or act like him caused individuals to rethink how God viewed them and how they could be a part of what God was doing.

> *13 Under the old system, the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer could cleanse people's bodies from ceremonial impurity. 14 Just think how much more the blood of Christ will purify our consciences from sinful deeds so that we can worship the living God. For by the power of the eternal Spirit, Christ offered himself to God as a perfect sacrifice for our sins. – Hebrews 9:13-14 NLT*

One of the most astounding truths about Jesus is that we don't have to clean ourselves up to be accepted by Him. In fact, it is only through association with Jesus that we can be made clean. So, there is no way to be "cleaned up enough" to come to Him, instead we come in our messiness and Jesus' blood cleanses us.

In Hebrews 9:13-14 what does a clean conscience enable us to do? This is not only true for the unsaved, it is also true when a believer sins What is the impact of unrepented sin on our ability to worship and what is the remedy?

Even if we "know" we can't clean ourselves up, we may try to deny, hide or ignore our sinfulness rather that bringing it to Jesus to be cleaned. When we do that we area only hurting ourselves.

2. Who's on Your Guest List?
Matthew's story started in a tax collector's booth as an outcast from his community. When he was called by Jesus the impact was so profound that, not only did he leave everything, but he also wanted all his friends to have the same experience he had. The guest list for Matthew's banquet included people who needed to hear that Jesus is calling them, just as they are.

> *2 Has the LORD redeemed you? Then speak out! Tell others he has redeemed you from your enemies. – Psalm 107:2 NLT*

Each of us has a unique salvation experience. For some, we knew Jesus from an early age and never left Him. Others heard the Good News as adults in a desperate situation. Share the story of your salvation and who you feel might benefit from hearing that story of hope.

As you remember who you were before you knew Jesus, try to identify others around you who are in a similar situation as you were. Your personal experience gives you unique insight into their needs. As God if He might use you to invite them to the table.

3. Jesus-y Tables are Messy

Jesus didn't hesitate to get His hands dirty to heal and to save. When we invite people to His table who need to meet Jesus, there is a good chance things will get messy.

Although Jesus is known for rebuking the Pharisees He didn't refuse their dinner invitations. Once an immoral woman appeared uninvited to such a dinner to anoint Jesus' feet and things got messy. The Pharisees saw an unclean sinner, but Jesus saw a forgiven woman. Although uninvited, she was welcomed at Jesus' table. If you're looking at a Jesus-y table and wondering why certain people are there you may be the Pharisee in the story.