

Growing by *Loving the World*

Jonathan Rue
Luke 5:27-32
Growing in God Series
10.04.09

At Joshua House, we're about three things. We want to encounter God, discover community and love the world.

SLIDE:
Encounter God
Discover Community
Love the World

This is our process for spiritual growth here at Joshua House. So if you want to grow this year in Christ, these are the three essential components needed to position yourself to grow in God. And these aren't trendy slogans, or hip new fads that we copied off of some other church. The place where we went to find this process for growth is Jesus. When Jesus was asked by the religious kings of complexity, the Pharisees and teachers of the law, which is the greatest commandment of the law, here's what Jesus said in response in Matthew 22.

SLIDE:
Matthew 22:36-40 (TNIV)

"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

37 Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

And so in this famous exchange between Jesus and this teacher of the law, we see that Jesus boils it down. There were 613 Old Testament laws, and then books upon books of interpretation of those laws, and yet Jesus says, "here's what you really need to know; here's the simple version: *love God and love others.*"

SLIDE:
Jesus gets *simple*: love God & love others

This is the cliffnotes summary of how to be a follower of God. Love God and love others. So this is why the first part of our process is *Encounter God*. That's our way to describe that first part of loving God. And then the second part of love others really has two components or two stages. And the first stage of loving others is loving other followers of Jesus.

SLIDE:

Loving others stage 1: other followers of Jesus

This is why the second thing that we're about here is *discovering community* with one another as followers of Jesus and learning how to love one another and serve one another within the church community here.

Well, the second stage of loving others is not just loving other followers of Jesus, but loving *everyone else*.

SLIDE:

Loving others stage 2: everyone else

See, when Jesus says love God and love others, he's not just talking about other Christians. He is talking about *everyone else*. There is no one that is outside of the love of God. We see this most clearly by the love of Jesus Christ in laying down his life for us on the cross. Romans 5:8 says this.

SLIDE:

Romans 5:8 (TNIV)

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

God doesn't only love those that are good and perfect and love Him. Christ died for sinners. While we were still in our sin, Christ died for us.

SLIDE:

2 Corinthians 5:19

God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them.

So, the love of God is not limited to those that love him and follow him. The love of God is expansive and wide and embraces all of humanity. And as we grow spiritually this year, by encountering God, by discovering community, we must add to that, this component of learning how to *love the world*.

We've been doing a series here in Joshua House called *Growing in God* and I've called tonight's talk, *Growing by Loving the World*. Let's Pray.

TITLE SLIDE:

Growing by Loving the World

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So, in Matthew 22, Jesus gets simple about what's really important in following God. Loving God and loving others. And his love for others is shown most powerfully by his sacrificial death on the cross. But tonight we're going to look at how expansive his love was even before he was nailed to the cross for the sins of the world. So we are opening up to the book of Luke again, chapter 5. We've been going through this chapter in this series, and tonight we're going to look at verses 27-32, where Jesus gets clear about what it looks like to love everyone.

SLIDE:

Jesus gets *clear*: what it looks like to love everyone

Jesus showed us how to love other people in the world in a very down to earth and practical way so that it becomes very clear how we are to go about loving the world around us. Let's look at Luke 5:27.

SLIDE:

Luke 5:27-32 (TNIV)

After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. "Follow me," Jesus said to him, 28 and Levi got up, left everything and followed him.

29 Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. 30 But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?"

31 Jesus answered them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. 32 I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

This story shows in three major ways how radically inclusive Jesus was and is.

Not many people or groups are radically inclusive today. We are great at creating conditions for who gets in or out. One common /condition is money. We price housing certain parts of town astronomically high so that only the rich can live there. It's an exclusive neighborhood. Have you ever noticed how little advertising is done by the priciest brands? When's the last time you saw a commercial for a Rolls Royce or a Bentley car? Or for Prada clothing? The most exclusive brands shun advertising because they don't want to appeal to the masses. That would wreck their company. They only want to target the wealthy so that they can continue to retain the rarified air of exclusivity.

Jesus was not exclusive in that way. He was not gathering together only the elite: the wealthiest, coolest, prettiest people. He didn't hang out with the best and brightest. Jesus was not exclusive—he was radically inclusive.

And the first way that we see Jesus being radically inclusive is that his call is radically inclusive.

SLIDE:
The radically inclusive call of Jesus

The call of Jesus in the gospels is when he calls a person, like Levi here, to follow him. And Jesus is calling us today to follow him. Many of us have heard the voice of Jesus call us to follow him. And call us into different purposes that God has for our life. Look at Luke 5, verse 27.

SLIDE:
Luke 5:27-28 (TNIV)

After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. "Follow me," Jesus said to him, 28 and Levi got up, left everything and followed him.

So, Jesus calls this man, Levi, who is a tax collector, sitting at his tax booth. Now tax collectors in first century Jewish culture were absolutely hated. They were despised by the people because they were traitors. They were Jews who were working for the occupying Roman Empire. So, Rome had conquered Israel and were extracting a heavy tax from Israel and the tax collectors were Jewish people that sold out to Israel and were working for Rome. That was strike one against them.

Strike two against them was they were notoriously crooked. And they would charge a higher tax than the tax that Rome was demanding and they were allowed to keep it for themselves. And the Romans backed this, so they had the authority to do this. It was legitimized robbery. And that's exactly what the Jewish Talmud referred to them as, as robbers.

So, to give you some sense of who this might be today, I think of somebody like Bernie Madoff, who robbed millions and millions from people to live in luxury through a ponzi scheme, and was busted last year. I think of the folks at Enron that stole tons of money from people's retirements and blew up this company. Now these guys were robbers that finally got busted by law.

That gets us close because they had an air of legitimate business about them. But a closer example is the AIG insurance executives. These AIG corporate executives that used public funds to bail out their bankrupt company and then they rewarded themselves with massive multiple million dollar bonuses for what a great job they had done in running AIG into the ground. And it was all legal. This

is kinda like the tax collector in Jesus' day. And no matter how angry these kinds of people might make us feel, even if we want to write somebody like that off, Jesus doesn't write them off. The call of Jesus is so inclusive that he calls a man like Levi.

And this is great news, because no matter where you're coming from tonight, the call of Jesus extends to you. Jesus does not hand select the most successful people, the most pretty people, the most good or intelligent or worthy people to be his disciples, to be his followers. Jesus calls everyone to be his follower. His invitation is the same to everyone, "*Follow Me*".

SLIDE:

His invitation is the same to everyone: follow me

Everyone is offered the same call: to follow Jesus. There is nobody so great that Jesus wants to follow them, and there is no one so terrible that Jesus refuses to extend his call to "follow me".

Now, what this means is that you cannot disqualify yourself from Jesus' offer. And what it also means is that Jesus is not giving his stamp of approval on your behavior. People that are living life in a way that is contrary to what God wants are always asking this question: Does God accept me as a homosexual? Does God accept me as a stripper? Does God accept me as an alcoholic? As a physically abusive husband? As a porn addict? Does God accept me as I am?

And we see Jesus come up to this traitor-thief in his tax office where he steals from his fellow Jews, and Jesus invites Levi to follow him. He doesn't say "Levi, keep doing what you're doing." He says, "Levi, come follow me."

That's always the message of Jesus to us. He loves us, accepts us just as we are, and invites us to follow him. He doesn't bless the things that we're doing that are in rebellion against God—the things that are broken, that are evil, that are destructive. He calls us out of those things, but he never lets those things keep him from pursuing us, keep him from reaching out to us. He's not afraid of anything that you've done. God will not turn away from you, no matter where you've been or what you've done or where you are at right now. But God will call you to follow him. To turn away from whatever it is that you're doing, to turn away from your sin, from your selfishness, and to turn toward him.

And look how Levi's responds to Jesus: he got up, left everything, and followed Jesus. So he left that lucrative career, just walked away without a plan or exit strategy other than following Jesus. And the result was that he became one of the twelve disciples of Jesus. He was brought into the inner circle of Jesus' closest friends. What an amazing story of God's gracious heart for those of us that are mired in sin. God doesn't write us off, or relegate us to second class status. Every blessing of close friendship with Jesus is available to you, right now in your sin—if you accept the radically inclusive call of Jesus to follow him.

And so the first way that Jesus is radically inclusive is that his call is radically inclusive.

And the second thing we see in this text is that Jesus goes to these radically inclusive parties.

SLIDE:
The radically inclusive parties of Jesus

I mean I think it's interesting that the concept of partying has become synonymous in our day with drinking heavily and drug abuse and sexual promiscuity. There are all these things that are very contrary to what God desires for us. I find that odd because when we look at the person of Jesus, he went to parties a lot. If you read through the gospels, you're going to find that Jesus was always eating with people and hanging out at house parties all the time. Jesus probably went to way more parties than you or me. Think about that for a minute.

So look at Luke 5:29.

SLIDE:
Luke 5:29-30 (TNIV)

Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. 30 But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?"

So, Levi really throws a party and Jesus comes over and Levi invites all of his friends, people that are like he is, to this party. And Jesus comes. Jesus hangs out with these people because Jesus hangs out with people that are not like he is.

SLIDE:
He hangs out with people that aren't like him

His social circle is not small, it is wide and always expanding. He's always looking for new people to hang out with. Now, let me ask you, how true is this of your life? Do you hang out with people that aren't like you? With people that don't hold the same beliefs as you? People that aren't interested in exactly the same things as you are? Do you think about hanging out with people solely in terms of what you are getting out of it or do you use your social life as a way to reach out to other people. People that are in need. Other people that are disconnected. Other people that don't have as many friends as you do. Have you ever thought about how Jesus modeled a life of partying with people that needed his help?

I want to tell you a story of a man named Scott Harrison.

SLIDE:
Image—Scott Harrison

When Scott was 18, he moved to New York City and he got involved in running night clubs. And for the next 10 years, he had a glamorous life. He ran major hip night clubs and threw parties for rich people all over the world. So, he would fly to Milan and to Paris and to South America and just throw parties. And see \$16 cocktails and \$300 bottles of vodka to rich bankers.

And then after doing this for 10 years, Scott was sitting on a beach in the South American country of Uruguay, and he had an encounter with God. Scott had grown up as a Christian but he had walked away from his faith and got into living this extravagant lifestyle where he had anything he wanted. And as he laid there on the beach with a plate of cocaine next to him, he thought, “I have achieved everything that I’ve wanted. I have everything that I thought I wanted, and yet my life is hollow and empty.” He had lived completely selfishly, pursuing his own pleasure and his own gain and it left him totally empty.

As he lay there openly before God, Scott asked himself this devastating question:

SLIDE:
What would the opposite of my life look like?

And so for the next three months, he wrestled with that, ended up walking away from what he was doing and going to Liberia to get involved in humanitarian efforts with the poor. And he started a water organization called Charity that builds wells in Africa. And how he got that off the ground is he came back to New York and he threw a birthday party for himself and invited 700 of his closest friends and had everybody buy a bottle of water for \$20. And he raised \$15,000 that night. And he went over to Africa and he built four wells. And then he emailed everybody from that party and he showed them the four wells that he had built.

And this thing began to take off. And he has, every year now, thrown himself a birthday party for the purpose of raising money for impoverished Africans that don’t have access to clean drinking water. This guy has turned parties into a purpose to help people. He’s turned away from the selfishness of hanging out with the elite of the elite and he’s now helping the poorest of the poor. What a picture of living out how Jesus loved the world—through throwing parties with others in mind.

The third way that Jesus is inclusive is that his mission is radically inclusive.

SLIDE:
The radically inclusive mission of Jesus

When the Pharisees has questioned him about why he would be eating with tax collectors and “sinners”, Jesus answered them this way:

SLIDE:
Luke 5:31-32 (TNIV)
Jesus answered them, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. 32 I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

So Jesus gives a summary statement of his whole mission, why he the Son of God, came to earth as a man. And it wasn't for the righteous. Jesus didn't come to earth in the flesh to hang out with the top church leaders. He didn't come to encourage those that were doing well. Jesus came for sinners, for those that have lost their way. He came for the sick, the sinful, & the separated.

SLIDE:
He came for the sick, the sinful, & the separated

This is who the heart of God is beating strongest for—those that are sick, those that are stuck in sin, and those that are separated from God. Jesus is being a bit ironic by telling the Pharisees that it's not the healthy who need a doctor but the sick, because they were surely not all that healthy, since they fought with Jesus throughout the gospels. But his point was that he wanted to be with the people that needed God the most—sinners. Now this term sinner means somebody that is living in rebellion against God and the way of life that God has shown us. And this term encompasses all of us—we are all sinners, that were called to repentance by Jesus.

SLIDE:
“The church is the only fellowship in the world where the one requirement for membership is the unworthiness of the candidate.” –Robert Munger

So Jesus came for the sinful, not the righteous. Is that the way that we think about our mission as we follow Jesus?

As we see how Jesus modeled a life of radical inclusion, it gets more simple and more clear about how we should be following him: we must love everyone like he did.

SLIDE:
Following Jesus gets *simple and clear*: love everyone

If we are really following Jesus and looking to him as the model for how we are to live, then this is undisputable and unavoidable: we've got to love everyone.

We've got to love those that don't love us back. We've got to love those that can't give us anything in return. We've got to love people that we don't even know. The apostle Paul, who wrote much of the New Testament, wrote that we should,

SLIDE:

Ephesians 5:1-2 (TNIV)

Follow **God's example**, therefore, as dearly loved children 2 and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

And Jesus tells us in a really direct way who we should love and how we should love in the next chapter of Luke:

SLIDE:

Luke 6:27-36 (TNIV)

But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you...31 Do to others as you would have them do to you...36 If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. 33 And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. 34 And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. 35 But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. 36 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

You should have received an insert when you came in tonight about service opportunities through Fruit of the Vine and the Community Center. Please pull that out and look through it. How might God use you this year in loving those that are outside of you friends, family, and Christian community. This is an essential ingredient in your spiritual growth this year.

Plugs:

Love the World Insert

Welcome Team-sign up in the lobby

Reminder to small group leaders—if you were unable to attend the leader refresher, there is a make-up gathering tonight after the service in the b-rooms.

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Jesus gets *simple*: love God & love others

Loving others stage 1: other followers of Jesus

Loving others stage 2: everyone else

Jesus gets *clear*: what it looks like to love everyone

The radically inclusive call of Jesus (v. 27-28)

His invitation is the same to everyone: follow me

The radically inclusive parties of Jesus (v. 29-30)

He hangs out with people that aren't like him

The radically inclusive mission of Jesus (v. 31-32)

He came for the sick, the sinful, & the separated

Following Jesus gets *simple and clear*: we love everyone